

JUNE

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YEAR B WEEKDAYS 1

Tuesday, June 1, 2021
(Lec. 354)

- 1) Tobit 2:9-14
- 2) Mark 12:13-17

Gospel related: CCC 450 CSDC 261

TUESDAY OF
NINTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Justin, Martyr)

FOCUS: We are called to be just in all our actions, words, and thoughts.

Today's readings give us the opportunity to reflect on our call to live out one of the cardinal virtues: justice. The *catechism* defines justice as "the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor" (1807). That seems clear enough, but what does justice look like in our daily lives?

Jesus sidesteps the trap of the Pharisees and Herodians with his wise answer regarding paying taxes to Rome. The denarius that Jesus uses in his answer was used to pay for the temporal goods in society. And taxes, in theory, are paid to the government for the purpose of benefiting the common good of society. Using that tax money appropriately is a matter of justice.

Justice also applies to what we owe to individuals: our family, friends, the people we work for or with, our neighbors, and the people we meet in our everyday lives. Tobit shows us what it means not to give your loved one her due. Rather than trusting his wife and taking her word that the goat was a bonus from her employer, Tobit unkindly accuses her of stealing the goat. In this particular incident, Tobit teaches us what we owe to the people in our lives: trust, respect, kindness, patience, help, honesty, a listening ear – even in the midst of our own challenges and trials.

Underlying all of this, of course, is the second part of Jesus' statement: *Repay ... to God what belongs to God*. Justice is giving God his due. And God, who is infinitely merciful, loving, and just in judgment, is due our praise and worship in return. We can do this in our daily lives: submitting to God's will in each circumstance; giving God our praise and thanks, even in difficult times; and allowing ourselves and our gifts, our work, and free time to be used by God, even in ordinary, daily life.

Today, as we draw closer to Jesus in the Eucharist, let us ask him for his wisdom as we strive to act justly toward God, and one another.

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Wednesday, June 2, 2021

(Lec. 355)

1) Tobit 3:1-11a, 16-17a

2) Mark 12:18-27

WEDNESDAY OF

NINTH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saints Marcellinus and Peter,

Martyrs)

Gospel related: CCC 993, 1619

FOCUS: God is *not God of the dead but of the living*.

Jesus constantly encountered people in authority who opposed what he did or what he said. They would try to trap him in his speech or catch him in violation of the law. In yesterday's Gospel, it was the Pharisees and Herodians challenging him about paying taxes. Today, it is the Sadducees challenging him on the Resurrection.

The Sadducees were an elite and powerful group of priests and aristocrats. They accepted only the written, not oral, Torah – that is, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. They did not believe in the immortality of the soul, or in the resurrection of the dead. They try to argue with Jesus about resurrection from their limited perspective of legal rights and marital duties.

Their argument was one of materialism, with a mindset that was unable to envision or comprehend absolute Truth, because it is based upon only what one can perceive, and the conditions in which they are perceived. This is a limiting perspective; it is one that has boundaries and parameters.

God is not limited. God is not bound by human constraints or earthly parameters. And this is what Jesus is conveying to those who listen to his answer. God himself said to Moses, *I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*. How could that possibly be true, if Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were dead? God does not lie (even the Sadducees believed this), so these words to Moses must be true, and there must be something beyond this material world. For God is *not God of the dead but of the living*.

Jesus' words were meant to give the Sadducees a particular understanding of a theology of resurrection. For we who profess belief in the Resurrection, these words ought to nudge us into thinking about what this belief really means for us in practical terms – to consider how it affects the way we live on a day-to-day basis.

Coming together for Eucharist, we will recite again the mystery of our faith – that through his Cross and Resurrection, Christ has set us free. May participation in this sacrament open our hearts and minds to fullness of faith in him.

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Thursday, June 3, 2021
(Lec. 356)

- 1) Tobit 6:10-11; 7:1bcde
9-17; 8:4-9a
- 2) Mark 12:28-34

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

Gospel related: CCC 129, 202, 228, 575, 2196

FOCUS: A properly ordered heart loves God first, enabling us to love our neighbor.

In today's Gospel, Jesus gives us the two great commandments: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength, and You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

What can this look like in practice? We can see the examples of many saints who spent their lives serving others out of the love of God. Today's first reading offers a more "everyday" example of loving God and loving neighbor, though the circumstances are anything but ordinary.

Before his journey, Tobiah's father Tobit instructed him to marry a kinswoman; Sarah fits this description. However, each of Sarah's seven husbands was killed by a demon on their wedding night. The archangel Raphael, however, tells Tobiah how to drive away the demon.

Tobiah's prayer reveals a great deal about his character. First, he prays before consummating the marriage, which is evidence he puts God first. Second, his prayer begins with blessing and praising God, which also shows he puts God above everything. Third, he states that he is taking Sarah as his wife *not because of lust, but for a noble purpose*. His purpose is twofold: fulfilling his father's request to marry a kinswoman, and to form a holy union. We can infer that because of Tobiah's love of God and putting the Lord first, this properly orders his heart to love his neighbors, that is, everyone around him.

We can ask the Lord to strengthen our desire to love him above all things, so that love of neighbor may flow naturally from our hearts, properly ordered to the commandments of love. And, like Tobiah, we will be given the strength and means to carry out that which God asks of us.

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Friday, June 4, 2021

(Lec. 357)

1) Tobit 11:5-17

2) Mark 12:35-37

Gospel related: CCC 202

FRIDAY OF
NINTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: It is our joyful duty to praise God.

Praise of God is our principal duty when we come to Mass. We owe God praise as a matter of justice (Cf., CCC 2095): he created everything, gave each of us our unique, unrepeatable soul, and recklessly shares his divine life with us. In other words, we are loved in such a manner that we could never deserve or pay back. It's not a pious platitude to say that we're completely dependent on God; it's simply the truth. That deserves the fullest, most heartfelt praise from every person on earth.

We have a great example of a prayer of praise in the first reading. Tobit has probably the best day of his life: His son Tobiah returns, his blindness is cured, and his son brought home his new wife. Tobit not only offers praise to God, but immediately proclaims to the whole town what God did for him.

Tobit says something interesting, however, in his hymn of joy: *It was [God] who scourged me, and it is he who has had mercy on me.* This is a key to being able to sustain the practice of the faith: suffering is among the many gifts that God gives us, and it is worthy of praise. We are to honor God even when the cross of our Lord feels too heavy to bear; we are to worship him when our prayers feel leaden and dry.

Praising God is easy in the good times. Prayer flows better; the fingerprints of the Lord in the happenings of life are more evident. Worship of our God – like anything rooted in love – cannot depend on good times and claim to be authentic.

Tobit's canticle points us in the right direction on how to adore our God regardless of the good or bad times. Tobit lauds who God is in addition to what God has done. Our Father is all good, all powerful, all knowing, and perfectly loving. When we begin our prayers with that kind of praise, we're echoing what the angels and saints are saying in heaven. And that's the point of prayer in our lives as well – bringing about heaven on earth.

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Saturday, June 5, 2021

(Lec. 358)

1) Tobit 12:1, 5-15, 20

2) Mark 12:38-44

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

Gospel related: CCC 678, 2444

FOCUS: We are called to live a life of humility and generosity as we build the kingdom of God.

In today's Gospel, Jesus points out to his disciples the gift of a poor widow, who contributed two small coins whose monetary worth was, on the face of it, insignificant. Jesus tells his followers, *Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood.* Her gift was the greatest of all. In humility, she gave of her want rather than any excess. She set forth an example of love and generosity that is a challenge to all of us.

For one thing, it is a call to a life of humility. Instead of being puffed up about our own importance, as the scribes were in this same Gospel passage, we can work at putting others first.

In another way, it can prompt us to take a good hard look at who we hold in high esteem. As a culture, we are often dazzled by celebrity, wealth, or prestige. Our idols may be wealthy athletes, entertainment celebrities, or the rich and powerful. Maybe we can see today's Gospel as a reminder and a challenge to refocus ourselves. Perhaps we are looking for our heroes in the wrong places.

And finally, the example of the poor widow is pretty clear. How do we measure up to that? This is not necessarily a monetary question, but one that asks how well we can detach from things of this world and depend on God. Blessedness comes in our spiritual poverty: knowing that who we are and everything we have comes from God, and then delighting in that fact.

Humility and generosity are great gifts, and we increase in them the more we use and share them. This is how the Kingdom is built up; this is how we witness to it. May we always be blessed with a poverty of need that we can share for the sake of the Kingdom.

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SUNDAY, JUNE 6, 2021

(Lec. 168)

- 1) Exodus 24:3-8
- 2) Hebrews 9:11-15
- 3) Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

Gospel related: CCC 1328, 1335, 1339, 1403

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

FOCUS: On this feast, we do not celebrate *what* we receive in Holy Communion but rather *who*.

Sacrifice in the Old Testament often consisted of animals placed on makeshift altars as a burnt offering to God. In the first reading, Moses sprinkles the *blood of the covenant* on God's chosen people. Jesus uses the same exact term to refer to the cup that he shared with his disciples, in today's Gospel.

This verbal connection in Scripture is a sign of the fulfillment of the messianic prophecy. When Jesus offered himself as body and blood, he honored the old covenant under Moses while becoming the *mediator of a new covenant*. By this blood, he has obtained for us *eternal redemption*, and has *[cleansed] our consciences from dead works to worship the living God*.

Jesus' presence in body, blood, soul, and divinity in the Eucharist is also a promise – that he will be with us until the end of days. He wishes to remain *with* us and *in* us, helping us to seek him, to see him, and serve him by how we love, honor, serve, and forgive one another.

The feast we celebrate today, known as Corpus Christi or the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, was established by Pope Urban IV in the year 1264. He did so in response to a reported Eucharistic miracle in the Italian village of Orvieto. As legend has it, the Eucharistic host bled when being offered in the hands of a doubting priest, Father Peter of Prague. This was, in essence, a manifestation of a miraculous presence in the hands of one who doubted the Real Presence.

This is a doubt that is all too common today, as well. Many Catholics have not been catechized well with regard to the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, and those outside of the Catholic Church believe it to be only Christ's symbolic presence, or at least that he is not *substantially* present. In proclaiming the Year of the Eucharist in 2004, Saint John Paul II said: "The Holy Eucharist contains the entire spiritual treasure of the Church, Christ Himself." He went on to encourage every Catholic to "rekindle this Eucharistic amazement" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, par. 6).

We can only hope and pray that the true presence of Christ in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar will strengthen the faith of believers, remove doubts from the minds of skeptics, and serve as a reminder to all of us that the Eucharist is a miracle. Every Eucharist is a miracle. When we share in the miracle of the Eucharist, we share in Jesus' miraculous love for us and for all sinners.

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Monday, June 7, 2021

(Lec. 359)

1) 2 Corinthians 1:1-7

2) Matthew 5:1-12

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

MONDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God sees our suffering and responds, offering encouragement and blessing.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God.

These words from Saint Paul, written to the community of Corinth around the year 55, are some of the most beautiful and consoling words in all of Scripture. Granted, they refer to affliction and suffering, which of course do not sound wonderful at all, but it is *how* he speaks of these things that earns the accolades. God does not only not abandon us in our affliction, but in his compassion – in his ability to “suffer with” us – he enters into that suffering and gives us encouragement. He gives us his grace. This grace enables us to endure and persevere, and to join our suffering to Christ’s. In turn, it allows us to encourage others; to be compassionate toward – to “suffer with” – others. To be blessed.

Blessed? Yes. That’s what Jesus tells us in today’s Gospel. He turns our common wisdom on its head, promising that those who are journeying through hardship are not cursed, but rather, can be *blessed*. Those who mourn, those who are persecuted, those who are meek and poor in spirit – these are the blessed ones. Jesus doesn’t promise that those who follow him will never experience discomfort. Instead, Jesus tells us that we are to rejoice and be glad of it, *for [our] reward will be great in heaven*. Even here, the one who suffered for our sins is encouraging us in our own sufferings, offering compassion to us that we might in turn offer it to others.

The promise of Christ is not that he will take away all suffering here and now – it is that he will enter into it *with* us. That we will never be alone. That he will bring his perfect goodness, love, truth, and life into whatever evil, heartbreak, confusion, or illness we face. Look at Christ’s victory on the cross – he did not simply vanquish death. He transformed death into a doorway to eternal life. And he wants to bring this same power to you and to me today.

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Tuesday, June 8, 2021

(Lec. 360)

1) 2 Corinthians 1:18-22

2) Matthew 5:13-16

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

TUESDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are the *salt of the earth*.

God has anointed us and made us secure in Christ; he has *put his seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts as a first installment. We are salt of the earth.*

Paul's pronouncement to the Corinthians is also a theological statement about our baptism and the very real and effective transformation-of-being that takes place in it. It is a transformation that empowers us to be, as Jesus says, *salt of the earth*.

Salt intensifies sweetness and counteracts bitterness. It helps release the aromatic properties of foods and prevents the growth of disease-causing microbes in the curing of meat. It creates texture, serves as a binding agent, and in some cases enhances color. It is essential to life [salt is necessary for organ systems to function correctly] and is, studies show, one of the most desired tastes by humans. It makes sense, then, that we, baptized into the life of Christ, would be a seasoning for the world. For, through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, our lives and witness point to Christ.

In pointing the way to Christ, we can bring out the sweetness of life in him and help counteract the bitterness of this world. For is Christ not the way, the truth, and the life? Is God not that which humanity most desires, deep in its heart? In the Church is the fullness of truth, beauty, and goodness, and Christ has defeated sin and death. And we, united with and bound to him in the sacraments, can give others who seek him a taste of what is waiting for them, should they have faith in the Gospel.

We are a seasoning for the world – a seasoning that ought never lose its taste and should be liberally applied. If we serve with a humble and joyful heart, others will see and may be moved by it. And then won't that heavenly banquet be so very full, and so delightfully flavored!

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Wednesday, June 9, 2021

(Lec. 361)

1) 2 Corinthians 3:4-11

2) Matthew 5:17-19

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

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

FOCUS: God is always with, and for, us.

We are all called to be saints (small “s”). That is, we are called to lives of holiness, and trust in God. One of the marks of such a life, modeled by the Saints (capital “S”), is belief in God’s goodness in all circumstances. By grace, we see God’s bountiful provision even in the face of suffering, persecution, and death. Even when many forces were at work against them, the Saints trusted God and believed that God is for them.

As Jesus says clearly in today’s Gospel, he came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it. In his words, his actions, and his very person, Christ came as the final revelation of who God is. He completed the work of reconciling us to the One who created us.

Ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, human beings have succumbed to Satan’s lie that God is not for us, but against us. Satan wants us to believe that God does not really care about us. So often, we live unaware of the Lord’s care even while he persistently labors in love for us. We conduct our lives thinking primarily of ourselves, gauging how we are doing based on our own effort, struggles, feelings, and sufferings. In doing this, we are in a sense denying (to ourselves) God’s active love for us. We are implicitly denying that God is for us.

The way of the Saints is different. Through grace, they lived with their eyes on God and trusted in his goodness. This is the life that the Lord calls each of us to – of ever-deepening belief in his love that carries us always. That is what he seeks to give us, especially as he draws us to himself at the Eucharistic table. Through the prayers of the Saints and the grace of God, may we entrust ourselves totally to God, whose goodness is beyond measure. A God who is always with, and for, us.

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Thursday, June 10, 2021

(Lec. 362)

1) 2 Corinthians 3:15–4:1, 3-6

2) Matthew 5:20-26

Gospel related: CCC 678, 764, 1034, 1424, 2054, 2257, 2262, 2302, 26008, 2763, 2792, 2841, 2845

THURSDAY OF
TENTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We see *the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

If we are not careful, we risk losing the sense of shock and radicalism of Jesus' proclamation in today's Gospel: *Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the Kingdom of heaven.* These were, on the whole, holy men who dedicated their lives to the service of God and rigorous obedience to the laws of Moses. Many of them likely strove for genuine holiness with all their heart, mind, and body. So, for Jesus to tell his disciples that the righteousness of these religious leaders must be *surpassed*? That one must not only refrain from murder, but even from *anger* and simply calling someone a fool? This is a high bar indeed!

Perhaps the first reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians may help us understand. Paul describes the children of Israel as living under a veil. That is, these chosen ones of God struggled to see clearly. In contrast, for those who turn to Christ Jesus, *the veil is removed*, and their freedom (to see) is restored. The fullness of truth is found in Jesus Christ. In him, we see the face of God – a face that not even Moses could look upon directly!

The people of Israel were chosen by God to be examples of righteousness to the nations. They were given the great benefit of a lived relationship with the one true God and the law to guide them. But, in their story we come to see that this alone is not enough. Even the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees must be surpassed. The vision that Christ offers to us, then, cannot be our own – it must be his. Thus *we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord.* It cannot be our righteousness which saves us, but his. Not our merits, but his. Thank God for that.

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Friday, June 11, 2021

(Lec. 171)

- 1) Hosea 11:1, 3-4, 8c-9
- 2) Ephesians 3:8-12, 14-19
- 3) John 19:31-37

Gospel related: CCC 478, 608, 641, 694, 1225, 1432

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

FOCUS: The love of God is at the heart of all things.

We all know what love is. We recognize it when we see it or feel it. We see it when a parent cares for a child with patience, tenderness, careful instruction, and unconditional acceptance. We know that lasting relationships require affection, communication, compassion, and self-sacrifice. We know that love can be damaged by betrayal, selfishness, abandonment, and even physical harm. We know what it feels like to love and what it feels like to lose love.

In today's reading, we receive yet another reminder of how God loves. God called the Israelites out of Egypt. [Ephraim is a son of Joseph, who is the son of Jacob; Ephraim is ascribed to one of the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Deuteronomy 27:12-13).] Here, the Lord compares the Israelites to a child whom he took in his arms, taught to walk, fed, and protected on their journey. The Lord says, *my heart is overwhelmed, my pity is stirred*. Despite their failings, God loved them.

In the Letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul prays for the love of the Father, the strength of the Holy Spirit, and the indwelling of Jesus, so that *you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God*. God's love is fundamental to all other gifts.

And in the Gospel passage, we are reminded of God's ultimate act of love. During his passion, Christ was holding each one of us in his heart. Here, we see the Lamb of God being obediently led to the slaughter and sacrificed for our sins (CCC 608). Even after death, we see water and blood pouring forth from his side – the blood of sacrifice and the waters of new birth. These are types (or precursors) of baptism and Eucharist – the sacraments of new life in the Spirit and of the Precious Blood of Holy Communion (CCC 1225).

This solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart, then, is all about love. The heart of Christ, depicted as pierced by a crown of thorns and enflamed with his passion, is far more accurate than any valentine or emoji ever drawn. For this heart manifests true love – a love that continues to be shared with every human being. Christ suffered and died for *us*. Christ loves *us*. "There is the whole mystery: he died for you. In him you have been redeemed, in him you are saved" (Saint Ambrose, *De Sacramentis* 2, 26).

Today, especially, may we let that sink in. Christ loves us! Let us allow the love of Christ to dwell in our hearts. And filled with the fullness of God, we can share that love with others.

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Saturday, June 12, 2021

(Lec. 364)

1) 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

(Lec. 573)

2) Luke 2:41-51

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

Gospel related: CCC 149, 333, 503, 517, 527, 529, 531, 534, 559, 575, 583, 587, 618, 695, 711, 713, 725, 2196, 2599 CSDC 259

FOCUS: In Mary's love for Jesus, we have an example of true discipleship.

Today's memorial honors the Blessed Virgin Mary for the example of her love for Jesus. Devotion to her Immaculate Heart dates back several centuries. In particular, Saint John Eudes is credited with fostering this devotion in the 17th century. In the biblical world, the heart was the organ of decision-making and reflection. In the modern world, it is associated with emotions, whereas the gut played that role in the biblical world. Previously celebrated in August, it was transferred to the Saturday following the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus because of its association with our Lord. Mary's heart was filled with love for Jesus. And so as we honor her, we honor her Son as well.

Today's Gospel narrates the only episode in Jesus' youth found in the Gospels. This period is often referred to as "the hidden years." We are to presume that during this time Jesus *grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him* (Luke 2:40). During these years in the home at Nazareth, Jesus learns from Mary and Joseph how to live as a child of God.

Jesus and his parents go to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. This trip, of about 90 miles, would take several days. Passover was one of three pilgrim feasts when Jewish men were expected to travel to Jerusalem. That Mary and Joseph go illustrates that they were observant Jews, fulfilling the commandments. At the age of 12, Jesus would be expected to go with them.

Jesus' comment, *I must be in my Father's house*, indicates that his relationship with his Father is becoming more important to him. But Joseph and Mary *did not understand*. It is something they will comprehend only later when he embraces his public ministry. But Luke comments that *his mother kept all these things in her heart*. It is this heart, inflamed with love for Jesus, that we honor today. May our hearts burn with a similar love for her and her Son.

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SUNDAY, JUNE 13, 2021

(Lec. 92)

- 1) Ezekiel 17:22-24
- 2) 2 Corinthians 5:6-10
- 3) Mark 4:26-34

Gospel related: CCC 546

**ELEVENTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: It will always be our choice whether or not we choose to water and weed the seeds of faith planted upon our hearts.

The Alaska State Fair is held annually in late August, in Palmer, about 42 miles northeast of Anchorage. This is not your typical agricultural show. Here, farmers from the Matanuska-Susitna Valley routinely display vegetables of gargantuan sizes – a 138-pound cabbage, 65-pound cantaloupe, and 35-pound broccoli. You might even get to see a 1,780-pound pumpkin!

While the growing season is so much shorter there than in the rest of the United States, the 19 hours of daylight in late spring and early summer yield amazing results. So we can imagine what they could do with a mustard seed!

In today's Gospel, Jesus describes the kingdom of God using the parables of a wheat field and a mustard seed. We are told that when the wheat field has matured, it is immediately harvested. From the mustard seed comes a giant bush big enough for birds to live in its shade.

Our faith in Jesus sprouts from the tiniest seeds of faith planted upon our hearts. How large it grows depends on us. We are given the gift of faith, but it is always our choice whether or not to accept and act on the gift we have been given. Will we water? Will we weed?

The kingdom of God is here for our habitation and our building. Things get in our way, however, impeding us from doing our best at watering and weeding. The list is endless as to what can pull us away from our number one priority – to cultivate God's kingdom that rests on our hearts. It's not that these other pursuits are not valuable or important, but let us strive to not allow them to obstruct our relationship with God.

The people who show their crops at the Alaska State Fair accept and act upon that which they have been given. They take advantage of every moment of their short growing season in order to produce "fruit" [and vegetables] worthy of admiration and praise. They work with what God has given them, and cultivate their harvest, and their proverbial mustard seeds, carefully.

Life is always going to be full of choices. Let us strive to make choices that lead us closer to God and one another, and not farther away. When harvest time comes and the sickle swings, we want to be gathered up into God's storage barns, that is, into his Kingdom. The last thing anyone wants is to be cast aside. Cast aside in this life, or in the next.

Will we water? Will we weed? It is always our decision to make.

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Monday, June 14, 2021

(Lec. 365)

1) 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

2) Matthew 5:38-42

Gospel related: CCC 764, 2443, 2763

MONDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *Now is a very acceptable time.*

“The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting, it has been found difficult and left untried.”

This quote is from G.K. Chesterton, a notable Catholic writer and philosopher of the early 20th century. Mixing faith with wit, he was a cross between Aquinas and Mark Twain. This saying is from his well-known work, “What’s Wrong with the World,” published more than 100 years ago. While the title coincidentally also describes our current world, the quote itself reflects the focus of today’s readings written almost 2000 years ago.

In our first reading, Saint Paul pleads with the Corinthians to believe what he has told them about the Good News of Jesus Christ – and not to waste time in doing so, for *now is the day of salvation*. The urgency of this message, and the belief that Christ’s return was imminent, means that Paul has been willing to undergo the most vicious of difficulties to ensure that the Gospel is preached far and wide.

In today’s Gospel from Matthew, Jesus is also making the point that the Good News that he brings is important enough to warrant the bearing of difficulty for its sake. His disciples are to bear insult by turning the other cheek. (If struck on the right cheek in this predominantly right-handed society, that means the victim was back-handed – the most demeaning physical blow one could receive in that culture.) They are to be liberal in their service to and charity with others. In abandoning the old “eye for an eye” standard of vengeance, and going beyond what is asked or required of them, they demonstrate the value of that for which they suffer and undergo difficulty.

The inherent urgency, importance, and value of the Gospel message seems to be at the heart of Chesterton’s critique of what he saw in Christianity around him. The difficulties surrounding the pursuit of the Christian life were too much for many – and so it was abandoned; left untried. And yet, the deepest sorrow of that failure is that the greatest reward comes from the enduring of, and overcoming, the difficulties. Because our true destiny, the very thing we were created for – eternal life with God – is worth every bit of effort we might have to make. And as Saint Paul says, *Behold, now is a very acceptable time*. So let’s not leave the Christian ideal untried.

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Tuesday, June 15, 2021

(Lec. 366)

1) 2 Corinthians 8:1-9

2) Matthew 5:43-48

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

TUESDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The ability to love indiscriminately comes from recognizing God's gift of love for each of us.

Today's readings ultimately are about grace. Paul prefaces his encouragement about financial support by telling the Corinthians, *We want you to know, brothers and sisters, of the grace of God.* He goes on to explain how the believers in Macedonia, despite their poverty, gave to the collection for the Church in Jerusalem. The Macedonians gave *beyond their means*, thus demonstrating the genuineness of their love for others.

This type of generous giving is possible only when one recognizes the gift he or she already has received. Paul goes on to write, *For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich.* Out of love for the world, God took on human flesh, walked the earth, and ultimately suffered, died, and rose from the dead. This life and death of Jesus was not some generic, predetermined show. No, it was a gift inspired by an intensely personal love – a gift of love for you and me.

Understanding the love God has for each of us, despite our sinfulness, is the means to living out the challenge Jesus offers us in today's Gospel: *Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.* God's grace is available to all – friend and enemy alike. As Jesus explains, *for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.* If God's gift of love is indiscriminate, so must ours be.

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Wednesday, June 16, 2021

(Lec. 367)

1) 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

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

Gospel related: CCC 575, 764, 1063, 1430, 1434, 1693, 1753, 1969, 2447, 2608, 2655, 2691, 2763, 2792

WEDNESDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Be generous with the gifts God has given, and pure in intention.

Today's readings offer us a guide for giving. In Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, he encourages the readers to be generous as God is generous, *for God loves a cheerful giver*. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns against performing good works for the sake of appearances.

In the first reading, Paul begins with an axiomatic statement about nature. You reap what you sow. Greater efforts generally produce greater results. However, in life, we know that things are not always so predictable. It is tempting to hold onto what we have, storing up resources for a rainy day. Paul encourages his readers to be generous as God is generous, reminding them that God *scatters abroad*. When we give cheerfully, without sadness or obligation, we do not need to worry about running out. God has provided the seeds, and it is God who will multiply them *and increase the harvest of [our] righteousness*.

This circle of giving encompasses much more than simply monetary generosity. God is the source of every good gift. Our talents, our time, and our treasure all belong to him, and we have a responsibility to use them for his glory. When we rely on God completely and trust his abundance, we are free to give of ourselves generously without fear of self-diminishment. We may never know which seeds we plant will yield the greatest fruit in God's kingdom.

To be truly good, our actions must be accompanied by good intentions. In the Gospel, Jesus warns against hypocrisy in almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. These righteous deeds are not to be performed in order to be seen, but are to be performed in secret, where only the Father can see. Those who act with righteousness only to earn earthly praise will receive the reward they seek. However, they may miss out on their ultimate reward in heaven.

The guide for living that these readings offer points us to a middle way between stinginess and self-glorification. When that middle way is hard to find, God still provides. One of his abundant blessings is the gift of the sacraments. They are here so that we can access the grace we need to be generous and to purify our intentions. Praise God for his every good gift.

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Thursday, June 17, 2021

(Lec. 368)

1) 2 Corinthians 11:1-11

2) Matthew 6:7-15

Gospel related: CCC 268, 443, 764, 1165, 1434, 1969, 2608, 2632, 2659, 2668, 2736, 2763, 2759, 2776, 2792, 2841, 2845 CSDC 492

THURSDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus teaches us how to pray.

In today's Gospel, we hear the familiar words of the Lord's Prayer. Consider the many ways this prayer is part of our lives. In a little bit, we will recite it together as one body, as we do for every Mass. Every time we pray the Rosary, we repeat it throughout. In our own personal prayers, we might often use it. Jesus taught it as a model to us, and "it is truly the summary of the whole Gospel" (CCC 2761), uniting us to our Triune God.

This instruction on prayer takes place during Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, a lengthy section in the Gospel of Matthew where he gives discourses on moral teachings. Regarding prayer, Jesus decries the prayer of pagans as inauthentic. He says, *In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

And indeed, these words of the Our Father truly reflect an authentic relationship with God. First, it calls upon God as our Father, that he is close to us. It recognizes God's holiness and God's kingdom. It asks for our daily bread, what we will need to sustain and nourish us, whether it be physically or spiritually. It asks for mercy, and reminds us to show mercy to others in our own relationships. It is a personal prayer that reflects who God is, and who we are as God's people. It strengthens our relationship with God and with others.

In our own way, the Our Father has led each of us to a more authentic relationship with God. We might consider how we use this prayer in our own life. Today, as we pray it together again as part of our Eucharistic celebration, let us listen to the words. Are there words that stand out to us? What is God telling us? The answer is in the prayer his Son has taught us.

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Friday, June 18, 2021

(Lec. 369)

1) 2 Corinthians 11:18, 21-30

2) Matthew 6:19-23

Gospel related: CCC 368, 764, 2533, 2551, 2604, 2608, 2729, 2763, 2848 CSDC 260

FRIDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Endure any hardship, or forego any earthly reward, for the sake of the Gospel.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus tells us that where our treasure is, there our heart will be. We must keep our eyes on that prize, and not set our hearts simply on earthly goods and success.

This must have been something Paul took to heart, because clearly his treasures were not in earthly things. For what was his reward for preaching Christ crucified? Beating after beating; stoning; dangers from people, the wilderness, the sea, and false brothers; hunger and thirst; cold and exposure; and many imprisonments. Paul faced death, and the pressures of leadership for all the Churches. All of this he bore – gladly and with great boasting – for the sake of the Gospel.

He did not boast of himself, but of Christ who was strong where he was weak, and whose grace enabled him to survive every affliction he suffered, not for Paul's own sake, but that Paul might be the conduit of that grace for all to whom he ministered. Who could stand any one, let alone all, of what Paul endured unless he or she had stored up treasures in heaven, placing all one's heart, mind, and soul in service to building God's kingdom?

This is our challenge: To endure any hardship, or forego any earthly reward, for the sake of the Gospel. For each one of us, that will be different, and unique to ourselves and our circumstances. But what is common to all is the reward that awaits us, and the power of Christ to be strong where we are weak.

We do not make this journey alone – the Holy Spirit is present to strengthen and encourage us; grace is given to us that we might persevere. We all know what is temporal and fleeting, and what it is like to walk in darkness. Christ is our light who brings us what is eternal. Our treasure is in him, so let us direct our hearts to him, too.

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Saturday, June 19, 2021

(Lec. 370)

1) 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

2) Matthew 6:24-34

SATURDAY OF
11TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Saint Romuald,
Abbot;
Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC** 270, 305, 322, 764, 1942, 2113, 2416, 2424, 2547, 2604, 2608, 2632, 2659, 2729, 2763, 2821, 2830, 2836, 2848
CSDC 181, 260, 325

FOCUS: Focus on the Lord above all.

The Gospel seems almost disjointed today. First Jesus is talking about not serving two masters, a topic which could really have its very own homily. Then we hear about how we should not worry, that God takes care of the birds and the flowers.

But they are not completely unrelated sets of instructions that we are receiving from Christ the Teacher.

It is in serving two masters that drives much of our anxiety. Or, even worse, it is in serving three, or four, or five masters. And what, or who, are these masters?

They are the people, things, or ideas we “over-attend to” in order to abate or alleviate our worries. We are worried about shelter and food, so we don’t just work for a living, we allow fear to master our psyche, and we become convinced we do not have enough. We are worried about what others think or say about us, so we serve the master named pride and its sidekick, self-doubt. We are worried about education, safety, our health – you name it! – and so we subordinate ourselves to a master who drives us to ensure we obtain those things. Each time, we sacrifice something of ourselves in unhealthy or unholy ways. We give up something of ourselves that is sacred for something else which is not.

What then, *should* we give our lives over to? Not a “What” at all ... “Who” is the word we are looking for; and the answer is Jesus the Christ. He is the only Master who loves us unconditionally and has the key to true joy and true fulfillment.

In today’s world, we often take on too much responsibility. And in trying to “have it all,” we can really actually lose much of it.

The sooner we realize we are not in control, the closer we are to being free. Jesus is asking us to trust in the love that God has for each one of us; to have faith in God’s goodness; and patience in his power to bestow what is needed.

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SUNDAY, JUNE 20, 2021

(Lec. 95)

- 1) Job 38:1, 8-11
- 2) 2 Corinthians 5:14-17
- 3) Mark 4:35-41

**TWELFTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Jesus calms the storm and quiets the fears in the hearts of his followers.

Quiet! Be still! With these words, Jesus calmed the storm that was threatening the Apostles as their boats were being tossed about and filled with water. It must have been a fierce storm since it frightened these men, many of whom made their living on the sea. They were afraid enough to wake Jesus, who was asleep in the boat. They needed him to be present to them in their panic and fear.

Certainly, Jesus can calm the worst storms in our lives as well. What are those storms? Do we struggle in our relationships? Perhaps our storms are connected to physical or financial difficulties. Maybe we wrestle with our faith, or are challenged by anxiety or depression. How wonderful that Jesus can calm all those storms. He is there for us with his peace if we just turn our fears over to him. Just as he quieted the winds and silenced the waves, he can bring comfort to us.

As the disciples witnessed this miracle on the sea, they were struck with awe and wonder. *Who then is this*, they ask, *whom even wind and sea obey?* They were still learning who Jesus was, and the might of his power. Even though they followed him daily, listening to his words and witnessing his miracles, they were still uncertain. Jesus rebukes them a little when he asks them, *Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?*

The truth is that in our journey to the Father, we are still learning who Jesus is as well. It is often a big leap to go from the Jesus we read about or hear in the Gospels, to the Jesus who lives fully in our hearts. There is a difference between knowing Jesus intellectually and fully becoming one with him. As in any relationship that we want to nurture and deepen, our love and closeness will grow as we get to know each other better. This requires spending time together – listening and watching and learning.

In order to grow our faith, we need to deepen our relationship with Jesus – to spend time with him daily, and include him in our thoughts and decisions, through prayer. We can read the Gospels and spend time with others who also believe in him so we can learn from their experience. This is a lived faith. For Jesus to be in our hearts, we must invite him in and then nourish that relationship daily. We can survive the storms in our life with his help. In loving Jesus, the storms with which we live will be calmed, and our faith will grow stronger.

* * *

Monday, June 21, 2021

(Lec. 371)

1) Genesis 12:1-9

2) Matthew 7:1-5

MONDAY OF
12TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Aloysius Gonzaga,
Religious)

Gospel related: CCC 678, 764, 2763

FOCUS: Help one another in faith with humility and clarity of vision.

All of us have probably experienced the nuisance of getting something stuck in our eye. Even if it's only an eyelash that's caught in our eye, such a small thing can make a big difference. We tend to lose our ability to do anything well until that eyelash or other foreign object is removed. Now consider if that were a splinter, or better yet, an actual wooden beam! Our sight would be severely damaged, to say the least, and we would be completely disoriented.

Jesus' use of analogy and hyperbole in today's Gospel serves its purpose: it gets our attention! Whether the object in our eye is big or small, we need to remove it in order to see clearly and to offer any commentary or judgment on what we see. We need the eyes of our hearts to see God and discern his movements in our daily experiences.

Jesus is not condemning all acts of judgment here, but he is condemning false judgment. He is calling out the hypocrisy of judging others for faults while ignoring our own. A community of people who love one another will help each other grow in faith, and hold one another accountable to the moral life, but only if each one has clear vision. I cannot help you in your struggle if that same vice is tying me down, and you cannot help me in mine if you cannot see the struggle at all.

We want to become the kind of people who can see others as Christ does – with humility, clarity, and love. God is transforming us through Word and sacrament, so that we become vessels of his mercy and compassion. We can receive today's Gospel reading as a pathway to bearing the light of Christ to others. As we live more and more in alignment with the truth, others will see the truth in us and – ultimately – see the presence of Jesus Christ.

* * *

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

(Lec. 372)

1) Genesis 13:2, 5-18

2) Matthew 7:6, 12-14

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

Gospel related: **CCC** 1036, 1696, 1789, 1970, 2609, 2763, 2821 **CSDC** 20

FOCUS: We can rely on God's grace.

Jesus' words in today's Gospel are a bit intimidating. Narrow gate? Those who find it are few? Many will pass through the wide gate headed to destruction? Lord, how can we hope to find the gate leading to life?

The good news is that we don't have to do it ourselves. In fact, the belief that we ourselves can and should attain perfection without God's grace is a fifth-century heresy, known as Pelagianism. Pelagius was a contemporary of Saint Augustine in Rome who taught that free will and an ascetic lifestyle could bring about human perfection, without the need for divine grace. The Church formally rejected this teaching as heresy and affirmed, among other things, that we need God's grace to do anything righteous; and that through his grace, we can know and follow his commandments.

This means that it isn't up to us, alone, to find and enter through the narrow gate. God has given us the Way, in his Son; the assistance of the Holy Spirit at all times; and the grace we need in the sacraments. We need only to cooperate with that grace. The commandments, Scripture, and Sacred Tradition guide us, and help us know how to cooperate. The gate may be narrow and the road constricted, but it's not impossible. Nothing is impossible for God.

We can rely on God's grace. We can trust him. God will lead us to life if we humbly listen to him and follow him. Sometimes that may look like not taking the more appealing path; often, that will look like following the Golden Rule. It will look like quiet prayer time spent listening for the Lord to guide us, and being attentive to his Holy Spirit.

We can begin here, as we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, asking him to pour out his graces on us as we receive his body and blood.

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Wednesday, June 23, 2021

(Lec. 373)

1) Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

2) Matthew 7:15-20

Gospel related: CCC 2005, 2285, 2763

WEDNESDAY OF
12TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit.*

Jesus' warning about false prophets couldn't be timelier. There are more voices competing for our attention right now than at any point in history, all promising us someone's idea of happiness. There will always be voices that claim to lead us closer to God, while instead subtly drawing us deeper into worship of the self. It is essential that we know how to tell the false voices from the true.

Jesus says, *By their fruits you will know them.* Things that are from God and that lead to God are life-giving, truthful, and good.

But how do we know? By remaining in the Lord, so much so that his voice drowns out every other. We do this through having an active prayer life; availing ourselves of the sacraments, especially reconciliation and the Eucharist; through study of the lives of the holy men and women who have gone before us, whose experiences and perseverance can give us help and hope. We also remain in him through our patient trust in and waiting on his promises, as we saw Abram do in the first reading. Faithfulness is righteousness, and both bear only good fruit.

By our baptism we each have a share in Christ's ministry as priest, king – and prophet (CCC 1268). And as prophets, we're called to share the word of God that we've been given, to show others the depth of God's love for them and invite them into relationship with him through his Church. Our faith must be active and missionary – that's the fruit we bear. *But a good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit.*

The tree is the interior life, our personal relationship with God. Just as a tree can stay healthy and growing only with water, sunlight, and the right nutrients, so our interior life needs the sacraments, intimacy with God in prayer, and Scripture.

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Thursday, June 24, 2021

(Lec. 587)

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

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

FOCUS: John the Baptist's birth brings joy as he is destined to announce the day of salvation in Jesus.

In Luke's Gospel text today, we hear of the birth and naming of John the Baptist. His birth had been foretold to John's father, Zechariah, by an angel who decreed that Zechariah would name him John. And while it was a common name in his day, we hear the neighbors say, but *there is no one among your relatives who has this name*. So there must be some other significance to this name being chosen.

John's name, like that of Jesus, is notable for its theological meaning. John, *Yohanan* in Hebrew, means "God/YHWH is gracious." Many names in the biblical world included forms of the word for "god" or the divine name YHWH. The name Jesus means "YHWH saves" and the name Zechariah means "YHWH remembers." Naming a child was an important moment, since when a man named his son he was acknowledging him as his own and so the child becomes part of his household. When Joseph gave Jesus his name, Jesus became a "son of David," since Joseph was a descendant of David.

Those present at the naming recognize John's importance since, *the hand of the Lord was with him*. Luke concludes today's scene by telling us that, *The child grew and became strong in spirit*, in anticipation of his appearance in the desert to announce the arrival of Jesus years later.

So, today, the Church celebrates the birth of John the Baptist, with Scriptures that enrich our understanding of his role and importance. The prophet Isaiah, in our first reading, foretold the coming of the Messiah. Like Isaiah, this child, John, would one day foretell and prepare the way for Christ. He would be the first to recognize Christ for who he is, while they are both in the womb (Luke 1:43), and as an adult, literally identifying him as Jesus walks toward him: *Behold, the Lamb of God* (John 1:29).

In the second reading, we hear part of a sermon Saint Paul delivered in a synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia, located in modern Turkey. Invited by the synagogue officials to speak at a sabbath service, Paul addresses his *fellow Israelites* at the beginning (13:16), recounting for them specific moments in their salvation history. He speaks of King David, whom God testified as being *a man after my own heart; he will carry out my every wish*. Further, *from this man's descendants God, according to his promise, has brought to Israel a savior, Jesus. John heralded his coming*. As Isaiah announced good news to the exiles, so John was sent to announce the "word of salvation" that would be realized in Jesus.

And so on this solemnity of the birth of John the Baptist, we give thanks for the gift – not only of Jesus Christ – but of those to whom the prophecy of Christ was given. For by their witness, and by their participation in God's saving plan, we have been shown the way to Christ. As John always directed others' gaze of him away from himself and toward Jesus, may our own lives and witness point the way to Christ for others.

* * *

Friday, June 25, 2021

(Lec. 375)

1) Genesis 17:1, 9-10, 15-22

2) Matthew 8:1-4

Gospel related: CCC 448, 586

FRIDAY OF
12TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The Lord is always generous and merciful.

When we read and hear healing stories such as the one in today's Gospel, we might wonder: Why not us? Why not our loved one? Like the leper in the Gospel, we come and praise the Lord, we bring our petitions humbly before him, and we wait in hope that the Lord will do as we have asked. And stories such as these offer us hope that God will.

In fact, God already has. As his people, we were marred by sin and cut off from communion with him. For generations we prayed for a savior, saying to God that if he willed it, he could make us whole. And he did will it; he sent his Son to make us whole, to be cleansed from sin and death, and to go forth and worship him, spreading the Good News to all the earth. We are the leper – filled with hope, faith, and the courage to petition for his mercy. We are the leper, reconciled to God and one another through Jesus Christ.

We know that the Lord responds to our prayers with mercy.

But what about when the Lord doesn't do exactly as we ask? Does that mean that the Lord isn't truly good? That he isn't as merciful and generous as Jesus reveals in his life, preaching, death, and resurrection? Of course not. But then, how do we make sense of God's answers?

A simple answer is to say that God's desire for us is not to give us exactly what we want, but exactly what we need. God acts according to his divine will, a divine will that in the smallness of our humanity we may not always understand. In the first reading, God sees a much bigger picture than Abraham is aware of or capable of envisioning. How could he have foreseen generations upon generations of God's people who would enter into the covenant God was establishing with *him*?

Sometimes, accepting the will of the Lord is easy; sometimes it's hard. But we can always trust that the Lord's will embodies a mercy and generosity and love that knows no bounds and exceeds even our deepest hopes. With such trust, let us come and receive the ultimate gift that makes this love present to us today.

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Saturday, June 26, 2021
(Lec. 376)

- 1) Genesis 18:1-15
- 2) Matthew 8:5-17

SATURDAY OF
12TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Saturday in honor
of BVM)

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

FOCUS: Be humble and without fear in asking the Lord for healing and nourishment.

The Gospel story is a curious one. The centurion, a Roman official, has to ask for help ... from an itinerant Jewish preacher: Jesus. His servant is paralyzed. He appears to care deeply, for he explains that the servant is *suffering dreadfully*. The centurion is a powerful man. He says "Go" and his soldiers go. He says "Come here" and someone comes. He says, "Do this" and a slave does it. He is a man of authority, a man who can command that his will be done.

Yet the centurion, with all his power, is a humble man. He knows his control is limited. All the authority in the world cannot ease his servant's suffering. The only power he has left is *to ask*, to bring his need before Jesus, and to be bold in his request.

This is an enviable example to follow. With God's grace, we can be like the centurion, with the humility to acknowledge what we have power to do, and what we do not have power to do. If another human can help us, let us dare to go to that person and ask. If another cannot help us, let us boldly go to Christ with the prayer, "Just say the word, and it will be done."

In the Eucharist, which we now prepare to celebrate, we take the first step to come before Christ, recognizing our weaknesses and our unworthiness. Here we boldly ask him to heal us and to nourish us with his body and blood, and to transform us to be of greater service to others.

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SUNDAY, JUNE 27, 2021

(Lec. 98)

- 1) Wisdom 1:13-15, 2:23-24
- 2) 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15
- 3) Mark 5:21-43
or 5:21-24, 35b-43

Gospel related: CCC 548, 994, 1504, 2616

**THIRTEENTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Jesus heals with compassion and love.

All the Gospels tell of Jesus' healing powers and recall the many times he used them. Today has two wonderful accounts, and what is also highlighted is the gentleness with which he heals the two women he encounters.

Though often on the move, and surrounded by large crowds, Jesus was not impersonal or detached when he healed. Jesus took the time to see, restore, and vindicate. The use of terms such as *Talitha kourai* in healing Jairus' daughter, and calling the woman with the hemorrhage *Daughter*, underlines this affection and concern.

Jesus didn't want these healings to be anonymous; he wanted to speak to the person, to look into their eyes, touch them, and not simply relieve them of physical symptoms. Thus, even though it is reported to him that Jairus' child has died, he goes to her, takes her hand, and tells her to *arise*.

In the case of the woman with the hemorrhage, however, it clearly seemed ridiculous to the disciples when Jesus asked, *Who touched me?* All they could see was the pressing crowd – a mob of anonymity. But Jesus saw more than that. His words break through that veil and a personal encounter follows.

How the afflicted woman must have sought that intimate encounter, while navigating the expansiveness of the crowd. Her heart full of faith and determination, she went directly to the One she knew could help her.

She came face to face with Jesus, who not only recognized her pain but also her faith and courage. His use of the term *Daughter* is one of the most beautiful moments in Scripture; she is not simply another needy face in the crowd, but a *Daughter*, just as the dying girl is a *little child*.

We are daughters – and sons – of the Father; Christ is our brother. He desires to heal us, however we are broken, with compassion and love. He desires this so much that he suffered and died, himself, that we might live. We can approach him as Jairus did, and as the woman in the crowd did, confident of his care and his desire for our good. Our faith in him will allow him to work in us for our sake, and that of the world.

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Monday, June 28, 2021

(Lec. 377)

1) Genesis 18:16-33

2) Matthew 8:18-22

MONDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Irenaeus,
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 2444

FOCUS: Our God is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and full of an outpouring of love for us.

God sent his Son to be one of us, and so we know we are not alone in our humanity. He is with us on our bad days, when we are hurt, exhausted, worried, and without faith. When we cry out to him to save us, he will remind us that we have no reason to be of little faith, because he is always at our side.

The Lord is kind and merciful, as the psalm says. He redeems us from destruction, pardons our sins, and is *slow to anger and abounding in kindness*. Our sins and our crimes are responded to in mercy: We receive not what is due to us, in punishment and through demerit, but are saved from death through his sacrificial love.

We see this in the first reading, where Abraham intercedes for the people of Sodom, and God responds, and relents in his wrath. For the sake of the righteous, he will not destroy the city. We see this in the sending of his Son, who comes to redeem us even though we would reject him and kill him. He does not hold that against us, but offers us eternal life with him.

Therefore, to follow Christ – as the scribe intends to do in the Gospel – is to understand the full truth of who he really is, and what he has come to do. Matthew's use of the word "teacher" in the scribe's address of Jesus indicates that the scribe does not yet have that understanding. Therefore, he is not ready to follow him, further indicated by his need to do something else (granted, an important something else – bury his father) first.

The message for us is the same. When we see and understand who Jesus is, nothing will be more important than following him. And why would there be? We belong to a God who is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and full of an outpouring of love for us. Putting him first lets everything else fall into place.

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Tuesday, June 29, 2021

(Lec. 591)

1) Acts 12:1-11

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

3) Matthew 16:13-19

Gospel related: CCC 153, 424, 440, 442, 552, 553, 586, 869, 881, 1444, 1969

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

FOCUS: The Lord chose us and sends us to do his work.

Today we celebrate two of the giants of our faith, the Apostles Peter and Paul. Saint Peter was the “Rock” Jesus would use to build the Church. Saint Paul was the great evangelist who spread the Gospel to the Gentiles. Together, these two men would change the course of history.

Saint Peter began his discipleship with Jesus as Simon, a fisherman working with his father and his brother Andrew in the town of Capernaum. He was not formally educated (Acts 4:13), and had little in the way of material wealth. He frequently spoke without thinking, and he recognized himself as *a sinful man* when Jesus first called him (Luke 5:8). He may have had leadership skills and gifts, but to choose him as a leader for a new religious movement would seem to us to be quite a risk.

Saint Paul, originally known to us and the early Church by the Semitic/Hebrew name Saul, was a Roman citizen and a zealous Pharisee, who hated and persecuted the early Christians. He even participated in the stoning of Stephen. In Saul, the Lord chose a violent enemy to be a bold witness to the Resurrection. Again, of all the people whom Jesus could have called, Saint Paul appears to us as one most unlikely. Which is why it is a good thing we weren't the ones making these decisions!

Both men would make great sacrifices and even lay down their lives for the message of Jesus. Their preaching of Christ crucified and risen was instrumental to the growth of the early Church; the accounts of their ministry have served as testimony to the Gospel; and in the case of Paul, his letters are foundational texts for theology and ethics.

The Lord chose from the great mass of “ordinary people” two men who would listen to his call, and spend their lives dedicated to fulfilling it. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, they were successful in their mission, and we are here today worshiping and encountering the same Christ present to us who was present to them.

This, of course, leads us to consider our own lives. When we were baptized, the Lord called us to share the message of salvation and to witness to his saving power in our lives. We might be uncomfortable with the idea that we are called to make a difference for Jesus in this world, thinking [wrongly!] that we could never be good at it. It is important for us to remember that Jesus chose people even less “likely” than us, to do great things. If Simon and Saul can turn the world upside down, then Jesus can use us to do the same.

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Wednesday, June 30, 2021
(Lec. 379)

- 1) Genesis 21:5, 8-20a
- 2) Matthew 8:28-34

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

FOCUS: God is present even in the seemingly impossible.

How many of us have found ourselves stuck in a seemingly impossible situation – where there seemed to be no clear way forward and there were many uncertainties? In these moments, where did it feel like God was?

In our first reading, Abraham is faced with his own difficult situation: to send away the son his slave Hagar had borne for him, when he and his wife had been unable to conceive a child. But God has promised to make of him a great nation in his advanced age, and he now has a legitimate son with his wife, Sarah. In the midst of Abraham's distress, God comes to him and tells him that it is okay to follow Sarah's demands that Hagar and the boy be sent away, for God will be with them and will take care of them. God is present to Abraham, and he is present to Hagar and her son.

Similar to our first reading, God is present in the face of the impossible in the Gospel. Two people possessed by demons confront Jesus and plead with him to be cast out into a herd of swine. This mysterious situation would be impossible to manage for anyone but Jesus. He listens to them and indeed casts them out into a herd of swine. God's presence is in the listening, and in the ability to miraculously cast the demons out of two people.

These stories reveal powerful truths to us about God. First, God is close to us. In both situations, God is near in the lives of individuals, not distant. Second, God is compassionate to our hardships. Both readings reveal a God who works to bring healing and comfort in the face of challenges. Finally, we learn that God's presence is so powerful that we need not be afraid. With every seemingly impossible situation in our lives, God is with us.

Our readings today remind us that there is no impossible situation with God. To trust him is to understand that he loves us beyond our understanding. As we gather at the Eucharistic table today, let us remember God's powerful presence in our lives.

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