

APRIL

1 2 3 4 5 6
7 8 9 10 11
12 13 14 15
16 17 18 19
20 21 22 23
24 25 26 27
28 29 30

Wedding Homily

- 1) Ephesians 4:1-6
- 2) John 15:9-12

FOCUS: Sacrificial love is at the heart of the vocation to marriage.

In the Gospel proclaimed today, we hear Jesus say to his disciples to remain in his love. And that *how* they remain in his love is by keeping his commandments. Once again, Jesus sums up his commandments with this one commandment, *Love one another as I love you.*

Well that's simple enough, just "love one another"? Oh, wait, "as I love you?" ... Wait just a minute ... He died for us. He gave up his place in heaven to become human and suffer for us.

Oh, he wants *me* to love others like that? Yes!

We hope that your life will not be that hard. But what Jesus is talking about is sacrificial love. Now, sacrificial love isn't full of deep suffering, necessarily. But giving, in order for it to be meaningful, is, on some level, sacrificial. And today you are *giving* – of yourselves to one another, and of your life for the entirety of your earthly life.

Where are you going to be tomorrow N.? By N's side! Where are you going to be the next day, N.? By N's side!

There are many people who get a number of decades into life when they realize that, in trying to "keep all of their options open," they have actually let a number of rewarding possibilities disappear – this is true in our personal lives, as well as in business and schooling. But in our personal lives especially, committing to something – something real, something important – is what gives meaning to our lives.

And so the calling that you take on, starting today, and for the rest of your lives, is a reflection of Christ's gift to the Church. You are to love one another selflessly, faithfully, and unflinchingly even in the face of poor health, financial hardship, or personal misfortune, should they arise.

Every day, you, and everyone who calls themselves a Christian, really, are to obey Christ's command to love sacrificially. That is how we remain in his love and find the joy and purpose that Christ has promised us and wants us to have.

To one another, and to Christ, let us say, "I do" and "I will" love through the good times and the challenging times, in faithfulness to Christ and in faithfulness to one another.

Funeral Homily

- 1) Acts 10:34-43
- 2) Matthew 25:31-46

FOCUS: Come, you who are blessed by my Father.

As we gather here today, our grief might find us in different places. We might feel emptiness, a hollow from the loss of someone whom we loved and held dear. We might feel uncertainty, wondering what our lives will be like from this point. We might feel sorrow, dealing with the death of someone who meant something so special to us. Whatever we feel and wherever we are at, God is with us.

God is with us in those who are gathered here with us. God is with us in the memories we share. God is with us in the words we listen to in our readings.

In our first reading, we hear a passage from the Acts of the Apostles where Saint Peter speaks about our faith. He reflects on what it means to be witnesses to Christ. In Christ, God has revealed to us that he is not partial and that he welcomes everyone. Jesus came to show God's love for us. Peter testifies that the good he saw, he now professes before others. Jesus' ultimate act of love was to sacrifice himself for us, and then the Father raised him from the dead. Jesus took death away from us, and we are witnesses that he conquered death.

This is the hope we celebrate here; this is what N believed; this is what we believe. We understand Jesus' words in today's Gospel: that there are those who care for others and those who do not. And when the Son of Man comes in his glory, he will take unto himself those who have kept his commandments. He will welcome into the Kingdom prepared for us those who have fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the ill, and visited those imprisoned. For when we do these things, we do it for him. To serve others is to serve God.

We commend our brother/sister to God, after a life of faith and service to the Lord and his people. We pray that he/she will soon hear the king say to him/her, *Come, you who are blessed by my father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* God has prepared a way for us since the very beginnings of time. We are not lost by death, but rather there is a way of life for us after death. This is the way God has prepared for us. We share in God's kingdom.

As we mourn N., let us remember that God is in our midst. Let us take the time to remember his/her life and know that God is with us. Indeed, God has prepared a way.

YEAR B WEEKDAYS I

Thursday, April 1, 2021

(Lec. 39)

- 1) Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14
- 2) 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
- 3) John 13:1-15

Gospel related: CCC 423, 447, 520, 557, 609, 616, 622, 730, 1085, 1269, 1337, 1380, 1524, 1694, 1823, 2843 CSDC 484

**THURSDAY OF
HOLY WEEK
(HOLY THURSDAY)**

FOCUS: The Abiding Presence of Christ.

Every event has a place in history. Nations rise and fall. Battles are waged, won, or lost. Kings and presidents come and go. Generations of families experience births, weddings, and deaths. Dates mark beginnings and endings. Everything is temporary.

But the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ abides for all time (CCC 1085). His passion and death were not merely a tragic historical record that happened in Jerusalem 2000 years ago. His resurrection was not merely a phenomenon that was witnessed by devoted followers. These events were part of God's eternal plan for the salvation of the world – once, for all.

This evening, we begin our three-day liturgy which marks the holiest days of our liturgical year – the Sacred Paschal Triduum. In these days, we encounter the paschal mystery of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection writ large. We marvel at what Christ has done for us – here and now – and that by “dying he destroyed our death and rising he restored our life” (Preface I of Easter).

To help us understand the continual reality – the perpetuity – of Christ's salvific act, the Church provides a breadth of readings during these sacred days. Tonight, we recall the story of the Old Testament Passover. Faithful to his covenant, God helps the Israelites escape their slavery in Egypt. He instructs Moses and Aaron to tell the people to slaughter a lamb, put its blood on the doorposts and lintels, and eat and dress as people in flight. While the firstborn of men and beasts in Egypt would die, the Israelites would be spared. This night was to be remembered – a memorial feast which all generations would celebrate “as a perpetual institution” (CCC 1085).

Christ's institution of the Eucharist is recalled in Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, where he writes of the night Jesus *was handed over*. At that Last Supper, the simple Passover meal is transformed as Christ establishes a new and everlasting covenant with all people. Knowing that the hour of his death was near and that he would soon depart the earth in human form, he instituted the Eucharist so that he would remain in *sacramental* form (CCC 1380). The Church has never failed to heed his commands – *Do this in remembrance of me*. At this same Last Supper, he washes the feet of his Apostles and instructs them to do likewise. *As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love* (John 15:9). The Eucharist remains a sacramental sign of Christ's love and abiding covenant.

Even at the hour of our death, when we receive the Eucharist as viaticum (literally, “with you on the way”), Christ is with us. As he does each day, he will offer us the seed of eternal life and the power of the resurrection (CCC 1524). For as Jesus says, *This is my body that is for you ... This cup is the new covenant in my blood ... For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes*.

Even during a worldwide pandemic when church doors have sometimes been closed, Christ has been here. Even when we have had limited access to holy Communion, Christ has been here, and Christ has been present to each one of us wherever we have been. Even when we sin or ignore his commands to love one another, Christ is here. Even in the darkest moments of our lives, when we are experiencing our own dying and rising, Christ is here. Let us always give thanks to God for so great a gift – the very origin of the word demands it. In Greek, they called it *eukharistos* or “grateful.” We call it Eucharist. From age to age, we give thanks to God for the abiding presence of Christ.

Friday, April 2, 2021

(Lec. 40)

1) Isaiah 52:13–53:12

2) Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

3) John 18:1–19:42

Gospel related: CCC 217, 440, 478, 495, 501, 544, 549, 559, 575, 586, 595, 596, 600, 607, 608, 609, 624, 641, 694, 726, 730, 964, 1225, 1432, 2471, 2561, 2605, 2618 2677, 2679

**FRIDAY OF THE
PASSION OF THE LORD
(GOOD FRIDAY)**

FOCUS: On the cross, Jesus breaks the chains of sin, Satan, and death forever, and for everyone.

Centuries before Jesus' birth, the prophet Isaiah spoke of a "suffering servant" led to the slaughter. As terrible as it seemed, it had to be, so as to break the chains of sin, Satan, and death, forever and for everyone. He also prophesies the exaltation of the servant, *who shall be raised high* and shall *startle many nations [and] kings shall stand speechless*. For the servant, the Messiah, would suffer all things for us, bear our guilt, justify many, *and win pardon for [our] offenses*.

The servant becomes king, residing on a *throne of grace*. He is *a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God*. We approach the throne to receive mercy and timely help. For our king, the throne is not brocaded cushions with gold leaf inlays, it is the cross where he is crowned with brambles.

Jesus' enemies stirred up the crowds to call for the release of Barabbas, a man guilty of the crimes Jesus would die for – insurrection and treason. Barabbas represents all of us, those guilty of sin who were freed by Jesus' most bitter passion.

John places all of us along the *Via Dolorosa*, the Way of Sorrows, as Jesus makes his way to Golgotha. At every turn Jesus is mocked, spat upon, accused of blasphemies, beaten, berated. Yet, through it all, Jesus said nothing in his defense.

The sky was darkened. The earth shook. The curtain of the temple was torn. Time stopped. As Christians everywhere this day flock to darkened churches to venerate the wood of the cross, we fast and pray, mindful of the depth of God's love for us, even to the death of his Son on a cross. Only two questions remain: What did we do to deserve such a loving God who gives the life of his only Son for our salvation? What can we offer him in return for this wondrous sacrifice Christ has made for us?

In Christ, we see how much God loves us. He asks for the gift of our life, our love, and our faith in return.

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Saturday, April 3, 2021

(Lec. 41)

- 1) Genesis 1:1–2:2 or 1:1, 26-31a
- 2) Genesis 22:1-18 or 22:1-2,9a, 10-13, 15-18
- 3) Exodus 14:15–15:1
- 4) Isaiah 54:5-14
- 5) Isaiah 55:1-11
- 6) Baruch 3:9-15, 32–4:4
- 7) Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28

**HOLY SATURDAY
EASTER VIGIL**

New Testament Readings

- 8) Romans 6:3-11
- 9) Mark 16:1-7

Gospel related: CCC 333, 641, 652, 2174

FOCUS: Called to share the stories of our faith.

Many of us have had the sad task of keeping vigil when a family member or close friend has died. We gather to share stories of how the loved one, now deceased, had an impact on our lives. Some of our stories are humorous, and bring a smile to someone's face. Others are profound and bring a tear to our cheeks. We gather together to bring comfort and consolation to each other in this most painful of experiences.

Tonight all over the world, the Church gathers together to keep solemn vigil. We are keeping watch, celebrating in the sacraments the triumph of Christ's resurrection, while awaiting his glorious return. We gather together on this holiest of nights to share stories about our salvation history; to tell stories of creation, stories of rescue, and stories of escape from tyranny. God's endless love for us, and his splendor, surround us; and life-giving waters welcome us.

We gather together to bring love and support to those who have chosen to enter our family tonight. We affirm our faith with them and recommit to dispersing the darkness of this world with the Light of Christ that dwells within us.

We also gather together this night to celebrate with unbridled hope the reality that death is not the end – to celebrate death having no power over us ever again.

In the Gospel tonight, Mary of Magdala and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought *spices so that they might go [to the tomb of Jesus] and anoint him*. They worry over how they are going to remove the giant boulder that guards the tomb. Much to their amazement, the tomb is wide open. They enter and have a chat with a quite nice young man who tells them not to be so amazed that the rather large stone has been rolled away because he has even more amazing news.

He has been raised; He is not here! Imagine any funeral director telling us this when we arrived full of grief to keep vigil with someone we loved. We wouldn't know how to react. The nice young man in today's Gospel doesn't give our two Marys time to react. Instead, he tells them to inform the disciples and Peter that Jesus is coming to them.

If we are to be "The Light of Christ," we must realize the urgency of our task at hand. There is no time to waste. We are to disperse the darkness around us. We are to be witnesses of the risen Christ in our midst. It begins in our homes and it extends to all we encounter from friend to foe and neighbor to stranger.

Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised. My friends, let us go and tell a suffering world hope is not lost.

SUNDAY, APRIL 4, 2021

(Lec. 42)

- 1) Acts 10:34a, 37-43
- 2) Colossians 3:1-4 or
1 Corinthians 5:6b-8
- 3) John 20:1-9 or
Mark 16:1-7 (Lec. 41)

Gospel related: CCC 333, 515, 640, 641, 652, 2174

EASTER SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD - SOLEMNITY

FOCUS: Christ raised from the dead brings new life to the world.

The passage from John's Gospel takes place *on the first day of the week*. This is reminiscent of the Creation account in Genesis which narrates the events of creation and the Fall in a garden. So, now again, God brings life in the garden where Jesus' tomb was located. Mary Magdalene *came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark*. In John's Gospel, darkness represents a time of lack of faith. Mary is not expecting the Resurrection; she comes to mourn the death of Jesus. When she discovers that the tomb is empty, her first thought is that the body of Jesus has been stolen. She returns to the disciples and tells them, *we don't know where they put him*.

When the two disciples arrive at the tomb, they find it just as she described it. But while Peter seems to not understand, the *other disciple ... saw and believed*. He understands what the others will come to know when the risen Christ appears to them: Jesus is risen. The burial cloths that were left behind are of no need to one who has conquered death.

We have no burial cloths here – but we do have the bread and wine that will become the body and blood of our Lord. Easter is the oldest feast in the Church year. From that day of Resurrection, through this moment (and into the future), the disciples of Jesus gather to celebrate and remember the saving events of his death and being raised from the dead.

Saint Peter, at the house of the Roman centurion Cornelius, recounts *what has happened all over Judea* concerning Jesus. Peter's sermon describes the good deeds of Jesus, who was anointed with the Holy Spirit. But, *they put him to death by hanging him on a tree*. After God raised him from the dead, Jesus appeared to his disciples and commissioned them to preach the Gospel. This is what Peter is doing for Cornelius' household. We learn in subsequent verses that their response to Peter's words is to accept the faith and be baptized.

Saint Paul tells the Corinthians that Christ is our Paschal Lamb who *has been sacrificed* for us. This imagery, reminiscent of the first Passover, indicates that the shedding of Jesus' blood has redeemed us. In light of this, Paul calls us to live in newness of life, putting aside our old ways and embracing the *unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*.

From that first Easter moment, the Church began to grow. This is the core belief of our Christian faith: It is the risen Lord who gathers us together around his table to listen to the sacred stories about our faith, and then he gives himself to us in the form of bread and wine, as he did with his disciples on the night before he died. We share in the life of the risen Christ now, as Cornelius and his family did; as Paul and the Corinthians did; and, until Christ comes again, as our children will. God be praised for this gift of salvation to the world.

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Monday, April 5, 2021

(Lec. 261)

1) Acts 2:14, 22-33

2) Matthew 28:8-15

Gospel related: CCC 640, 641, 645, 654

MONDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus Christ is risen. Let us announce the Good News!

“Happy Easter, everyone.” Yes, it is again a wonderful day to celebrate the Lord’s resurrection.

Easter is a season, not a day, and it is a time of continual rejoicing. And that joy is evident in both of our readings today. In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter, inspired by the visit of the Holy Spirit, proclaims the risen Lord to the Jews gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost. This is the same Peter who, a short time ago, had denied Jesus three times. And in today’s Gospel from Matthew, we see the joy of the two Marys who, having seen the empty tomb, encounter the glorified Jesus and fall to their knees in homage.

The women were told by Jesus to go to the Apostles to proclaim the good news that they had encountered the risen Lord. That’s exactly what we are asked to do today – to take our experience of Christ in our lives and tell others; to tell our story of the role Jesus has played in our lives.

This is what Peter and the others do. When the Spirit came on Pentecost, the fear vanished and their evangelization began. Today’s reading from Acts gives us just a portion of Peter’s inspirational speech that day, but it shows us what the Spirit can do. Peter, who cowered after Jesus was arrested in the garden, now boldly proclaims, *God raised this Jesus; of this we are all witnesses.*

Let us pray to the Holy Spirit for the boldness of Peter. He is awaiting our requests.

Tuesday, April 6, 2021

(Lec. 262)

1) Acts 2:36-41

2) John 20:11-18

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

TUESDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: God desires that all would come to know him, and spend eternity with him.

After Peter exhorted the people to save themselves from the corruption around them, *Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day.* That is a lot of people in one day! What a celebration that must have been – and can we even begin to comprehend the magnitude of what that did for the community, for the Church, and for the world?

In the Gospel, Jesus appeared to Mary in the Garden. She accepted his message, and then *went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord.”* Now, numerically, that was only a few people, but what a celebration that must have been! Again, can we even begin to comprehend the magnitude of what that did for the community, for the Church, and for the world?

When we hear and share the Good News, and others come to believe, there is rejoicing in heaven. Whether three thousand, one, or eleven, each person who comes to know and love God helps to build his Kingdom here on earth. We move closer to unity and perfection with God. We have far to go, we know that. We’re more likely to hear about 3,000 people being out of power after a storm than 3,000 being baptized. But there is hope in the midst of the counting: Hope that Jesus Christ who appeared to Mary in the Garden, and went to his Father and our Father, remains with us as we carry out the great commission of taking the Gospel to all the world. We have seen the Lord, just as Mary did. We see him in a different form (bread and wine), but no less truly or really present. And he sees us, and through his Holy Spirit, he accompanies us as we offer others his peace, and his promise of eternal life.

Truly this would be an incredible world if we were adding three thousand people to the Church, every day. Not because the total itself is important, but because each person, unique in his or her gifts, would be *part of that number* [as *When the Saints Go Marching In* says], helping to contribute to the salvation of all the world. And that is what God desires for us – that all would come to know him, and spend eternity with him.

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Wednesday, April 7, 2021
(Lec. 263)

- 1) Acts 3:1-10
- 2) Luke 24:13-35

Gospel related: CCC 112, 439, 552, 555, 572, 601, 640, 641, 643, 645, 652, 659, 710, 1094, 1166, 1329, 1347, 2625

WEDNESDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: We receive Christ, so that we can be Christ in the world.

This Easter week, we are called to celebrate the joy of the Resurrection. With this call to rejoice, we also receive a mission – what Pope Francis describes in *The Joy of the Gospel* as the call to missionary discipleship.

Missionary discipleship is going out and meeting people where they are, as Jesus did. Jesus always takes the first step in relationship with us. If we look for him, we will find that he is already there, knocking at the door of our hearts. In a similar way, we must go to where people are – in our neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. Pope Francis often speaks of the Church's need to go to the margins: to those who are not only physically marginalized, but also spiritually.

Missionary discipleship is also active listening, and questioning. Who do they think God is? What has kept them from getting to know God better? The answers to these questions should inform the way we share the Gospel. Pope Francis has described this approach as taking on the “smell of the sheep” (*Joy of the Gospel* 24).

Yet when we evangelize, it is important that we, too, go beyond listening. We must talk about who Jesus is, what he has done, and what this means for us.

In today's Gospel, as the disciples approach their destination, Jesus *gave the impression that he was going on farther*, but the two men invite him to stay. There is something very poignant in his waiting for their invitation. Jesus does not force himself on anyone. So, too, we cannot demand faith from others. Our task is to extend the same invitation we have received from Christ. When Jesus joins them at table, he blesses and breaks the bread and their eyes are finally opened to his presence. Jesus' body, broken and shared, is the source of both our faith and our mission. At Mass, we are gathered and sent. We receive Christ, so that we can be Christ in the world, sharing the joy of the Gospel with everyone we meet.

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Thursday, April 8, 2021
(Lec. 264)

- 1) Acts 3:11-26
- 2) Luke 24:35-48

Gospel related: CCC 108, 112, 572, 601, 627, 641, 644, 645, 652, 702, 730, 981, 999, 1120, 1122, 1304, 2605, 2625, 2763
CSDC 52, 491

THURSDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: We give thanks to God who meets us where we are, inviting us to come closer to him in faith.

Jesus' first words to his disciples in today's Gospel are, *Peace be with you*. And yet, they are terrified. They have no idea what they are seeing. Indeed, it was completely illogical for them to be seeing their friend who was put to death days earlier. But Jesus helps them in their fear. He invites them to touch him and to see that he is not a ghost. He eats with them, and as he does, he reveals the meaning of the Scriptures to them. He once again teaches them like he always has.

In the first reading Peter, once one of those who was *startled and terrified*, asks a question of the crowd that Jesus in one way or another asked him, several times: *Why are you amazed?* The underlying question is, "Why do you have so little faith?" Peter has just healed a man in the name of, and using the power given to him by, Christ. Are those around him still so oblivious to all that has taken place in the preceding months and years that they still do not see that God's promise had been brought to fulfillment in the person of Jesus? Apparently so, because Peter must preach to them a reminder of their history.

Re-teaching and reminders are not such bad things, however. Even we who believe may have moments of doubt; we may have moments of weakness where we stumble. So it is good that we hear our story, again and again. It is right and just that we come together in worship, giving thanks to God who offers us peace, notices our state of spiritual mind, and meets us where we are, inviting us to come closer to him in faith. Always closer.

As we ponder this, let us remember that we, like Peter, do not journey alone. Our Eucharistic community today nourishes us with Christ's very own body and blood. Let us allow the grace and strength of this holy supper to fortify our faith.

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Friday, April 9, 2021

(Lec. 265)

1) Acts 4:1-12

2) John 21:1-14

Gospel related: CCC 448, 645, 659, 1166

FRIDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Every disciple of Jesus has a unique role, but we are all called to obedience, courage, and zeal.

Today's Gospel reading begins the delightful and powerful scene on the Sea of Tiberias. Seven of the Apostles, having worked all night on the fishing boat, have caught nothing. How humble and honest they are to admit as much when an apparent stranger asks them! At the stranger's bidding, Peter casts the net once more, and the catch of fish that ensues is too great to haul into the boat. John, the beloved disciple, likely recognizes the reprise of the miracle that Jesus had performed some three years earlier (recounted in the fifth chapter of Luke). He is the first to realize and announce that the stranger is *the Lord*. But Peter is the first to take action. He doesn't wait for the boat to reach the shore, but gets to Jesus as fast as he can.

Let's consider how seemingly absurd was Jesus' command to cast the net. The fish hadn't been there all night; they certainly wouldn't be around during daylight. Moreover, if they weren't on the port side of the boat, neither would they be on the starboard side. The idea was ridiculous. But, as a quote often attributed to Mother Angelica, the foundress of the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) says, "Unless you are willing to do the ridiculous, God will not do the miraculous. When you have God, you don't have to know everything about it; you just do it."

The demands of the Gospel may sometimes seem ridiculous to us; they often seem so to the world. Nevertheless, Christ calls us to trusting obedience, the logic of such obedience transcending that of mere nature and of sin. In particular, we are called to proclaim courageously and zealously the power of the name of Christ crucified, whom Saint Paul declares in First Corinthians to be a *stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles* (1:23). And we can carry out this calling, not relying on our own power, but on that of the Holy Spirit.

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Saturday, April 10, 2021

(Lec. 266)

1) Acts 4:13-21

2) Mark 16:9-15

Gospel related: CCC 643, 645, 459, 888, 977, 1223

SATURDAY
WITHIN THE OCTAVE
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Share the truth and joy of Easter with all the world.

What are the things that stand in our way of preaching the word of God? Of answering Christ's call to witness the Kingdom to those around us? Maybe we find it awkward? Well, it can be awkward, but like the washing of feet, Jesus has commanded us to do it, and ultimately it is life-giving for giver and receiver.

In today's two readings, we encounter the disciples after the Resurrection: doing signs, in the case of Peter and John; and witnessing to the Resurrection, in the case of Mary Magdalene. It says in the first reading that Peter and John were perceived as *uneducated, ordinary men*. But the religious leaders were amazed (and then scared) because they realized such humble men probably couldn't do this without supernatural help. And they were right. John was too young; and Peter was a notoriously stubborn blockhead who ran away at the cross. But Jesus loved these imperfect vessels and he sent them.

In the Gospel, Mary Magdalene isn't believed by the disciples. But Jesus loved Mary of Magdala, and her love for him is why she was at the tomb at all – and she found he had risen! Then, after rebuking the unbelieving disciples, Jesus even sends the people of shallow faith to share their faith with the world.

The transformation of our life is because of God. Nothing about us disqualifies us from the work of discipleship.

Are we also unworthy to be the bearer of Christ's message? Yes. But he chose us anyway. He calls us for what we are, but also, for what we are not. He calls us, as he did the unbelieving Apostles, to *Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature*. He has risen, thanks be to God!

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SUNDAY, APRIL 11, 2021

(Lec. 44)

1) Acts 4:32-35

2) 1 John 5:1-6

3) John 20:19-31

Gospel related: CCC 442, 448, 514, 575, 643, 644, 645, 659, 730, 788, 858, 976, 1087, 1120, 1287, 1441, 1461, 1485, 2839
CSDC 491

**SECOND SUNDAY
OF EASTER
or DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY**

FOCUS: Divine mercy sets us free from the sins of the past and empowers us to live holy lives in the present.

The Gospel doesn't tell us if Thomas ever did put his hand in Jesus' wound, but that doesn't matter. Either way, he and the other Apostles received all Jesus had to give from his pierced heart: the gift of divine mercy that we celebrate today.

Here at the end of the Easter Octave, we're called to reflect on how divine mercy sums up the whole mystery of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. Notice how Jesus immediately greets the Apostles on that first Easter with peace, and shares his bountiful mercy – giving them his own power of forgiveness. It is the deepest truth God has shared about himself: he is mercy, he loves us even when we don't deserve it.

This is tremendously freeing. It frees us from worrying that we're not good enough to earn his love, from distancing ourselves from him out of shame for our sins and defects – as if we could ever hide them from him! Above all, it sets us free from the great sin of despair, of thinking that we're too far gone for God to save us. How could a human creature's mistakes outweigh the forgiveness of the infinite Creator?

When our Lord appeared to Saint Faustina Kowalska in the 1930s, he instructed her to paint what is now the famous image of himself with two rays coming from his heart, red and white for the blood and water that flowed from his side on the cross, with the inscription, "Jesus, I trust in you." The water stands for the washing away of our sins in baptism and reconciliation, the blood for the new life that we receive in the Eucharist. As our second reading tells us, it's Jesus, *the one who came through water and blood*, who has conquered the world.

God's mercy not only cleanses us from our past, it gives us a way forward. When we allow it into our hearts, it manifests in our works of mercy for others. The peace and mercy Jesus gives the Apostles comes with a command to go and share it: *As the Father has sent me, so I send you*. These men who had been hiding in a locked room then became such powerful witnesses to the Resurrection that they established a community unequalled in solidarity and generosity.

This may seem impossible to us because we know how weak we are. We may have as much difficulty as Thomas did in having faith in what Christ has promised us. And to truly love each other as God's children? To be *of one heart and mind* like the community of the Apostles, setting aside our own attachments to serve the needs of others? There are few things more difficult than this kind of sacrificial love. Yet Saint John insists that these commandments *are not burdensome, for whoever is begotten by God* – that is, whomever has faith – *conquers the world*. So let us fix in our minds these five words: Jesus, I trust in you.

* * *

Monday, April 12, 2021
(Lec. 267)

1) Acts 4:23-31

2) John 3:1-8

Gospel related: CCC 432, 526, 581, 591, 691, 720, 728, 182, 1215, 1225, 1238, 1257, 1262, 1287, 2790 CSDC 50, 484

MONDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The work of sanctification lasts our entire lives.

Wind is a powerful force. Over time, it can create incredible sculptures from stone, slowly eroding and shaping rocks into fantastic shapes, as in the White Desert of Egypt. Or, combined with water, it gives rise to the natural wonders of Utah's Arches and Bryce Canyon National Parks. Visitors from around the world come to visit these sites to see what nature has created through the power of wind, water, and time.

The Holy Spirit is mysterious. We cannot see him, we can only experience his effects. Wind is often used to signify the movement of the Holy Spirit, just as in Jesus' allegory to Nicodemus. At Pentecost, a *strong, driving wind* filled the Upper Room as the Holy Spirit descended (Acts 2:2). The early Christians in today's first reading experienced being filled with the Holy Spirit, and they were emboldened to speak the word of God. Yes, the wind has great power.

Nicodemus was understandably confused about the idea of being "born again." But this Christian rebirth is a rebirth of water and Spirit, which we celebrate in the sacrament of baptism. In baptism, we become a new creation in the kingdom of God. Baptism imbues us with God's grace, with his very life in our souls. Water, life-giving and sustaining, is a gift from God which we use as a rich symbol of the grace he gives us in the sacrament (Cf., CCC 1217).

We receive the Holy Spirit at baptism, but the work of sanctification – becoming holy – lasts our entire lives. It takes time. We must cooperate with the Holy Spirit, moving where the "wind" of the Spirit moves us, to follow God's will for our lives. As our spiritual lives mature through prayer, we can become more aware of how the Holy Spirit is moving in our lives and how he is working in and through us.

Wind, water, and time. If these natural forces can create such wonders in the physical world, we can imagine how much greater the results will be from the wind (the Holy Spirit), the waters of baptism, and time on us and our spiritual lives.

* * *

Tuesday, April 13, 2021
(Lec. 268)
1) Acts 4:32-37
2) John 3:7b-15

TUESDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Martin I,
Pope and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 423, 440, 505, 526, 591, 661, 2130 CSDC 50

FOCUS: We are called to the resurrected life – a life led by the Holy Spirit.

Just as the wind *blows where it wills* with no hint of where it's coming from or where it's going, so does the Spirit move the hearts and actions of Jesus' followers – if we only surrender control of our lives to him.

What might it look like if we followed the Spirit's lead? Perhaps a little like the lives of the early disciples in the first reading. When they were baptized in the Spirit, they became *of one heart and mind*. They bore witness to the world around them *with great power* through their trust of one another, and their generous sharing of the community's goods to build one another up. Their unity and their love for one another clearly drew many to their way of life – people who saw their authentic witness and longed to give their hearts and minds to God. People such as Joseph, known as Barnabas, who would one day join Saint Peter in his travels and be a source of encouragement to the Christians in Antioch.

The truth is, the Spirit draws each disciple in a unique way. The Spirit takes into account the disciple's personality and circumstances, where they are in their faith journey, their talents and skills – as well as the disciple's trust in the Spirit. Each of us has a unique call from the Holy Spirit at this time in our life, a way that can make a difference in the lives of others as we strive to witness with our own life.

We would do well to take time today to sit with Jesus as Nicodemus did, and let him speak to our heart. Jesus longs to teach us the ways of heaven and to use our life and our work to draw others to himself.

* * *

Wednesday, April 14, 2021
(Lec. 269)

1) Acts 5:17-26

2) John 3:16-21

Gospel related: CCC 219, 444, 454, 458, 678, 679, 706 CSDC 3, 64

WEDNESDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: We are called to live the truth of our faith for all to see.

In today's passage from the Acts of the Apostles, the Apostles have been arrested and jailed for teaching the people about Jesus and performing miracles in his name. Then, during the night, an angel of the Lord frees them. But the Apostles go right back to doing what got them into trouble in the first place.

Such behavior might seem strange or even irrational unless we look at it through the lens of the Gospel. The Gospel speaks to us about living in the truth. This is a truth that must be seen, not hidden, so as to reveal the work of the One who is Truth, that is, God. It is a truth that those with faith absolutely "must share" – in the same way that we "must share" any other good news that we receive. To hold it close to ourselves is to deny ourselves the joy of its richness!

Fortunately, unlike the Apostles, we probably won't end up in jail for going to Mass, for praying, for doing works of charity, or even for talking to other people about Jesus Christ and our faith in him. But our relative safety ought not make us complacent. Nor should we allow fear to dictate whether or not the truth is visible in our lives.

And indeed, fear may tempt us to hide the truth of our faith in the shadows. But, in the face of such temptation, today's Gospel reminds us of what should push us to live our faith without fear, out in the open for all to see, and that is those first words: *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.* Being loved so completely and lavishly should fill us with such joy as to make it impossible to not want to share this wonderful, transforming mystery of God's love for us with everyone and anyone.

* * *

Thursday, April 15, 2021

(Lec. 270)

1) Acts 5:27-33

2) John 3:31-36

Gospel related: CCC 161, 504, 690, 1286

THURSDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: God calls us to life in him.

Even in the face of trials for the sake of the Gospel, we are confident of one thing: God's fidelity to us will never waver even as we, at times falteringly, seek to be faithful to him.

We see this commitment to serve God, no matter the cost, when Peter and the Apostles are summoned before the Sanhedrin. When they're accused of disobeying the Sanhedrin's order *to stop teaching in [Jesus'] name*, the Apostles reply that they *must obey God rather than men*. Just as Christ testified to the Father and was rejected, so they testify to Christ even in the face of rejection and persecution, because they *accept [Christ's] testimony*. They believe God is trustworthy, for as John tells us in the Gospel: *The one whom God sent speaks the words of God*.

We who also accept Christ's testimony may indeed face rejection and persecution. But that's incomparable to the gift of the Spirit and eternal life that awaits us. God calls each of us to life with him, and this covenantal relationship outlasts any suffering in our earthly life. Life with the Lord connects us to the fount of love, to the One whose truth, beauty, and goodness always exceed what we expect or imagine.

The bold Apostles before the Sanhedrin preached the Gospel because they knew how good life with God was: They had heard this in Jesus' preaching, seen it in his healing, and witnessed the power of his Resurrection and the sending of his Spirit. They proclaimed the Gospel in the face of rejection because God had shown them how good he is, and they wanted his goodness to be known everywhere.

In times of trouble, our ever-faithful God will be there to claim us. The same Spirit who emboldened the once-fearful disciples will come to our aid and make the way for us. As we approach the Eucharistic table, may this sacrament deepen our life in God and our abiding in his Spirit so that we can speak his Word in the world.

* * *

Friday, April 16, 2021

(Lec. 271)

1) Acts 5:34-42

2) John 6:1-15

Gospel related: CCC 439, 549, 559, 1338

FRIDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Recognizing God in our midst requires faith and an openness to his grace.

Imagine living at the time of Jesus and imagine being present with the Sanhedrin as they questioned the Apostles. Would we have recognized their ministry as God's work? Imagine also being in the crowd from today's Gospel. Would we have recognized Jesus as the Messiah? Recognizing God in our midst is sometimes more difficult than we wish because our judgment can be clouded by stress, bias, or misunderstandings. Recognizing God in our midst requires faith, first of all, and then an openness to his grace working in our lives.

Today's readings give us examples of how God was working in the world at a particular time, and how those who witnessed it understood it. In the first reading, the Pharisee Gamaliel advised the Sanhedrin to release the Apostles, saying, *For if this endeavor or this activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself. But if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them.* Gamaliel realizes that he is uncertain about the Apostles and so takes a wait-and-see approach. Rather than rushing to a decision, he advocates for patience.

Gamaliel had enough faith to know that it was possible that these men were of God, but he as yet did not fully believe in the One in whose name the Apostles taught.

In the Gospel, the crowd that Jesus fed said of him, *This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world.* Seeing the sign Jesus performed led them to this profession of faith – but it was an incomplete faith. They saw Jesus not as the Messiah and Son of God, but a royal figure who would usher in a prophetic era, like Moses did, or perhaps Elijah. Jesus would be a king for them, yes, but not a savior.

Recognizing God in our midst requires faith and an openness to his grace. But over time we can learn to pay attention to the movements of the soul. In doing so, we can become attuned to God's ways and learn to see him in everyday life.

* * *

Saturday, April 17, 2021

(Lec. 272)

1) Acts 6:1-7

2) John 6:16-21

Gospel related: CCC 1338 CSDC 453

SATURDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: As the Easter season continues, Jesus liberates us from our fears, and promises to always be present to us.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says to his disciples, *It is I. Do not be afraid.* We have all been in a situation where we felt afraid: a nightmare, a scary movie, a sudden noise in the dark, nursing a sick loved one. At times when we have indeed been afraid, the comfort of a family member or friend was reassuring and healing. It gave us courage to face our fears as we knew we were not alone. But Jesus promises us even more.

In his very first homily as pope, Saint John Paul II encouraged the faithful with the words, *Do not be afraid.* It became one of his signature phrases. Saint John Paul II was always assuring us that while there are times when our world fills us with fear, anxiety, frustration, or uncertainty, Jesus is here to calm the storms around us when we open ourselves to his love. If we try to depend only on ourselves, we become burdened with our struggles and overwhelmed with our fear. It is a burden we do not need to take on by ourselves. Jesus is here. *Do not be afraid.*

We can always trust in the words of Jesus. We need not be afraid. Jesus is with us always, no matter the time or the place. We don't have to wait for a convenient time. We don't have to make an appointment. He is always available to us. How liberating to know that he will take on the burden of our fears if only we trust in him. His love is unconditional. His comfort is there for the taking. His promise is forever. We need not live in fear when we can instead live surrounded by his most holy peace.

* * *

SUNDAY, APRIL 18, 2021

(Lec. 47)

1) Acts 3:13-15, 17-19

2) 1 John 2:1-5a

3) Luke 24:35-48

Gospel related: CCC 108, 112, 572, 604, 627, 641, 644, 645, 652, 702, 730, 981, 999, 1120, 1122, 1304, 2605, 2625, 2763
CSDC 52, 491

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

FOCUS: Christ takes away our fears and doubts and frees us to go out and share the Good News.

Fear is one of the most common of all emotions. We all fall into its grasp from time to time. It can be very real and even cause us to freeze up and not act as we should. The disciples certainly experienced this when Christ appeared in their midst as they were listening to *the two disciples [recount] what had taken place on the way*.

The risen Christ came, offering them reassurance and peace. It is one thing to hear a story about Christ's post-resurrection appearance, it is another to see it with your own eyes. The evangelist does not hold back in describing their fear – even their incredulity. They see Jesus but they immediately think it might be a ghost or a hallucination.

But Jesus will not allow that fear to have the last word. Reassuring them of his real, actual presence, he proves it by the most common of all actions: He invites them to look at his hands and feet, and to touch him so they will sense the reality of flesh and bones, which a ghost does not have. And then eats in front of them – something else a ghost would not do. But more than just ameliorating the disciples' fear, Jesus presence has a triple purpose: to prove his resurrection, to help them understand the fulfilled Scriptures, and to prepare them for their mission before the world.

Jesus calls them witnesses – *martyrs* in Greek – disciples who give all to proclaim the risen Christ. Peter becomes one of the great examples of this change. In our first reading, we saw a different Peter from the Good Friday man who denied Jesus three times. Filled with the truth of the Resurrection and the power of the Spirit, he is the very opposite of fearful. Now he has the courage to stand before those who condemned Jesus – to proclaim him as the fulfillment of the prophetic promises and to call all to repentance. Saint John matches this powerful message with a reminder to his community of the immensity of Jesus' forgiveness.

So what about us? It is easy in our broken humanity to allow fear and doubt to control us. Yet they must never have the last word: Christ always finds a way to reassure us of the truth and reality of the Resurrection, and its offer of life. As believers, we find that reassurance in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church where the Scriptures are proclaimed and the Spirit is at work. Here we encounter Christ. Here he takes away our fears and doubts and frees us to go out and share the Good News. Jesus has conquered sin and death. The reign of fear is over.

* * *

Monday, April 19, 2021

(Lec. 273)

1) Acts 6:8-15

2) John 6:22-29

Gospel related: CCC 698, 728, 1296, 1338, 2835

MONDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Work for food that endures for eternal life.

In our daily lives, it is so easy to get caught up in our worries. Jesus understands our concerns, especially when we have responsibilities to our families or workplaces and are struggling to live up to those responsibilities. But he calls us to take the larger perspective – to work for the food that *endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you*. He asks us to approach him in trust and allow him to guide us as we work toward meeting those needs, but to go beyond the perspective of our daily needs as well. He wants us to seek him in love, for help on our spiritual journey through this life toward heaven.

Throughout the Easter season the readings, especially from Acts, give us tremendous examples of disciples who have taken this broader, eternal perspective. We read about men and women whose lives have changed because of their encounters with the risen Christ, and who are guided by the Spirit. Today, we meet such a disciple in Stephen, who *with grace and power*, worked great wonders and who debated boldly with his opponents who didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah. In the same way as Jesus, he was condemned to death by false witnesses. Yet in the face of these false accusations, Stephen persisted in standing up for the truth of the risen Jesus and faced his accusers with *the face of an angel*.

We might feel far removed from the time of Jesus and the first disciples, yet, like them, we are called to take the broad, eternal perspective of our faith while trusting that we will be led in our daily struggles. Let us pray today for the courage of Saint Stephen and for the perspective of heaven that Jesus invites us to take on today.

* * *

Tuesday, April 20, 2021

(Lec. 274)

1) Acts 7:51–8:1a

2) John 6:30-35

Gospel related: CCC 423, 1094, 1338

TUESDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus is the Bread of Life in whom we find eternal life.

In today's passage from the Gospel of John, we hear these very familiar words of Jesus: *I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.*

In trying to understand what Jesus is offering, it helps to put it into context with the thoughts of the disciples and the crowd. Jesus is compared to Moses. Moses gave the Israelites manna in the desert so they would not starve during their 40-year journey to the Promised Land. Moses was the greatest prophet, a Hebrew liberator, leader, lawgiver, and historian. Moses is considered one of the greatest figures of the Bible. The comparison between Jesus and Moses is pretty explicit.

Jesus corrects those around him by saying it was not Moses who gave them this food. But it came from God. Jesus, by being God, helps them to see that what he gives is greater than what Moses gave in the desert. What is Jesus' bread?

Just prior to this exchange, Jesus had told them that he gives them *food that endures for eternal life* (6:27). Life with Jesus is eternal life. Eating the bread Jesus offers gives eternal life and unites us with the Father. This promise and proclamation of Jesus is at the heart of the Eucharist and life in Christ.

As we continue with Mass, let us focus on what it is we eat in the bread and wine, which becomes the body and blood of our Lord. Let us be nourished and come to recognize Jesus as the Bread of Life in whom we find eternal life.

* * *

Wednesday, April 21, 2021
(Lec. 275)
1) Acts 8:1b-8
2) John 6:35-40

WEDNESDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Anselm,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 161, 606, 989, 994, 1001, 1338, 2824

FOCUS: Jesus is the bread of life.

We all worship something. Worship, at its simplest, means to give worth to something – to identify, in our own hearts, that this thing or person has value for me. There are many human needs and desires, and as Saint Augustine wrote, they all evoke a restlessness within us. In our search for happiness, we prioritize these needs and desires, and decide what we will worship – what will take priority in our lives.

When Jesus today tells the crowds, *I am the bread of life*, he is, in essence, offering himself as that which we ought to worship. This is not a demand for groveling before some god who needs his ego stoked. Indeed it is entirely the other way around. Jesus is telling us not what God needs, but what we need. We need bread. This is obvious. We also need God. And that need is as real and deep and existentially important as our need for food. Actually more so. Anyone who eats bread will get hungry again tomorrow. Anyone who drinks water will need more later. We are material creatures in need of material sustenance. But Jesus' words are telling us that material food and drink are not themselves enough. They do not satisfy. We remain restless.

Saint Augustine came to the conclusion that our hearts are restless until they rest in the Lord. Jesus tells the crowd *whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst*. We all worship something. If we value the things of this world, they leave us thirsting for more. But if we worship rightly, that is to say, if we value rightly, we notice that we are more than material creatures. We are sons and daughters of the Father. We are unsatisfied by what the world tells us we should want, but satisfaction is not impossible. For Jesus says, *This is the will of [the] Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have eternal life*. What a promise!

Jesus is the bread we need. We put our confidence, and our restless hearts, in him.

* * *

Thursday, April 22, 2021
(Lec. 276)

1) Acts 8:26-40

2) John 6:44-51

Gospel related: CCC 151, 259, 591, 728, 1001, 1335, 1338, 1406, 1428, 2837

THURSDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Proclaim the Gospel both with and without words.

There's a popular saying: "Proclaim the Gospel at all times, and if necessary use words." Sooner or later, words are *always* necessary.

Take Philip's wonderfully blunt encounter with the eunuch: *Do you understand what you are reading?* And his reply: *How can I, unless someone instructs me?* How indeed? Philips shows us.

First, we listen to the Holy Spirit. Philip only goes to meet the eunuch because the Spirit tells him to. With prayer and patience, we can learn to recognize when the Spirit is prompting us in the same way, even if we don't hear him in words.

Second, listen to the person. Philip gives the eunuch time to share his questions about God. For us, this part may take a while. Most people need to build up a level of trust before they're willing to talk about life's big questions.

When they're ready, we can proclaim Jesus to them. The heart of the Good News is simple. God has created all of us for a life of perfect love with him and each other. Sin, our decision to reject God's will, has broken our relationship with God, but he hasn't abandoned us. By sending his Son, Jesus, to take on our human nature, take the consequence of our sin onto himself, die, and rise from the dead, he has restored the relationship we were made to enjoy.

We don't need a theology degree to share this message, but the more we study Scripture and the teachings of the Church, the better we can share her beauty, goodness, and truth. One of the most effective things we can share is our own story of how Jesus has changed our life.

If God could work through Philip, he can work through us. Today, let's ask him for the grace to proclaim the Gospel at all times, both with and without words.

* * *

Friday, April 23, 2021
(Lec. 277)
1) Acts 9:1-20
2) John 6:52-59

FRIDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint George,
Martyr;
Saint Adalbert,
Bishop and Martyr)

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

FOCUS: Jesus wants to continually sharpen our spiritual sight, so that we see him more clearly in all things.

Physical sight is the sense that allows us to see the beauty of creation and to see where we are going so we can reach our destinations safely. Some of us have perfect vision, some have limited vision, and some have the inability to see, physically, at all. But there is another kind of sight that is even more profound and powerful – spiritual sight. This is the ability to recognize God and his promptings, his truth, and his presence.

In our journey with God, sometimes we are able to clearly see his gifts and his plans for our lives. But other times we are not able or willing to see his providential hand upon us.

Saul thought he was seeing rightly in his persecution of those who belonged to the Way. But Jesus gave Saul new eyes on the road to Damascus, so that Saul could see that Jesus truly is the Son of God. Ananias thought he was seeing rightly in viewing Saul as a person to fear and to avoid at all costs. But Jesus gave Ananias new eyes to see that Saul was a chosen instrument of God who needed Ananias' help.

In the Gospel, the Jews thought they were seeing rightly in questioning how Jesus could give them his flesh to eat. But Jesus invited the Jewish people to see with new eyes and to believe that he could truly give them his flesh and blood for eternal life.

Where do we need to be given new eyes to see the truth? Where does our spiritual vision need correcting? Perhaps it is in the way we see ourselves or the people we live with each day. Perhaps it is in the way we view our past mistakes or our present circumstances. Perhaps it is in the way we see God. No matter what aspect of our lives it is, let's ask God for the eyes of our hearts to be opened to truth, that we might have the perfect (spiritual) vision God intends for us.

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Saturday, April 24, 2021
(Lec. 278)

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

SATURDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Fidelis of Sigmaringen,
Priest and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 438, 440, 473, 728, 1336, 1338, 2766

FOCUS: Lord, *you have the words of eternal life.*

In today's Gospel, Jesus has just concluded his teaching on the bread of life, where he spoke of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. And now, many of his disciples who were listening said, *This saying is hard; who can accept it?* Many left the company of disciples, *and returned to their former way of life.*

After these disciples left, Jesus turned to the Apostles and asked if they wanted to leave as well. Peter responded with a profession of faith: *Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God. We have seen the power in your words, Peter says, how could they walk away?*

Indeed, how could anyone walk away? The first reading today takes us several years beyond that moment in the Gospel, to the ancient Church, which had already been growing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Here, in a town called Lydda, Peter moves from seeing the power of Jesus' words to acting on them. For Aeneas the paralytic, Peter says, *Jesus Christ heals you*, and then commands him to get up and make his bed. All who lived in Lydda and the town of Sharon saw Aeneas no longer paralyzed, and *they turned to the Lord.*

In the coastal town of Joppa (about 12 miles away), Peter prays over the body of Tabitha, and simply says, *Tabitha, rise up.* She rises, and stuns the town. *And many came to believe in the Lord.*

In both cases, Christ's word was spoken through Peter, and the people saw their power. In movement opposite to some of the disciples in the Gospel, the people of Lydda, Sharon, and Joppa came to believe and left their former way of life behind. Seeing such signs and wonders done in the name of Jesus Christ – to whom else could they go?

Seeing the miracle of our own lives, and the signs and wonders that make up every moment of them, to whom else could *we* go?

* * *

SUNDAY, APRIL 25, 2021

(Lec. 50)

- 1) Acts 4:8-12
- 2) 1 John 3:1-2
- 3) John 10:11-18

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

**FOURTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

FOCUS: Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows us, who cares for us, and who willingly lays down his life for us.

There's a saying that circulates among some parenting circles: "You don't just love your children ... you *fall in love* with them."

Beloved, our second reading says, *we are God's children now*. We are God's children now. Can we imagine a God who doesn't just love us, but who is "in love" with us? A God who will do anything to protect and care for us?

Jesus, the Incarnation of God's perfect and abundant love for us, himself provides an image for this love, an example that would be well understood at the time. *I am the good shepherd*, he says. A good shepherd is not a hired hand who, when trouble comes, flees from it rather than facing it, leaving the sheep exposed to danger and death.

No, the good shepherd is one who knows his own sheep; he cares for his own sheep and leads them to safety; and he never flees from danger. Rather, the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. In fact, in this relatively short passage, Jesus says five different times that the good shepherd "lays down his life" for his sheep.

As human beings, we face many dangers in our lifetime, many threats to our safety and well-being. We may face sickness, loss, fear. We may face ridicule, or we may worry for our loved ones; we may struggle with loneliness, have anxiety, or we may struggle with sin.

Yet Jesus knows us. We are the sheep of his flock. He "sees us" as we are, with all of our accomplishments and all of our failures. Jesus cares for us, and he shepherds us through this world, and our life of faith.

We can take comfort by trusting in God and in Jesus, the Good Shepherd; and by remembering these things: Jesus *knows* us; he knows what we face. He understands our fears, our loss, our struggles. He knows everything about us, and he does not flee from this information; he does not run away like the hired hand. Rather, our Good Shepherd cares for us and remains with us to protect us. Our Shepherd loves us, and is *in love* with us, so much so that he laid down his life for us.

* * *

Monday, April 26, 2021

(Lec. 279)

1) Acts 11:1-18

2) John 10:1-10

Gospel related: CCC 754, 764, 2158 CSDC 1

MONDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus is the gate through which we enter salvation.

Jesus says, *I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers.* It is through Christ alone that the sheep may come in for safety and shelter, and go out to pasture. Jesus alone is the one who will provide what the sheep need for life. All sheep. Every sheep.

Today's first reading allows us to see the depth of Jesus' meaning in his words to the Pharisees. The Holy Spirit sent Peter out to accept the first Gentile converts into the newly established Church. We see how this caused consternation among the Jewish Christians of Judea, until Peter explained in detail how the Holy Spirit had come upon the Gentiles just as he had come upon the gathering of Jewish believers at Pentecost.

Peter's words relieved the other disciples' angst – they even glorified God for his life-giving mercy. It was, after all, to Peter that Jesus had shortly before given the thrice-repeated command to shepherd his sheep. Jesus never offered exceptions to this, so Peter went where he was commanded to go. As the leader of the nascent Church, it was right and just that he be the first to welcome uncircumcised believers. But his primary role was being entrusted with the Gospel to the Jews. It would soon be Saul – also known as Paul – whom Christ would commission to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles.

This is the Church that Christ founded – one that opened the gate of salvation to all who would come to believe in him. We have the sacred duty to bring Christ to a world that hungers for the truth of the Gospel. May his Word and sacrament give us the grace we need to do so.

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Tuesday, April 27, 2021

(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: Trust in God's plan, even when we can't see it.

Do we truly believe that God is greater than anything else, bigger than any challenge we can face? The world is certainly filled with difficult circumstances that may tempt us to think otherwise.

Perhaps the early Christians from today's first reading were tempted by the same question: Is God *really* bigger than anything else? After Stephen was martyred – stoned to death for professing Christ – in about 35 AD, followers of the Way were being persecuted. Due to this persecution by the Jewish authorities who opposed this new religion, they were scattered.

It's easy to imagine these early Christians wondering, "Where is God's plan in all of this? We've been preaching the Gospel and forming a community, and now we are scattered to the wind." But we here, today, see the majesty of God in those circumstances, and the fruitfulness of the disciples' trust in him.

The persecution drove these early Christians to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, cities located in part of what are now Lebanon and Syria; the Island of Cyprus; and modern-day Turkey and Syria, respectively. They began preaching to fellow Jews, and then others who heard them began preaching to Gentiles as well. *A large number of people was added to the Lord*, and it was in Antioch that, for the first time, the followers of Christ were called Christians. Today, Christianity has spread across the globe.

Jesus tells us, as he told the Jews in the temple area, that his Father *is greater than all* and that *no one can take [his sheep] from [his] hand*. This gives us the confidence to believe that God can and does work all things to good – even when circumstances seem like evil is winning, God can still bring about something greater than we can imagine. We can trust in him, as sheep trust their shepherd to care for them despite any dangers.

We are Christ's. We are God's. And God is greater than anything this world can throw at us.

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Wednesday, April 28, 2021
(Lec. 281)
1) Acts 12:24–13:5a
2) John 12:44-50

WEDNESDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Peter Chanel,
Priest and Martyr;
Saint Louis Grignion de Montfort,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 679, 1039, 2466

FOCUS: Jesus did not come to condemn the world but to save the world.

Jesus says, *Whoever believes in me believes not only in me but also in the one who sent me, and whoever sees me sees the one who sent me.*

Jesus is telling all who will hear that he and his Father are one. What he says comes from his Father; we can trust and accept it. And what Jesus says is that he did not come to condemn the world but to save the world.

For those who live in darkness – because they do not know God or because they cannot fathom God could love them no matter what – Jesus comes as light. He does not condemn us. He comes from the Father to tell us what the Father told him: The Father sent him for our salvation; his Father’s will for us is eternal life. We are his people, and he is our God. And through Christ’s saving work, our covenantal relationship as God’s people extends into eternal life.

This is not to say there will be no judgment; Jesus says there will be on the last day. None of us knows when this is or what it will be like. But we trust and accept that Jesus – who is the Word made flesh, carrying out God’s commands – is the way to eternal life. Therefore, in faith we live as disciples, striving to love as we are commanded to love, and being sanctified through the Holy Spirit working in our lives. We ask for forgiveness, turning away from the sins that lead us away from God, and recommitting ourselves to a life worthy of our baptismal vocation.

Such trust and acceptance was exhibited by the disciples of the early Church. Their focus was salvation, and the return of Christ, which some believed would be in their lifetime. As we see in the first reading, they spent time together in fasting, prayer, and worship. They traveled to proclaim the Good News. The Holy Spirit guided them.

Like the early Church, when we gather for the Eucharist we renew God’s covenant with us and receive the Holy Spirit to guide us in trust and acceptance of the gift of salvation. May the grace of the sacrament empower us to proclaim this Good News to others, sharing the light of Christ where darkness still lingers.

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Thursday, April 29, 2021
(Lec. 282)
1) Acts 13:13-25
2) John 13:16-20

THURSDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(OBL MEM
Saint Catherine of Siena,
Virgin and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 858, 1337, 1694

FOCUS: By our baptism we are marked as Christ's own, and are commissioned to spread the Gospel and build the Kingdom.

The stories of our ancestors in faith are important. There are many places in Scripture where we find information about our spiritual lineage, or genealogical listings. We are a part of a story, a salvation history, that connects us to the men and women who came before us. It is a story of God's faithfulness, God's power, and most of all, of God's relationship with humanity.

The Jews to whom Paul spoke in Antioch knew their history. But Paul's words added something new, and essential: *From [David's] descendants, God, according to his promise, has brought to Israel a savior, Jesus.* Here Paul, once himself the most scholarly and righteous of Pharisees, is making the connection between the Judaism of the Pharisees and those who follow Jesus. This burgeoning Church of Christ's followers is – logically and naturally, according to their own covenantal history – the “next step” in God's plan for them. We know that many in Antioch would hear Paul's words, come to believe in Jesus, and be baptized. In fact, Antioch was where the followers of Jesus were first called Christians.

But as much preaching as Paul did, and as interesting as his background, history, and conversion are to this story, this isn't about him. It's about the power of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit working in and through him. For as Jesus says in today's Gospel, *Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.* Paul preached the Gospel because Christ sent him to do it. He was compelled to preach it, because it could not be contained within him. And the success he had in Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, and the many other Churches to which he ministered, was because he was a faithful witness to Christ. He, like John the Baptist, pointed the way to Christ, who in turn brings all to the Father.

We, too, are sent. By our baptism we are marked as Christ's own, and are commissioned to spread the Gospel and build the Kingdom. We are part of a history, and tradition, that has passed down the faith generation to generation. May the power of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit work in and through us as we continue to build the Kingdom here, and look forward to that time when all his children shall reside in its fullness forever.

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Friday, April 30, 2021
(Lec. 283)
1) Acts 13:26-33
2) John 14:1-6

FRIDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Pius V,
Pope)

Gospel related: CCC 74, 151, 459, 661, 1025, 1698, 2446, 2614, 2795 CSDC 1, 555

FOCUS: Through Christ and with the Holy Spirit, we have a way to the Father.

Anyone who has ever visited Ireland will have no doubt enjoyed the welcoming hospitality that is a trademark of the people who inhabit the Emerald Isle. They go out of their way to help in any way they can. And if asked for directions, they are known to enlist other people to help you get where you're going especially if their brogue, or the unfamiliarity of the area makes understanding the way forward a bit unclear.

I am the way and the truth and the life, Jesus tells Thomas in today's Gospel. *No one comes to the Father except through me*. There is no accent, language, or lack of familiarity with the surroundings to overcome here. On our best days, we see Jesus as he is, and we understand his directions. And on our not-so-best days, when we are lost and don't know which way to turn, we have the Holy Spirit whom he gave us to help us get where we're going.

Saint Paul's words to the people of Antioch are less poetic and more expository than what we heard in the Gospel, but the message – the Good News indeed! – is the same. Jesus' enemies could not confine him to the tomb. No, he has been raised up by God and now his disciples are boldly witnessing these events so as to give new life to the people. *What God promised our fathers*, Paul says, *he has brought to fulfillment for us, their children, by raising up Jesus*. Jesus, who, as the Son of God, became human to raise us up from the depths of sin and death. Jesus, who alone unites us to the Father through himself, because he and the Father are one.

In the person of the risen Christ, we have someone who will never lead us down the wrong path. The more we walk with the risen Lord each day, the clearer our path becomes. Difficult as some decisions in life may seem, the burden is made lighter when we realize Jesus carries it with us, just like the cross he carried, was carried for us.

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