

# SEPTEMBER

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## YEAR A WEEKDAYS II

Tuesday, September 1, 2020  
(Lec. 432)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 2:10b-16
- 2) Luke 4:31-37

TUESDAY OF  
22<sup>ND</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The Spirit of God awakens our inherent desire for him, and we respond in faith.

Created in God's own image and likeness, we are made for communion with God. It is inherent in our nature to be attracted by the good, the true, and the beautiful; we are drawn to anything that reflects the One in whose image we are made.

In today's Gospel reading, even before Jesus performs the mighty deed of casting out of a man *the spirit of an unclean demon*, Luke writes that the people were astonished by the authority of Jesus' teaching. The demon, of course, recognizes him immediately, saying, *I know who you are – the Holy One of God!* And the crowd is amazed by the power and authority of Jesus, who can cast out a demon with only his word.

The fullness of who Jesus is has not yet been revealed – he has not yet died and risen – but already there is something about him that inspires awe and wonder in the people he encounters.

Writing nearly 20 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, Paul tells the Corinthians, *We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand the things freely given us by God.* One might consider this as a lesson in understanding how it is we come to know and love God. The Spirit of God awakens our inherent desire, and we respond in faith. As we grow in the Spirit, so we come to appreciate all that God has freely given us – which is, of course, everything – including his own Son.

We are members of Christ's body, each of us in our own way having a sense of awe and wonder at his power, and at the power and mercy of God in giving him to us. We come to share in this celebration that we, too, might then make *news of him spread everywhere.*

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Wednesday, September 2, 2020  
(Lec. 433)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 3:1-9
- 2) Luke 4:38-44

WEDNESDAY OF  
22<sup>ND</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are God's co-workers.

Jesus says in today's Gospel that he must continue traveling in his ministry: *To the other towns also I must proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God, because for this purpose I have been sent.* When the fulfillment of his time on earth has passed, his disciples and we who follow will continue his work. We will "go to other towns proclaiming the Good News."

We accomplish this through the varied gifts of the life of the Church. In our own individual lives, regardless of our roles or stations in life – we each, in our own unique way, participate in the ministry of Jesus, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. Above all, we have the Eucharist which transforms us in grace in order to do that which we are asked to do.

Paul's words from today's first reading show how he saw that grace working among the community of Corinth. *We are God's co-workers*, Paul tells the Corinthians, *I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth.* The Corinthians are *God's field*, in which the work of the Kingdom is being done, but above all – God is doing the building.

Paul's words also remind us of our gifts in service to God. Our lives and our ministries are God's grace at work around us. In a sense, we, too, are co-workers. By our baptism into Christ, we are ministers and stewards of his purpose. Blessed are we, the psalmist says, *the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.*

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Thursday, September 3, 2020  
(Lec. 434)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 3:18-23
- 2) Luke 5:1-11

THURSDAY OF  
22<sup>ND</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Gregory the Great,  
Pope and Doctor  
of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 208

FOCUS: Put out into the deep.

The Apostle Peter – Simon Peter as he is identified in today’s Gospel – truly, and literally, has the patience of a saint. He has just finished a long, hard, messy, exhausting, and unproductive shift *at his job*, and this man, Jesus – who has already commandeered his boat – tells him to *put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch*.

Who among us likes to be told how to do our job, especially when it is our area of expertise? Not to mention if the instruction comes after we have already completed our tasks! But Peter seems unperturbed. He does respond to Jesus, but it reads more as a statement of fact rather than argument. And though he has no assurance of anything, he immediately does what Jesus tells him to do.

Peter is often more associated with other particular character traits: he’s the strong one Jesus chose to lead the Church; he’s the weak one who denied Jesus. Or he’s the smart one who identified Jesus as the Son of God; he’s the naïve one who didn’t understand Christ’s mission and wanted to keep him from going to Jerusalem. But today, he’s the patient one.

He’s also humble and repentant. After seeing what the instructions of Jesus led to – a catch of fish so bountiful *their nets were tearing* and they needed the other boat in order to load all of the fish – *Simon Peter ... fell at the knees of Jesus and said, Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man*.

This is how Peter came to belong to Christ. This is how we *all* come to belong to Christ. Though for us, unlike those first Apostles, this takes place at our baptism. There, in this sacrament of the Church, we participate in a call and response with Christ – and in humility and repentance we are marked as his own forever. Our very selves become vessels that put out into the deep that we might gather to Christ and his Church a bountiful catch.

Saint John Paul II centered much of his pontificate around this notion of setting out into deep water, *Duc in altum*, as it is said in Latin. Put out into, or cast yourself out into, the deep. *Do not be afraid*; trust in the Lord, as Peter did. Have patience for what the Lord is doing in us, and go where he directs us.

Today, the Church celebrates another sainted pope, Gregory the Great. He was born in the sixth century to a wealthy family, and dedicated his life to God. Known as a scholar, a prolific writer, and a skilled leader, he served as pope from the year 590 until his death in 604. During his papacy, he put a high priority on mission work, sending many to reach out to spread God’s word to others. He went where the Lord directed him, and in humility allowed the Lord to work through him.

Christ’s words and Pope Saint Gregory’s example are lights that help us navigate the waters into which we launch ourselves. We do not go alone, and we need not be afraid.

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Friday, September 4, 2020  
(Lec. 435)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 4:1-5
- 2) Luke 5:33-39

FRIDAY OF  
22<sup>ND</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are new wine, in new wineskins.

The Pharisees were very strict in their interpretation of and adherence to the Mosaic Law. Together with the prophets, the law formed the core of the covenantal faith between the Israelites and God. God had chosen Israel as his people, and had given them the law to guide her.

So it is not surprising that the Pharisees constantly complain about Jesus and his disciples, who often appear to flout the law. Here, today, the complaint is about fasting. Obviously, the Pharisees do not recognize who Jesus is – the long-awaited Messiah – or they would see the inconsistency of fasting now that the Messiah has finally arrived. Who would fast at a wedding celebration, let alone at the coming of the Messiah?

In addition to pridefulness and their spiritual blindness, at heart here is the conflict between the old and the new, and the struggle of letting go of one and embracing the other. Change does not come easily to anyone – especially the Pharisees!

The Pharisees represent the old covenant with its legal certainty and familiarity and its firm, resolute, unchanging traditions, while Jesus, presenting himself as the bridegroom, ushers in the new nuptial (marital) covenant. This new covenant is like new wine – fresh and spring-like, bursting with flavor and life. Clearly, the former must give way to the latter.

And that is a lesson we can take from today's Gospel: How do we let go of our old ways with their familiarity and convenience, and embrace the new life offered by Jesus? Letting go can be difficult. It will involve dying to self, placing others first, and holding on with a firm trust to the belief that God is ultimately in charge. It will involve risk and a Christ-like love.

Thankfully, we have been given the means and opportunity to do this. In Christ, we have become a new creation, unbound from the chains of death and dressed in the new cloak of salvation. We have perfect freedom in his grace, which consistently helps us – if we allow it – to change what we need to change and to be the new wine and the new wineskins for the sake of ourselves and the world.

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Saturday, September 5, 2020  
(Lec. 436)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 4:6b-15
- 2) Luke 6:1-5

SATURDAY OF  
22<sup>ND</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Saturday in honor  
of BVM)

FOCUS: Authentic love desires the good of others and is willing to sacrifice for it.

I'm sure we can recall moments in our lives when loving another meant doing the difficult thing. When it meant caring enough about a person to have difficult conversations, or to call another to accountability in his or her behavior that, hopefully, led to growth in holiness and greater happiness for all involved. This is the kind of love Saint Paul embodies in his Letter to the Corinthians.

He is writing to the Corinthian community in the role of a spiritual father. He says he became a father to the Corinthians through the Gospel, and that the Corinthians are his beloved children. Out of love for his spiritual children, Paul warns them of the dangers of pride and self-comparison within their Christian community.

When Paul was laboring as an Apostle to the Gentiles, he suffered greatly on behalf of the Church. But he was not as concerned with his sufferings as he was with the preaching of the Gospel and the unity of the Church. Paul was not an Apostle for himself; he was an Apostle for Jesus and for his body, the Church.

By contrast, our Gospel presents a conversation based in legalism rather than love. The Pharisees ask Jesus, *Why are you doing what is unlawful on the sabbath?* The Pharisees do not ask this question out of love for Jesus, but rather out of self-righteousness. They have the kind of prideful hearts Paul taught the Corinthians to guard against. The Pharisees were concerned with keeping the Sabbath for themselves, rather than for God and for others.

Authentic love desires the good of others and is willing to sacrifice for it. Jesus is the perfect example of this love. He obeyed the Father in all things and teaches us to do the same.

Obedience to God is not meant to lead us into pride or scrupulosity – which focuses only on ourselves. Instead, God's commandments have an outward purpose – to lead us deeper into the love of God and the love of others.

Therefore, as we receive the Eucharist today, let's remember that we are receiving the love of God. It is an authentic love that strengthens us and empowers us, so that we are drawn out of ourselves and into union with God and his Church.

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**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2020**

(Lec. 127)

1) Ezekiel 33:7-9

2) Romans 13:8-10

3) Matthew 18:15-20

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

**23<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Let us help others find the path toward life.

In writing to the Romans, Paul says that the *one who loves another has fulfilled the law*. He is reiterating the teaching of Christ, indeed, his *greatest commandment*. The commandment to love – inclusive of one another, oneself, and God – is found in all four of the Gospels.

Jesus is the love of God made flesh. He came *out of love for love*. He came to save us, to make us whole again, to make us holy. The love that Jesus commands, and that Jesus lives, is not a set of warm or fuzzy feelings. It is a profound willing of our good, and a selfless desire that we be who we are made to be.

This is the love we also are commanded to live. We are asked to will – to want, to seek, to make happen – the good of those God puts around us. This is not always easy, and it is not always pleasant. We see examples of this in both the reading from Ezekiel and in our Gospel.

The Lord tells the prophet Ezekiel that he will be held responsible for the death of the wicked if he does not *speak out to dissuade* him. In the Gospel, then, Jesus gives instructions on how we should correct those who sin against us; how to raise our voices against wickedness, speaking out and speaking up when we see others living apart from God. To do so is to love, and it is a commandment.

Yet, before this clarion call leads us too far, we must remember what is perhaps the most uncomfortable reality of this law of love. Jesus makes it clear that we are not asked to do this from afar – e.g., from behind computer screens or behind backs – but one-on-one at first and always face to face. We are called to be present, to correct *[our] brother* who has sinned against us in person. We are called to be in relationship – to know of this sin in the first place because it is “against us” – because we are close.

Call it tough love, accountability, charitable or fraternal correction, or even *speaking the truth in love*, as Saint Paul says elsewhere (Ephesians 4:15). It is a love that truly desires the good of the other, and will intervene out of love for the sake of another’s salvation – just as the Father did in sending his Son.

Ultimately, the one who chooses evil over good has forged his own path toward death. But in following the command to love one another in the ways just described, we can help others find the path toward life. And Christ, who is present here in this sacrament, gives us the grace to do just that.

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Monday, September 7, 2020  
(Lec. 437)

1) 1 Corinthians 5:1-8

2) Luke 6:6-11

Gospel related: CCC 581 CSDC 261

MONDAY OF  
23<sup>RD</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are an Easter people.

We might be deep into the season of Ordinary Time, but our first reading provides an important reminder to us: We are an Easter people. We, too, must clear out anything that interferes with our new life in Christ.

Paul writes to the Corinthians because he had heard that they were boasting of the sinful actions of one of their members – *a man living with his father's wife*. Paul points out that this sinful behavior is like *a little yeast [that] leavens all the dough*. Soon more sinful behavior will abound and be acceptable.

Therefore, they are to not just avoid sin, but to call it out – remove it – when it enters the community. Paul writes: *Clear out the old yeast, so that you may become a fresh batch of dough, inasmuch as you are unleavened. For our Paschal Lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed.*

Today's Gospel, with yet another example of the scribes and the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus in wrongdoing, is a practical example of Paul's message. A man with a withered hand is in the synagogue, and the religious leaders watch *to see if he would cure on the sabbath*.

Jesus asks them, *Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life, rather than to destroy it?* It is a question that gets both to the heart of the humanity of the situation, and speaks to their blind adherence to the law, which was *old yeast* that needed to be cleared away. The man needed help; it did not matter if it was on the Sabbath or not. The Messiah, the Paschal Lamb, was in their midst.

We are an Easter people. Even in Ordinary Time, we are called to remember this and let it shape our words and our actions – to see if there is any *old yeast* in our lives or behavior that needs to be cleared out so as to live better within the Kingdom. As we continue our liturgy, let us open our hearts to the Eucharist, helping us further understand how we are to respond to the great gift of our redemption.

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Tuesday, September 8, 2020  
(Lec. 636)

- 1) Micah 5:1-4a  
or Romans 8:28-30
- 2) Matthew 1:1-16, 18-23  
or 1:18-23

Gospel related: CCC 333, 430, 437, 452, 486, 497, 744, 1507, 1846, 2666, 2812

**THE NATIVITY  
OF THE  
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY  
- FEAST**

**FOCUS:** The birth of Mary sheds light on God's action in history and how Christ is God-with-us.

Today's readings and feast are a beautiful reminder that Jesus, fully divine, was also fully human. They also affirm God's boundless love for us, in choosing to reunite us to himself by becoming one of us. Our salvation history is one in which God's every action proclaims that he is with us.

The prophet Micah foretells the birth of Jesus Christ – he will be born into David's line, born in the town of Bethlehem. The Gospel draws out more details about the birth of Christ, from his genealogical lineage to his being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary.

Even though the feast today is about the birth of his mother, Mary, the readings are rightly about Jesus Christ. The focus of all human life and all human history is framed around the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, even the birth of his mother. In each person's life the One who is Peace, the man who is God-with-us, gives meaning to each birth and death.

Jesus Christ was born into a particular lineage, into the Davidic line. He is the Messiah. This is important for us to hear, because it is a fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures and a sign of God's providence. Equally important, however, is that he was born of a woman. His mother, Mary – chosen by God before her own conception to be the first tabernacle of Christ – was fully human. Not divine, not another type of creature, but human: Formed in the image and likeness of God. Conceived without sin and full of grace so as to be sinless in all things, she was the perfection of humanity who gave birth to the Savior of humanity and the world.

So today we celebrate the birth of Mary. It is an historic event that sheds light on God's action in history and how Christ is God-with-us.

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Wednesday, September 9, 2020  
(Lec. 439)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 7:25-31
- 2) Luke 6:20-26

WEDNESDAY OF  
23<sup>RD</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(USA: OBL MEM  
Saint Peter Claver,  
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC2444, 2546, 2547 CSDC 325

FOCUS: God calls us to a joy that transcends our earthly comforts.

Sometimes the good news of our faith does not sound good at first listen. In today's Gospel, Jesus identifies those who are poor, hungry, weeping, and hated as *blessed*. At the same time, he warns of *woe* to those who are rich, satisfied, laughing, and popular. What kind of good news is Jesus offering?

This sermon on the plain in Luke's Gospel follows Jesus' call of his disciples, and precedes his sending them out on mission. Though a somewhat perplexing message, we can nevertheless identify two things: First, blessedness – also translated as happiness – is essential to the kingdom of God; and second, blessedness does not look like what we might expect.

Blessedness – happiness – does not look like we expect because the kingdom of God upends what we have come to know in the natural world. The Lord desires our happiness, and addresses this in the sermon. He names those who are blessed and speaks of all they will receive: Satisfaction, laughter, and the kingdom of God itself! The Lord exhorts the blessed to joy, telling them to *rejoice and leap for joy!* He is a God who made us for himself and to share in his joy.

Yet the crux of this teaching hinges on the nature of joy as that which we will not find apart from God. Nor will we find it, perfectly, here on earth. God prepares us for a true, lasting joy which is deeper than our superficial satisfaction. His happiness transcends the riches and comforts that we often seek and settle for in our earthly lives.

Today, the Church celebrates Saint Peter Claver, a Jesuit priest who did not settle for the comforts of this world. Dedicating himself to serve slaves in the new world, Peter Claver worked tirelessly to attend to their physical and spiritual needs. His work amid such suffering led to Peter Claver's own poverty, mourning, hunger, and even persecution, yet he stands among the blessed of the Church and enjoyed the happiness that Christ names in the Gospel today. Peter Claver rejoiced and was glad in the Lord's promises, as he now rejoices in the Lord's company in heaven.

The good news that we hear today may not sound good at first, and that might be indicative of an all-too-human inability to understand and trust in the deep goodness of God and the transformative happiness to which he calls us. God does not want us to settle for the fleeting satisfaction of earthly comfort, but to find our deep joy in him. Thus, the good news we hear today is of a God who ardently pursues us and wants us to respond in faith to him, treasuring his love above and beyond the things of this world that will pass away.

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Thursday, September 10, 2020  
(Lec. 440)

1) 1 Corinthians 8:1b-7  
11-13

2) Luke 6:27-38

Gospel related: CCC 1458, 1669, 1789, 1970, 2842

THURSDAY OF  
23<sup>RD</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Love radically, for *love builds up*.

We could summarize Jesus' teaching in today's Gospel as this: Love others radically. This radical love includes not just our family and friends, or the people who are kind to us, but everyone, even – or especially – our enemies. Jesus commands us to *do good* to those who mistreat us. To bless them, pray for them, give more to them.

It's a tall order, and it may seem impossible. However, history shows that this is how even the earliest Christians were known. The second-century philosopher and Christian apologist Aristides once said to the Roman King Hadrian, regarding Christianity: "The Christians, O King ... have found the truth ... Their oppressors they appease and make them their friends; they do good to their enemies ... they love one another" ([www.newadvent.org](http://www.newadvent.org)).

In his Letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, *love builds up*. What doesn't build up? Anything we do that harms others, *wound[s] their consciences* or *causes [our] brother to sin*. Not only are these *not* love, they are a sin against Christ.

We notice that neither Paul nor Jesus excludes anyone from that list of "others." So when we find it difficult to follow the command to love, as we all at some point surely do, we can think about Paul's words. We can recall Aristides' comments and know that our actions make a difference, and they affect others even outside of our community.

Christ in the Eucharist is the ultimate example of radical love. After all, he gives himself to each one of us without exception, sinners though we are. Love builds up. And so as we leave here with him physically present within us, with a grace that transforms us, the question is not "How can we do the same for others?" but "How can we *not*?"

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Friday, September 11, 2020  
(Lec. 441)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 9:16-19  
22b-27
- 2) Luke 6:39-42

FRIDAY OF  
23<sup>RD</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The prize that awaits each of us is an imperishable crown.

Paul tells the Corinthians that, as followers of Christ, they are to live their faith just as seriously and intensely as the athletes in an arena. He warns against shadowboxing or running aimlessly, but encourages them all to follow his lead in pursuing their faith lives with the seriousness of a true athlete.

In other words, to stay with this metaphor, they must work on their own game – their own skills; their own conditioning; their own strengths and weaknesses; their own role, before they can begin to contribute to the team effort. This sounds a lot like what Jesus has to say in today's Gospel.

*When fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher*, Jesus says. And this training includes acting not like a hypocrite, but as a person of integrity: Upstanding and virtuous in one's conduct; honest, and principled. No athlete, and no disciple, can expect to contribute to the good of the team/community if he or she is blind to her own weaknesses or stumbling over his own sin. Whatever beam is in our own eye has to be removed before we can speak to our brother about the splinter he is most likely trying to remove himself.

Paul has embraced his obligation to preach the Gospel – free of charge and with a willingness and a spirit of servitude. All that he does he does *for the sake of the Gospel*, driving his body and training it *for fear that, after having preached to others [he himself] should be disqualified*.

Jesus can help us do the same. With his grace we can overcome our failings through prayer, confession, spiritual direction, and the many daily challenges we face as we struggle to grow in our spiritual lives. And in the Eucharist, we literally take his body and blood into our own body, to strengthen us and nourish us for the race we are running.

So as we approach the Eucharist, we pray for the grace to trust him and to let him show us how best to run. For the prize that awaits each of us is an imperishable crown.

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Saturday, September 12, 2020  
(Lec. 442)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 10:14-22
- 2) Luke 6:43-49

SATURDAY OF  
23<sup>RD</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
The Most Holy Name of Mary;  
Saturday in honor  
of BVM)

Gospel related: **CSDC** 70

FOCUS: Let us build our life with Christ as our foundation.

“Like begets like” is a phrase many of us may have heard before. Another way of saying this, is “sin begets sin and righteousness begets righteousness.” Or, as Jesus says in today’s Gospel, *A good tree does not bear rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit ... A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil.*

We all want a “good” life, a life full of richness, even if not necessarily material riches. That is the nature of the human person. We *seek* goodness, we long for it from the depths of our being. That is, of course, because it is what we are made for. We are made for God – for perfect union with God – who is perfect goodness and perfect love. And so, with our every act, we try to grasp that for which we are made.

The problem is that we often don’t know how to find what we long for. We grasp at things we think are worthy, but sometimes they are not the best choices possible. Sometimes they are far from it. Sometimes they are not, in truth, beneficial at all.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus gives us an answer. Listening to the voice of God is like building our life upon a rock. This foundation can carry us through the complexities of choosing the good, true, and beautiful in a world full of so many voices drawing us to idols that cannot ultimately satisfy.

The idolatry of stuff, of busyness, of accomplishment, and of human recognition is strong because it seems to offer happiness. Some of what tempts us may even be wonderful and great, but none of it is *infinitely* so. Only God is the true, infinite good that we are made for and long for. Only by listening to the voice of Christ, and acting upon it, can we bear good fruit and point our lives in the direction of eternal beatitude – blessedness – with God.

The voice of Christ speaks to us every day; we need only to pay attention. And here in this liturgy, he speaks and comes to us in a very particular way. As like begets like, his grace is ready to transform us to be like him.

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## SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2020

(Lec. 130)

1) Sirach 27:30–28:7

2) Romans 14:7-9

3) Matthew 18:21-35

Gospel related: CCC 982, 2227, 2843, 2845

24<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We do not deserve God's mercy, but we can live it.

The Christian life is a communal life, not a solitary one. Thus, it entails times of being reconciled to God and with one another.

Saint Paul explains why it is necessary for us to be reconciled with each other if we ever have hope of being reconciled with God. *We are the Lord's*, we belong to Christ, and we are to conform ourselves to him: *None of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself*. We are a community of believers. We are all sinners, and need to give and receive from each other what we need from the Lord – mercy. We are meant to treat others the way God has treated us in Christ, sharing with them the life-giving and forgiving love of Jesus.

“What does that look like, exactly?” we might ask. This is at the heart of Peter's question in today's Gospel. “What does forgiveness look like, Lord, forgiving my brother seven times?” That seems like a reasonable number, does it not? Especially if it is for the same thing? Except Jesus said *seventy-seven times* was the answer. And lest we get stuck on the exact numbers rather than the larger point, Jesus tells the parable of the unforgiving servant. Completely upside down in his debt, with no hope to repay it, and he must throw himself completely on his master's mercy.

His debt is miraculously forgiven! Yet, rather than reforming his life, changing his heart, and sharing with others the mercy just shown him, the servant imprisons someone who owes him a much smaller amount. In response, the master hands him *over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt*.

Jesus suggests that he owes us nothing, but he has given us everything. He has forgiven the worst things we have ever done. He would forgive the worst things we could ever imagine. And yet, with all that mercy to draw from, free for the taking, he still finds us holding grudges over much smaller wrongs done to us by the hands of another.

All of us belong in Jesus' “debtors' prison,” but he came to set the captives free. It is true that we don't deserve the mercy God has shown us in Christ. We can't earn it and we can't repay it. But we can live it. We can forgive, and we can seek forgiveness. And as “seventy-seven” represents the limitless nature of God's mercy toward us – so we can make it represent ours to one another.

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Monday, September 14, 2020

(Lec. 638)

1) Numbers 21:4b-9

2) Philippians 2:6-11

3) John 3:13-17

Gospel related: CCC 219, 423, 440, 444, 454, 458, 661, 679, 706, 2130 CSDC 3, 64

**THE EXALTATION  
OF THE  
HOLY CROSS  
- FEAST**

FOCUS: The cross is the way of salvation.

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross – the cross by which God redeemed the world. Many of us are probably more familiar with the attention we give the cross on Good Friday. The Veneration of the Cross on that day is a very moving event. Each person who participates is trying to make sense of the length and breadth of God's great love. *For, as John tells us, God so loved the world!*

This is the love of which Saint Paul speaks in his Letter to the Philippians: *Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. We know from the passion narratives that Jesus literally poured out his blood to the point where only water came out.*

The cross upon which Christ hung was an instrument of torture and execution. It was humiliating and terrorizing. Yet Jesus willingly offered himself up to its power of death so that, in the end, death would be crushed. The innocent victim became the sovereign king. *Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.* And so, too, is the cross, the means of our salvation, exalted.

For some, the cross is seen as a sign of defeat. But we know that Jesus was anything but defeated, for he triumphed over even the grave. The cross to us is a sign of glory, a sign of redemption. That is why we sign ourselves with the sign of the cross because we glory in it, we relish it, we were saved by it.

Jesus freely emptied himself out for our sakes. *And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.* Jesus was lifted up on the cross for all who passed by to see. God lifted him up on the cross so that all might see and believe. To some the cross is folly. To us, it is the way of salvation.

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Tuesday, September 15, 2020

(Lec. 444)

1) 1 Corinthians 12:12-14,  
27-31a

(Lec. 639)

2) John 19:25-27  
or Luke 2:33-35

Gospel related: CCC 149, 495, 501, 529, 575, 583, 587, 618, 726, 964, 2605, 2618, 2677, 2679

TUESDAY OF  
24<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Our Lady of Sorrows)

FOCUS: Mary shares not only our sorrows, but also the hope of the Resurrection offered through her Son.

Yesterday, we commemorated the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, recalling Christ's saving passion and death. Today, we celebrate the Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows.

As we read in the *catechism*, "Mary's role in the Church is inseparable from her union with Christ and flows directly from it. 'This union of the mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ's virginal conception up to his death'; it is made manifest above all at the hour of his Passion" (CCC 964).

Mary's life as the Mother of Jesus was certainly full of much joy and wonder. But it was also marked by moments of deep sorrow as prophesied by Simeon [if Luke's Gospel is used today]. He proclaimed to her, *you yourself a sword will pierce*. Mary's heart would be pierced, and she would bear the sufferings that her Son would endure, "joining herself with his sacrifice in her heart" (CCC 964).

It is not just Jesus' suffering that she takes on. She also shares *our* sorrows and endures our sufferings with us. Yet Mary does not keep us at the cross. Instead, she leads us past the cross and toward the hope of the Resurrection.

Mary's own sorrow turned to joy on Easter. As mother to all of us, she points us to her Son's salvific work. At that first Easter, Jesus' redemptive suffering led to the promise of salvation for all people. No longer would we be subject to carrying the burden of sin – of deep woundedness and pain. Instead, Christian people are people of hope. Mary calls us to draw near to her Son, who takes our pain and our sins away, offering us redemption through the saving power of his cross.

We give thanks for that salvation when we celebrate the memorial of Jesus' death and resurrection – thanks that we have been held worthy to be in God's presence. May Mary, Our Lady of Sorrows, pray for us and lead us always to her Son – whose redemptive sacrifice takes away our sins and the sins of the world.

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Wednesday, September 16, 2020  
(Lec. 445)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 12:31–13:13
- 2) Luke 7:31-35

WEDNESDAY OF  
24<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saints Cornelius,  
Pope  
and Cyprian,  
Bishop,  
Martyrs)

FOCUS: As God has loved us, so we are able – with his help – to love one another.

Today we celebrate the memorial of Saints Cornelius and Cyprian, who lived in the third century, a time of severe persecution within the Church. They opposed those who thought the sin of apostasy was unforgiveable, welcoming those who returned to the Church and the sacraments through repentance and a penitential period.

They were shepherds of their people, and stewards of God’s mercy, lived out in the fullness of his Church. And his mercy, like all mercy, stems from love. Love not as a feeling that is fickle to the mood of the day, but an authentic willing of the good of the other. A love that is sacrificial, dying to self – and maybe for others – for its own sake and for the flourishing and good of others and the world.

Paul speaks to this in his Letter to the Corinthians. He is talking about a love that requires effort and commitment, self-control and humility, forgiveness, and selflessness. It is not a love that happens to us by fate. It is a love that *we choose to put into practice*.

So perhaps rather than thinking of “love” as something somehow “static,” with descriptive adjectives (e.g., love is *patient*), we can think of it as a dynamic activity – a perfect animation of the highest form of other virtues. Thus: patience ... is **love**. Kindness ... is **love**. Bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things ... these are **love**. Being unailing ... is **love**.

Emphasizing it this way helps us hear and understand “God ... is **love**,” in a new way. For these words do not describe God’s actions as much as they speak the truth about who God is. As such, as God has loved us, so we are able – with his help – to love one another. After all, he does not command us to do something we cannot do.

But we can’t love in this way without the assistance of grace, the grace we come to seek and receive in the sacraments. As we come to the table of the Lord, let us pray for the grace to truly *be* that love.

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Thursday, September 17, 2020  
(Lec. 446)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 15:1-11
- 2) Luke 7:36-50

THURSDAY OF  
24<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Robert Bellarmine,  
Bishop and Doctor  
of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 575, 588, 1441, 2616, 2712

FOCUS: *Your faith has saved you; go in peace.*

*Your faith has saved you; go in peace.*

Jesus makes a form of this statement three different times in the Gospel of Luke. In his words we are reminded of his power and compassion.

We hear him say these words in today's reading, after a woman washes his feet with her tears, wipes them with her hair, kisses them, and then rubs them with an expensive ointment. These are great actions of humility from a woman described three times in the reading as a sinner. Jesus forgives her for the unnamed sins, after which she shows *great love*. Her actions are in direct opposition to Simon, the Pharisee, who, as host, would have been expected to offer Jesus a welcoming kiss and water to wash his feet, and to anoint his head with oil. He failed on all three counts.

In today's first reading from Saint Paul, he reminds the Corinthians of the Gospel he has preached to them: *Through it you are also being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you.* For the Corinthians, as with the woman in the Gospel and for us, faith in Christ is what saves us because it is our response to God's invitation to enter the Kingdom. The gift of faith allows us to hold fast to the words of the Gospel, including its directive to repent and to love one another as Christ has loved us.

Together, today's readings tell us something that we already know – that we have a forgiving God. It may also be reminding us that we need to seek the Lord's forgiveness in the confessional more often. Reconciliation is an available, sacramental source of grace and mercy. It renews and strengthens our gift of faith, and allows us to more fully respond to God's call of love and redemption. Jesus longs to tell us through our confessor what he told the sinful woman in today's Gospel: *Your faith has saved you; go in peace.* Thank God for the gift of faith. May we be reconciled to God and to one another so as to live this faith for the sake of the world.

**Saint Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621)** A key leader of the Counter-Reformation, Robert Bellarmine was a man of giant intellect and influence. The Jesuit professor of theology was a gifted preacher and teacher whose sermons attracted crowds and converted many. His publication, *Disputations*, is a comprehensive defense of Catholicism and papal authority. Robert wrote several works on spirituality for the laity as well. He is the patron saint of catechists, catechumens and canon lawyers.

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Friday, September 18, 2020

(Lec. 447)

1) 1 Corinthians 15:12-20

2) Luke 8:1-3

FRIDAY OF  
24<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Because Christ was raised, so will we one day be resurrected with him and enter the gates of heaven.

That Christ was raised from the dead is central to our faith. And because he was raised, so will we one day be resurrected with him and enter the gates of heaven. Paul, to whom these truths were imparted by God, is exhorting the Corinthians to understand this.

In today's first reading, he is chastising the Corinthians for their actions in professing belief in Christ and the Gospel, but denying belief in bodily resurrection. He points out that this is a logical fallacy. If bodily resurrection is not possible, then Christ could not have risen from the dead. If Christ did not rise from the dead, then salvation from sin did not take place and their faith is hollow.

Today's Gospel gives us a counter-example to the people of Corinth in its presentation of those who surrounded Jesus. What the Corinthians find difficult to reconcile in their minds and in their faith, Jesus disciples' actually lived out in faith at his side.

This particular passage from Luke is unique to all the Gospels, as it is the only one to have this particular note about women traveling with him like this. For these women to do so would have been shocking to the Jews of Jesus' time, since in that culture it was scandalous for women to be alone in the company of men who were not their husband or close blood relation. Yet several of these women, Luke will later tell us, were witnesses to his death (23:49) and resurrection (24:9-11).

These men and women were disciples whose faith was intricately tied to their relationship to Christ. They followed him, they stood at the foot of the cross, and they witnessed him in his risen glory. They were *there*, and they were the predecessors to Paul who now preaches Christ crucified and risen. As Paul says, if none of that happened, *Then we are also false witnesses to God, because we testified against God that he raised Christ.* And if there is one thing we know about Paul, he is not a false witness.

Grateful for the faith and example of the first disciples who did not shy away from the challenges of faith, let us prepare to receive strength for our own journey at the Eucharistic table.

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Saturday, September 19, 2020  
(Lec. 448)

- 1) 1 Corinthians 15:35-37,  
42-49
- 2) Luke 8:4-15

SATURDAY OF  
24<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Januarius,  
Bishop and Martyr;  
Saturday in honor  
of BVM)

Gospel related: CCC 368, 1151, 2668, 2731, 2847

**FOCUS:** A good heart enables us to accept and participate in the grace we receive to *bear fruit through perseverance*.

In today's first reading, Paul is directly addressing those in Corinth who say they have faith in Christ, but do not believe in bodily resurrection. They have asked him how the dead are raised and what kind of body they will have.

Paul answers the second question first. Like Jesus, he begins with an example from nature. Just as the seed we sow must die to produce new life, our bodies will be transformed by death. What was natural, corruptible, dishonorable, and weak will become spiritual, incorruptible, glorious, and powerful. In other words, our bodies will be much more like Christ's body, endowed with God's own qualities.

This process of transformation begins before our physical deaths. Christ became one of us, died for us, and rose again to conquer death once and for all. At our baptism, we become one with Christ; we die with Christ, so that we might also rise with him. From then on, we are called to continually conform ourselves to his image. If our eventual end is to have a risen body like Christ's, then our lives should take the shape of Christ's life.

Like the sower in today's Gospel, God spreads the seed of the word generously, making himself known even in our natural world and human relationships. However, as Jesus makes clear, the seed that fell on good soil represents those who have heard the word of God and *embrace[d] it with a generous and good heart*. And this heart enables us to accept and participate in the grace we receive to live faithfully, and *bear fruit through perseverance*.

Let us invite Jesus to examine our hearts today and open them to his call to conversion. As we receive the Lord in the Eucharist, may it nourish the soil of our hearts, conforming us ever more to the image of Christ and making us more like our good and generous God.

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**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2020**

(Lec. 133)

1) Isaiah 55:6-9

2) Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a

3) Matthew 20:1-16a

Gospel related: **CSDC** 541

**25<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: God's thoughts and generosity exceed our ability to understand.

Isaiah tells us that God's ways are above our ways and his thoughts are above our thoughts.

As an example, the parable about the landowner's decision to pay all of the workers the same wage no matter how long they worked in his vineyard can be confusing. It seems to offend our sense of fairness.

But Jesus turns our perspective upside down when the landowner asks, *Am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?* Jesus' focus on the landowner – his generosity in paying the workers who only found the job at his vineyard at the last minute – draws our focus to God.

God is that generous landowner, who welcomes people to his vineyard until the very last moment. For God, it is never too late for people to come to him and seek to serve him and do his will. God loves all of us as his children, and his mercy extends beyond our own conceptions of place and time.

As we go about our day, let us seek God and remember his generosity to us, his love and mercy that are so high above us that we cannot even fathom them. And no matter when we entered his vineyard, let us thank God for the opportunity to work for him.

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Monday, September 21, 2020  
(Lec. 643)

1) Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13

2) Matthew 9:9-13

Gospel related: CCC 581, 589, 2100

**SAINT MATTHEW,  
APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST  
- FEAST**

FOCUS: *I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.*

In the Semitic world of the first century, sitting down to a meal with another was not just a daily event but an act of acceptance or recognition of equality. That may help explain why the Pharisees frequently chastised Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners: For to the Pharisees, the tax collector was not merely flawed, but a major sinner. He not only assessed and collected taxes, the tax collector often extorted others, and was seen as both a thief and, more importantly, a collaborator with the pagan Roman emperor in whose name taxes were imposed.

The tax collector was, in the eyes of the Jewish community, guilty of sanctioning idolatry and extortion. So for Jesus to call and accept a man such as Matthew was a scandal in the eyes of those who considered themselves God-fearing and righteous.

Today, as we celebrate Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist, we are not told anything other than he was sitting at his customs post. Instead, the focus is on Matthew's response and the actions of Jesus.

Notice the immediacy of Matthew's response to Jesus' simple, *Follow me*. Even if he was not guilty of extortion, Matthew's job as an imperial tax collector gave him a position in society with a good and secure income. So what would lead a man like him to leave all that to follow an itinerant preacher who offered no security, no permanent residence, or income? What was it about Jesus and his words – *Follow me* – that compelled Matthew to leave everything behind?

We simply don't know. But it speaks to the power of Jesus.

Whatever was in his heart, Matthew saw the answer in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and was ready to take a chance.

Throughout the centuries, that same deep desire has led millions of men and women to Jesus. Here today, as we gather to celebrate Mass, we honor within ourselves the same deep stirrings and hopes that Matthew felt – that desire to know Christ and to be called out of our sin and into righteousness.

As we celebrate Matthew, let us remember all who seek that deeper relationship with Christ. Let us give thanks that Jesus came not to call the righteous but sinners. Then let us be instruments by which Jesus will invite others to come and follow him.

\* \* \*

Tuesday, September 22, 2020  
(Lec. 450)

- 1) Proverbs 21:1-6, 10-13
- 2) Luke 8:19-21

TUESDAY OF  
25<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus offered himself as the sacrificial lamb so that we might become sons and daughters of God.

God invites us to enter into a mysterious union, a *communion*, with him. In our baptisms, we are claimed for Christ. When we receive the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus during Mass, we are entering into communion with the word of God, Jesus, very literally.

With that in mind, let's consider what he said when told his *mother and brothers* were outside: *My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it.* There, Jesus invites everyone to an intimate relationship, and he even tells us how to gain this closeness: By hearing and acting.

The reality is that each of us can have that kind of close familial relationship with Jesus. Quoting Saint Irenaeus, the *catechism* teaches that "the Son of God became Son of man so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God" (CCC 460).

Today, as we approach the Eucharistic table, we pray that the Holy Spirit strengthens us to hear and respond to God's wise commandments. May we, in receiving the Eucharist, draw ever closer to Jesus, who longs to be near us. And let us thank Christ for his obedience and love in offering himself as the sacrificial lamb so that we might become sons and daughters of God.

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Wednesday, September 23, 2020  
(Lec. 451)

- 1) Proverbs 30:5-9
- 2) Luke 9:1-6

WEDNESDAY OF  
25<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Pius of Pietrelcina,  
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 551

FOCUS: Pray, hope, and refrain from worry, relying on God for all things.

Today's Gospel passage is at the root of our own baptismal vocation, and the commission we receive at the end of Mass: "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life." For Jesus' command was never intended to end with his immediate disciples. Nor did he believe this could only be lived by exemplar saints, such as Saint Pius of Pietrelcina, known to many as Padre Pio, whom we commemorate today. He was known for his charity, his piety, and the stigmata he bore for more than 50 years. He is also known for his wonderful advice: *Pray, hope, and don't worry.*

If that doesn't speak to reliance on God, then nothing else does. We, too, have the ability, with God's help, to live a spirit of detachment from worldly concerns and to rely on God's grace and providence as Jesus often preached. Indeed, this is a challenging Gospel, and challenging task, especially in an age where the list of needs have expanded far beyond food and a second tunic.

But it was Jesus' consistent message in the Gospels that material possessions can hinder our ability to live the Gospel life. This does not mean that we actually need to abandon all our possessions, or cease to obtain and rely on the objects that we need to live and to do our work. Rather, it is about deciding which things – material or immaterial – need to go because they hinder our relationship with God. We are asked to be honest with ourselves as to whether we see all good things as coming from God and therefore are to be used for his purpose, or if we are relying solely on ourselves to get through life.

The humble priest we commemorate today demonstrated how the power of prayer can help us achieve the Gospel spirit of detachment. Saint Padre Pio, help us have the grace to do as you advise – may we indeed pray, hope, and refrain from worry, relying on God for all things.

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Thursday, September 24, 2020  
(Lec. 452)

- 1) Ecclesiastes 1:2-11
- 2) Luke 9:7-9

THURSDAY OF  
25<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Hope remains alive among those who follow Jesus and embrace the truth of eternal life.

This week marks the 25th week in Ordinary Time in the Church calendar. During this time, we continue to celebrate the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and anticipate the salvation and eternal life he promises. According to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Ordinary Time is a time of conversion, growth, and maturation. The priest's vestments are green throughout this season. Just as in nature, green represents new life and the hope that it brings.

The reading from Ecclesiastes contrasts the permanence of the earth with the transience of human life: *One generation passes and another comes, but the world forever stays.* The sun rises and sets, the winds blow south, north, east, and west. The rivers flow into the sea and keep on going. Referencing the cycles in nature, the author says, *Nothing is new under the sun.* He seems to suggest that a human life, which is so temporary, is meaningless. Despite that, it is natural for us to hunger for something more – to seek satisfaction and joy. We relish the hope that this season represents.

In today's short Gospel, we hear of Herod, perplexed by the rumors he hears of Jesus. He wonders who this man could be. Perhaps the rumblings that he is John, raised from the dead, haunt him. The fact that he had John beheaded should have ended the story, in his mind. Instead, hope is revived and once again moving among the people. The Gospel tells us even Herod kept trying to see this man.

Hope is a powerful thing. It is not just wanting something to happen. Even more, it is the expectation that our wishes could truly be fulfilled. Lack of hope can fill us with despair, sorrow, or depression. It robs us of motivation and leaves us with the sense that all is meaningless. Having hope, on the other hand, brings us joy, and gives us purpose, satisfaction, and comfort. Jesus is the epitome of hope. For the Israelites, he was the long-awaited Messiah and the answer to their prayers. For all of us, he is the hope of salvation and the promise of life eternal.

Jesus is hope renewed. He is Messiah, friend, and brother. We know him today as the Son of God, the chosen one and Savior of the world. He is the promise fulfilled.

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Friday, September 25, 2020  
(Lec. 453)

1) Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

2) Luke 9:18-22

Gospel related: CCC 2600

FRIDAY OF  
25<sup>th</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God has saved us through Jesus Christ. That is our promise and our hope.

Jesus asks today, *Who do the crowds say that I am?* His disciples reply with a flurry of answers. Some people think Jesus is John the Baptist, or Elijah, or another ancient prophet. The people in the crowd are on the right track, but incorrect.

The disciples, on the other hand, have come to learn the truth, even if they do not yet fully understand it or what it means. Peter answers Jesus' question, *But who do you say that I am?* with: *The Christ of God.*

How might we answer this question? It is one thing to express an element of faith, or truth: Jesus is the Christ. It's another to fully understand what that means for us and for the world. We know just from the recounting of the Gospels and Christ's passion that even the disciples did not fully understand. In a passage similar to this in Matthew and Mark, after Peter confesses Jesus as Christ, he then tries to tell Jesus not to go through with his foretold suffering and death, and Jesus rebukes him for his thinking as humans do, and not as God does (Matthew 16:23).

It is easy for any of us to fall into this same trap, when we think only of what it means *for us* that Jesus is the Christ of God. But our faith is one that professes Jesus as the Christ of God as a truth in and of itself, without conditions, exceptions, or caveats on our part. Jesus knows how to save us – we don't have to give him instructions.

So when those times arise where we have faith, but lack understanding and are perhaps grieving, frustrated, or otherwise overcome by our own thoughts, we might remember the words found in Ecclesiastes today: *There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for everything under the heavens ... [God] has made everything appropriate to its time ... without man's ever discovering, from beginning to end, the work which God has done.*

God has saved us through Jesus Christ. That is our promise and our hope.

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Saturday, September 26, 2020  
(Lec. 454)

- 1) Ecclesiastes 11:9–12:8
- 2) Luke 9:43b-45

SATURDAY OF  
25<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saints Cosmas and Damian,  
Martyrs;  
Saturday in honor  
of BVM)

Gospel related: CCC 554

**FOCUS:** Life includes both joy and suffering; we are called to trust God in both.

Life often consists of a series of contrasts. One minute we are content. The next we are not. During one phase, we enjoy good health, perhaps not even acknowledging how fortunate we are, while during another, we may undergo illness. We experience the “highs” of wonderful events – marriage, the birth of a child, success in a vocation or career – and at other times, we experience the “lows” of hardship – broken relationships, the loss of a job, or loneliness.

These contrasts are not new. Four thousand or more years ago, the author of Ecclesiastes paid close attention to these disparities, offering an exhortation to enjoy youth while it lasts, to remember God during good times before the hardships come along. The author reminds us that we are all dust: *And the dust returns to the earth as it once was, and the life breath returns to God who gave it.*

The Gospel, a short passage today, reflects these contrasts as well. Jesus has just healed a man’s son, and during this “high” moment, all were *amazed at his every deed*. Yet it is precisely at this moment, when all are amazed, that Jesus tells his disciples, *The Son of Man is to be handed over to men*. They did not understand, and they were afraid to ask.

Life is not simply the highs, nor is it simply the lows. They are both part of our experience. We don’t have one without the other. But in both we can trust the Lord, who has *destroyed death and brought life to light through the Gospel*.

**Saints Cosmas and Damian (3rd century)** Brothers Cosmas and Damian were Arab physicians committed to serving the poor in what is present-day Syria. Nicknamed the “silverless” because they refused to accept payment for the care they provided, their generosity attracted many to Christianity, but also came to the attention of the Roman emperor. They were arrested during the persecution of Diocletian, and martyred after refusing to renounce their faith. Tradition holds that their three younger brothers were martyred with them.

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**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2020**

(Lec. 136)

1) Ezekiel 18:25-28

2) Philippians 2:1-11 or 2:1-5

3) Matthew 21:28-32

Gospel related: CCC 535, 546

**26<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME**

**FOCUS:** Understanding God's will, committing to it, and doing it, are what bring life.

Two sons are ordered by their father to *go out and work in the vineyard*. This is not an unreasonable request. Presumably, the father owns the vineyard and therefore the sons have a stake in its success. It is to their benefit, and is their duty, to obey.

We know that the first one says he will not, but then does; the second one says he will, but then does not. That the first son is the one who actually does the will of God sets the stage for the real rhetorical punch of Jesus' message. Speaking to the chief priests and elders of the people, Jesus says to them, *tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you*.

These words are meant to get their attention, obviously, for as religious leaders, they would have seen themselves as both morally and socially superior to tax collectors and prostitutes. They also reflect something found in the words of the prophet Ezekiel as he relays the Lord's message to his people: *When someone virtuous turns away from virtue to commit iniquity ... [he dies]. But if he turns from the wickedness he has committed, he does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life*.

Everyone has a choice as to how to act – just like the sons in the parable; just like the chief priests and elders; just like the tax collectors and prostitutes. And the interesting thing about these words in Ezekiel is that the Lord is acknowledging not just those who repent and follow God's way, but also those who "turn from virtue to sin." This is a good description of the second son – and likely the religious leaders in this story – as their words signify obedience and piety, while their actions say otherwise.

Jesus is celebrating God's mercy, and his compassion upon those tax collectors and prostitutes (and others) who initially rejected God in making their life choices, but who eventually turned away from sin to life. He is also pointing out that virtue – in this case, the status and learning of the religious leaders – does not make them immune to disobedience and unrighteousness. Understanding God's will, committing to it, and doing it, are what bring life.

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Monday, September 28, 2020

(Lec. 455)

- 1) Job 1:6-22
- 2) Luke 9:46-50

MONDAY OF  
26<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Wenceslaus,  
Martyr;  
Saint Lawrence Ruiz  
and Companions,  
Martyrs)

FOCUS: Responding in faith to everything life brings us.

When something unexpectedly great happens in our lives – think of getting a hole-in-one while golfing or winning the grand prize in the parish raffle – it seems as if all is right with the world and God is orchestrating our lives according to a perfect plan.

When, like Job in our first reading, we undergo devastating losses, the resulting emotional pain is indescribable –especially when there is little explanation for why things happened the way they did. It can seem as if the world is a hopeless mess, and God can feel very far away.

When faced with one tragedy after another, Job tore his cloak, cut off his hair, and fell prostrate to the ground. Scripture points out that Job did not sin against God by these expressions of intense grief. Rather, he chose to praise God, even in the midst of it all. *The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, he said; blessed be the name of the Lord.*

We may have the mistaken belief that having faith in God means we never cry or get upset. We might think that if we are not in a positive emotional state all the time, we are lacking faith, and therefore cannot pray. Or perhaps we do not realize that any prayer to God is itself praise of God and his majesty.

We need look only at the psalms, that wonderful pedagogical book of hymnal prayer, to understand this. The Book of Psalms comprises five different kinds, including *praise* and *lament*. [The other three are wisdom, royal, and thanksgiving.] And the types of prayer found in the psalms cover any situation: thanksgiving, adoration, supplication, and contrition.

There are many ways to pray to God and ask for his grace, no matter what the situation is. And this is what helps us respond to the vagaries of life. We respond with the gift of faith.

Faith in the One who created us helps us embrace the fullness of our humanity in all its mystery, including our emotions and our reactions. Faith in Jesus Christ helps us express those emotions with hope instead of despair, with trust instead of fear. And faith in the Holy Spirit, who gives words to our prayers, allows us to be unafraid to speak to God, even when it is hard.

**Saint Lawrence Ruiz and companions (17th century)** Lawrence, or Lorenzo, was the first saint of the Philippines. As a married man and devout Catholic, he was one day accused of murder, and ended up fleeing his homeland with a group of Dominican priests, who were sailing to Japan in spite of terrible persecution of Christians. Upon refusing to recant his faith, Lawrence was martyred with his Dominican companions.

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Tuesday, September 29, 2020  
(Lec. 647)

- 1) Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14  
or Revelation 12:7-12a
- 2) John 1:47-51

**SAINTS MICHAEL,  
GABRIEL AND RAPHAEL,  
ARCHANGELS  
- FEAST**

**FOCUS:** Angels are specifically chosen by God to help in the completion of the divine plan.

What a grand feast the Church celebrates today! It is the feast of Saints Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael: archangels. Sacred Scripture speaks to the existence of angels, and Church teaching is that they are pure, created spirits; non-corporeal celestial beings who serve as messengers of God (Cf., CCC 326-329).

In fact, their very description of function – angel – is found in the word used for them. “El” in Hebrew is a word meaning “god,” with a “small g.” Its use in Hebrew and in the Old Testament does not always indicate a reference to the one true, Triune God, but it is found as a suffix in much of our Christian vocabulary. Simplified and anglicized here for clarity, we have from Hebrew “*Ang -el*,” for example, which means “messenger of God,” sent as part of his saving plan.

In terms of names and not descriptions, we are probably most familiar with *Emmanuel*: *emmanu* (with us) and *el* (god) – “God with us.” But we also see it in the names of our three angels today (hence this short discourse on the Hebrew language!). Michael: *Micha -el*, “who is like God?” [a question, not a statement]. Gabriel: *Gabri -el*, “God is my strength.” Raphael: *Rapha -el*, “God has healed.”

This isn’t just an exercise in getting smart in some obscure theological point, but understanding how names have a great importance in Scripture. For they tell us a lot about who God is and what he has done for us. Jesus is Emmanuel – God with us; he is the Son of God, the Son of Man; the Christ; the Messiah.

Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael are names of immortal spiritual beings who have intellect and will, and surpass in perfection all visible creatures. And they are specifically chosen by God to help in the completion of the divine plan (Cf., CCC 329-30). Michael, to whom we pray to defend us in battle still; Gabriel, who foretold the birth of Saint John, and was the messenger of the Annunciation to Mary; and Raphael, who tradition holds stirred the healing waters of the pool in Bethsaida. And, of course, our own guardian angels, who have their own memorial this coming Friday, October 2.

Our readings for this Feast of the Archangels remind us that part of this divine plan is a cosmic struggle. The imagery in Revelation illustrates its grand scale and profound meaning. Michael and his angels fight the serpent-dragon, the devil, for ultimate control. The outcome is clear: The devil is defeated and God’s people rejoice in the establishment of God’s kingdom. It was never a fair fight, for there is no comparing God the Creator to a creature.

God has triumphed over evil. The kingdom of God and the authority of Christ are established forever. As Jesus told Nathanael (another name: *Nathan -el*, “God has given”), we will see great things, like angels *ascending and descending on the Son of Man*. This is what gives hope when the forces of evil seem to overcome us here on earth. God has given us these creatures as his servants to be present for us in times of need.

We know that the bread of life we receive in the Eucharist strengthens us for our daily struggles, and we look forward to the fullness of the kingdom and our resting in God’s presence forever.

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Wednesday, September 30, 2020  
(Lec. 457)

- 1) Job 9:1-12, 14-16
- 2) Luke 9:57-62

WEDNESDAY OF  
26<sup>TH</sup> WEEK  
IN ORDINARY TIME  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Jerome,  
Priest and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 544

FOCUS: We exist simply because God loves us and cannot stop doing so.

Job has lost everything dear to him. His friends have either abandoned him or are arguing with him and accusing him of grave sin. He also feels somewhat victimized in the relationship he has with God.

Of course, he realizes any attempt to challenge God would not end well. He is no match for God. And yet, as much as Job ponders God's purpose, he never gives into the temptation to turn against the Lord. Even in the midst of all the pain and adversity Job suffers, he does not turn away from God. His relationship with God remains not only intact, but is the one and only thing he has left in the world. It is, in essence, his one and only priority. Later in his story, this will bear much fruit and be rewarded.

In today's Gospel, Jesus' words to those who wish to follow him are really instructions about setting priorities. Jesus indicates that following him requires total commitment before everything else. We must come as we are, with what we have, and give it all to Jesus. Then will we be able to address everything else in our lives. With Christ as our sole focus, everything else falls neatly into place and right order. The things we do, the familial obligations we have, are not set apart as something "required before" following Jesus, but are conformed to the life of discipleship and given purpose and meaning because of it.

The Lord has prioritized us: we exist simply because he loves us and cannot stop doing so. On this memorial of Saint Jerome, Priest and Doctor of the Church, may the gifts and graces he received in his life of devotion to God and his Word be made available to us to help us prioritize Christ in our lives.

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