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**YEAR B
WEEKDAYS 1**

Saturday, May 1, 2021
(Lec. 284)

- 1) Acts 13:44-52
- 2) John 14:7-14

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

SATURDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Joseph the Worker)

FOCUS: The Father is always near to us.

In today's Gospel, Jesus said, *The Father who dwells in me is doing his works*. Jesus was the Incarnation of God's love, and through Christ the Father saved us. The Son and Father are one.

And so for those of us who live in Christ, we are reconciled to the Father and come to know him through the Son. Jesus intercedes for us with the Father. While the fullness of the Father's glory is hidden from us until we enter heaven, he is near to us every day.

We can certainly identify with Philip, who said to Jesus, *Master, show us the Father*. Philip longed to see the Father in the same way he physically saw Jesus. We also long to see the Father in that way. Here on earth, that is not possible. Who can see the face of God and live? (Cf., Exodus 33:20). But Jesus reassures us and calls us to have faith. As Jesus said, *Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves*. In seeing Christ, we see the work of the Father.

Today's Gospel reveals the power of having faith in the Father and his love for us. We are never alone in our acts of prayer, love, evangelization, and service. We are never alone in our interior journey of purification and sanctification. These are all good things that come from God: The Father who sent his Son to redeem us, and who with the Son sent the Spirit to be our advocate and sanctify us. All the ends of the earth have indeed seen the saving power of God.

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SUNDAY, MAY 2, 2021

(Lec. 53)

1) Acts 9:26-31

2) 1 John 3:18-24

3) John 15:1-8

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

**FIFTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

FOCUS: Jesus is the source of life. Remain with him and keep his commandments.

Remain in me, as I remain in you. Some of you may ask, "What does that even mean?" Saint John answers this in today's second reading. *Children, he says, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth.* In other words, don't just spout pious niceties, *do the work* of the Gospel. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit those in prison. Love one another. For *those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them, and the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he gave us.*

Uniting ourselves to Jesus brings us into the divine life of the Holy Trinity. In order to abide with Christ, we need to take on his mind and his heart, and act accordingly. This we are empowered to do through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works in us, giving us gifts and helping us to bear fruit for the sake of the Kingdom. This sounds easy on the surface. Yet we probably can think of ways just in the last couple of days that we did not act with the mind or heart of Jesus.

If we profess faith in Jesus Christ, he expects us to offer our whole lives to him. That includes every action of every day, no matter how we may feel. *By this is my Father glorified, Jesus says, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.*

We can drop the "it looks easy" part here. The most important question we can ask at this point is, "Why?" If the world can offer distractions, pleasures, and a reasonably fulfilling life, why remain with Jesus?

Because no other vine that the world can offer is as life-giving as that of Jesus. A life apart from him will wither, and *be thrown out like a branch* at the time of judgment. Without Christ, we can do nothing. Every breath we take is simply and only because God has willed it so. God desires our good, and has made us to live with him forever in heaven. Nothing the world offers can even compete. Why sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the immediate? Yes, the ask can be considerable, but it is far surpassed by what our Lord offers us in return.

The world cannot offer infinite love. Only God does that. The world cannot provide consolation. Only the Holy Spirit does that. *God is greater than our hearts and knows everything,* and we receive from him what we need, and what we ask. Jesus is the source of life. Remain with him, and keep his commandments.

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Monday, May 3, 2021

(Lec. 561)

1) 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

2) John 14:6-14

Gospel related: CCC 74, 459, 470, 516, 1698, 2466, 2614, 2633 CSDC 1, 28, 555

**SAINTS PHILIP AND JAMES,
APOSTLES
- FEAST**

FOCUS: The cure for any sense of distance from the Father is to strengthen our relationship with Jesus.

So many people, including Christians, are more comfortable speaking of God in the abstract than speaking of Jesus by name. It's no coincidence, then, that so many people also feel distant from God. It's Jesus who bridges that distance, his name that connects us! He spells it out for us in today's Gospel: If we have seen him, we have seen God the Father. His words and works are those of the Father. His life, death, and resurrection have made the Father present to us in a supremely concrete and intimate way.

If God remains just an impersonal idea to us, we can relate to that idea however we choose. We can shape a safe god in our own image who demands no worship or repentance. But such a theoretical god has no power to overwhelm our hearts with love, to assure us that our sins are forgiven, to transform our mundane lives into the kind of heroic self-gift we see in the saints.

To know the Father and remain in him, then, we must know Jesus not as an historical figure but as a living presence in our lives. This means coming into every Mass with the awareness that we're about to receive him really present in the Eucharist and take part in his sacrifice. It means reading and meditating on the books of his life, the Gospels. Reflecting on a short Gospel passage for 15 minutes each day is an ideal starting point for personal prayer. Praying the mysteries of the Rosary allows us to enter into the key events of his life alongside his Blessed Mother.

Even saints go through times when they feel distant from God. For us, this desolation may be a temporary struggle or something we've endured our whole lives. Either way, the answer is to make a deliberate choice to reflect on and speak to the person of Jesus – the way, the truth, and the life.

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Tuesday, May 4, 2021

(Lec. 286)

1) Acts 14:19-28

2) John 14:27-31a

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

TUESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The peace known by Christians is a peace born of love.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you, Jesus says to his disciples. “Yes,” they may have thought, “finally, our troubles in this world will come to an end!” After all, they were awaiting a Messiah, the promised and anointed one of God who would save them.

But then there is a bit of a twist: Jesus continues, *Not as the world gives do I give it to you ... I am going away ... I will no longer speak much with you*. These are difficult things to hear. Doesn't the gift of Christ's peace mean that he would stay? That we would not need to experience any further suffering?

Evidently not. In the first reading, the people stone Paul and drag him out of the city, leaving him for dead. He is exiled from the community where he had been living and building a community of friends and fellow believers. He faces violence, separation, and very real suffering. Where is the peace Christ promises?

But the peace that Christ promises *is* real. It may be tempting to look at Paul's story, or the countless stories of suffering that accompany Christians to this day, and believe that Christ, in fact, does not give us peace. But this is not true. Christ keeps his promises.

Christ's peace is not a lack of trouble. No, in this world trouble certainly remains. Rather the peace known by Christians is a peace born of love. It is the deep and abiding understanding that Christ has overcome the world, that the victory has been won, and that the victory was won for us. It is the peace of knowing that the God of all the universe has chosen each one of us and will not abandon us.

Paul's story in today's reading does not end with his great suffering. Rather he continues his missionary work, expanding the Church, and strengthening the faith of the disciples. Christ does not abandon Paul. He does not abandon us. *Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid*, Jesus says. *I will come back to you*.

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Wednesday, May 5, 2021

(Lec. 287)

1) Acts 15:1-6

2) John 15:1-8

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

WEDNESDAY OF

FIFTH WEEK

OF EASTER

FOCUS: Staying close to Jesus and open to his voice helps us to discern the best ways to follow him.

What is the best way to follow Jesus in our confused and often chaotic world? This seems to be an issue for many people, judging from the number of books and articles that tell us the best way to be a true Christian.

The question of how to follow Jesus dates back to the very beginning of the Church, as we see from today's first reading. The early disciples gathered for what today we call the Council of Jerusalem. The topic was whether Gentiles should be expected to follow all aspects of the Mosaic law, including circumcision. As we will see later this week, the answer is "no." The early Church asked that its Gentile converts follow only a few very basic laws to be converted – and then, of course, to follow Jesus' law of love for God and love for neighbor, which is simple to understand but often difficult to live out.

The first reading is an excellent example of the Holy Spirit leading the Church in discerning God's will. But how do we, as individual Christians, follow the will of God in our lives? Here, today's Gospel gives us insight: by staying united with Jesus, as a branch remains on the vine so that it can bear fruit.

Through the Church we remain united to Jesus, particularly through the sacraments. Studying or reading Scripture, praying the Rosary, and daily personal or communal prayer also help to conform us more closely to Christ. In fact, if we open our minds and hearts to Jesus, he can speak to us in a variety of ways throughout our daily lives: through silence, the words of a trusted friend, and even a walk in nature. We can even seek out special companions – spiritual directors – who can listen to our experiences and show us where and how God is speaking to us.

If we stay close to Jesus in these various ways and listen to his voice in our hearts, we can be sure that we will bear much fruit – fruit that will bring others to Jesus through the witness of our lives and fruit that will give glory to God.

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Thursday, May 6, 2021

(Lec. 288)

1) Acts 15:7-21

2) John 15:9-11

Gospel related: CCC 1108, 1823, 1824 CSDC 39

THURSDAY OF

FIFTH WEEK

OF EASTER

FOCUS: The love of the Lord should bring us joy and move us to love others.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says to his disciples, *As the Father loves me, so I also love you*. He also tells them that if they keep his commandments, they will remain in his love. And, finally, he indicates that he is telling them these things so his joy might be in them, and that their joy might be complete. How do we hear these words spoken to us today? Do we believe them? Do we truly believe that Jesus loves us – that we are, in fact, lovable? And if we believe in this love, does it fill us with joy?

Walking around in today's world, one could get the sense that many do not believe this, and do not have joy. Of course there are plenty of reasons to look as if we are carrying a heavy burden, because many of us are, but it is sad to think that the weight of this burden crushes this joy that the Lord speaks of today.

So how do we recapture that joy? As we hear in the Gospel, we remain in the Lord's love if we keep his commandments. And what are these commandments? There are the 10 Commandments, the great command to love God and neighbor, the command to love one another as Jesus has loved us. There's a trend here, right? A trend to grow beyond our selfishness and self-centeredness and focus our love outward – toward God and those around us. And this love isn't just an ethereal feeling that we claim to have. No, it is a choice to live for others, to sacrifice, to put the needs of others before our own. And to do all this with joy because it isn't a chore to do this for those we love.

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Friday, May 7, 2021

(Lec. 289)

1) Acts 15:22-31

2) John 15:12-17

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

FRIDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: Jesus leads us to the fullness of love.

“All you need is love,” and, “love is the answer,” are wonderful sentiments summed up in an array of music genres, literature, and the scripts of plays and movies. Almost everyone could agree that love is essential, but that does not mean that we know the fullness of what love is or how to practice it.

In our Gospel today, Jesus points us to the fullness of love by directing us to himself. When Jesus tells the disciples, *love one another as I love you*, he is giving them a richer, deeper understanding of what loving one another means. The Jewish law was summed up in love of God and love of others. But here Jesus brings those two commandments together into one. He calls his disciples *to love as he does*.

Jesus loves purely and totally. His love is pure, uncompromised by any self-interest, so that he seeks only the good of his beloved. Loving totally, he holds nothing back, without hesitation or fear of what it may cost him. Jesus demonstrates the fullness of love on the cross where he gives up absolutely everything for the sake of his friends; for our sake. It is this sacrificial love that he commands to all of his followers.

We grow in that necessary intimacy in the Lord when we receive what he shares in Word and Sacrament, and when we share ourselves with him as well. As we continue our prayer at this Holy Mass, let us bring all of ourselves to offer to the Lord, who first gives all of himself to us. In this rich exchange, may we know him more, and may he transform us into channels of his love in the world.

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Saturday, May 8, 2021

(Lec. 290)

1) Acts 16:1-10

2) John 15:18-21

Gospel related: CCC 530, 675, 765 CSDC 39

SATURDAY OF

FIFTH WEEK

OF EASTER

FOCUS: We do not belong to the world; we belong to heaven.

In her spiritual autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux recalls a line from a poem her father would recite: "The world is but a ship, and not thy home."

This sentiment, which the Little Flower said encouraged her to "look into infinity, to reach the eternal shore where Jesus embraces" her, can encourage us as well. These words can be a balm to our hearts when we encounter the unfairness of the world.

Jesus assures us that we will encounter these things because the world *hated [him] first, and no slave is greater than his master*. That is, if we are truly following Christ, we are set apart from the world. We are servants of Christ, and are no greater than he. But our actions ought to be such as to be pleasing to him, and we can expect to possibly endure suffering as he did. For we do not belong to the world. We belong to heaven.

Heaven's citizenship belongs to people from all nations, ethnicities, and walks of life. The Holy Spirit is constantly at work, guiding us as he guided Paul and Timothy millennia ago. The two missionaries traveled throughout modern-day Turkey, but they were *prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching* in the province of Asia, which is modern-day Turkey. This may seem strange. However Paul, then, is granted a vision that those in Macedonia needed to hear the Good News. The two then traveled to Macedonia, or northern Greece, in accordance with God's call.

Therefore, although we are called to not be *of* the world, we still must live *in* the world. It is wise to spend our time in the world sharing the Gospel with others and following the promptings of the Holy Spirit as we continuously seek God's will. In this way, our time "on the ship" can be spent profitably, as we work to bring about the kingdom of God, and reach that eternal shore. "The world is but a ship, and not thy home." Heaven is our home.

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NOTE: When the Ascension of the Lord is celebrated on the following Sunday, the Second Reading and Gospel from the Seventh Sunday of Easter (see no. 60) may be read on the Sixth Sunday of Easter.

SUNDAY, MAY 9, 2021

**SIXTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

(Lec. 56)

- 1) Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48
- 2) 1 John 4:7-10
- 3) John 15:9-17

Gospel related: CCC 363, 434, 459, 609, 614, 737, 1108, 1823, 1824, 1970, 1972, 2074, 2347, 2615, 2745, 2815 CSDC 13, 29, 39, 580

FOCUS: The love that God calls us to is a love of obedience and sacrifice.

Wow, there is a lot of love in our readings today. In the First Letter of John, he writes that *God is love*. This is neither a description of an *attribute* of God, nor an assertion that God is just a name for capturing how we feel about things. It is a foundational doctrine that describes who and how God *is*: he is “be-ing.” He is active. God is, in the Holy Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, a communion of persons united in perfect love. The Holy Trinity is the perfect example of giving and receiving love.

Through that active, continuous outpouring of love, God created the angels, the universe, and us. John again instructs us by stating, *In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us*. The Lord initiated a loving relationship with us by creating us and calling us into relationship. Of course, we sinned and damaged that relationship, but our loving God sent prophets and leaders to bring us back. Finally, the Father sent the Son to die for us and show us the perfect love of self-sacrifice. *He loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins*.

Like a passionate lover, God pours out abundant love for us, so that we will love in return. If we understand who God is and what he has done for us, the most natural and reasonable response is to love God completely. This is exemplified in our first reading, where Luke tells us that while Peter was speaking to Cornelius, *the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the word*. These were Gentiles, not beholden to the Mosaic law, and not waiting for a messiah. Yet they responded to the love poured for them in the preaching of Peter, and glorified God.

To love God completely is to keep his commandments. Jesus says in today’s Gospel, *If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love*. The first commandment is to love God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength. This requires humility and surrender. We have to be willing to follow the teachings of our Savior and live as his disciples to really demonstrate our love for him. This is a self-sacrificial love, one where we lay down our lives for one another, either metaphorically or literally.

This is how we love one another. The Lord expects us to love in a way that sacrifices and suffers for the other. Parents make sacrifices because they love their children. Friends walk with friends through trials and sufferings. Jesus gave us the great example of love in his crucifixion. So, too, are we called to love one another even when it is painful and inconvenient. God is love, and his love calls us to the cross.

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Monday, May 10, 2021

(Lec. 291)

- 1) Acts 16:11-15
- 2) John 15:26–16:4a

MONDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.

USA: Saint Damien de Veuster,
Priest)

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

FOCUS: The Spirit of truth comes as the ever-present consolation who gives witness to the signs and wonders of Jesus Christ.

In today's Gospel, Jesus reassures his disciples that they will receive what they need to do their ministry, even in the face of persecution. He will send an Advocate, the Spirit of truth, who will testify to Christ in the same way the disciples will testify to Christ. This is important for the disciples to know because at some point, unlike they themselves, there will be hearers of the word, and subsequently new disciples, who will *not have been with [Jesus] from the beginning*. Therefore, the Spirit of truth comes as the ever-present consolation who gives witness to the signs and wonders of Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit who opens our ears and our hearts to the Word proclaimed by the Apostles and their successors. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers us and imbues us with grace to accept the gift of faith.

Are we open to the Spirit's promptings to proclaim the Good News of Jesus? Lydia, in the city of Philippi, was. In the first reading, Luke tells us that Lydia is so inspired by what she hears that after she and her household are baptized, she immediately offers generous hospitality to Paul and his missionary companions. What are the ways we are being called to give witness to Jesus? How are these ways particular to Jesus and set apart from ways that are considered practical, polite, or even effective?

Let us take some time in prayer to offer our hearts to God and ask the Lord how we can personally share love and compassion to those in our families and our communities. We have an Advocate among us who will never leave us bereft of truth, blind to beauty, or immune to goodness in our striving for perfection in faith and fullness of love within the Kingdom. We give thanks for the gift of the Spirit, who animates the Church; upholds, protects, and consoles us; and empowers us in our testimony of Christ's sacrificial love for the world.

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Tuesday, May 11, 2021

(Lec. 292)

1) Acts 16:22-34

2) John 16:5-11

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

TUESDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: The Holy Spirit empowers us as disciples.

“If only Jesus were still here with us, if I could just see and hear him, being a Christian would be easy.” This line of thinking makes sense in our world of seeing and touching. Certainly, the disciples of Jesus had an advantage over us, getting to walk along with Jesus and hear his teachings first-hand, right?

Well ... no. Jesus tells his disciples that *it is better for you if I go*. When Jesus’ work is complete, he will ascend to the Father, and send an Advocate to his disciples. The Advocate is the Holy Spirit.

Why, one might ask, is it “better” for the Advocate to come than for Jesus to remain? Jesus was one man who lived in one particular time and place within history, namely first-century Palestine. The particularity of Jesus, though necessary for salvation history, cannot match the universality of the Holy Spirit. Scripture teaches us that the Spirit is available in *all* places and at *all* times. In this way, the Holy Spirit fulfills the covenant that God makes time and again throughout salvation history, expressing God’s desire that salvation is for *all* people.

Today’s first reading from the Acts of the Apostles provides a glimpse of what life in the Spirit can look like. After a miraculous earthquake frees Paul and Silas from prison, perhaps an even greater miracle takes place: The prison guard experiences a radical conversion of heart, as he and his entire family come to believe in Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. This conversion results in a beautiful act of hospitality: The guard welcomes Paul and Silas into his home to feed them and tend their wounds. The Holy Spirit was at work, giving the guard the gift of faith and empowering him to radically love the men who had just previously been his enemy.

This is the hope of the Gospel. The same Holy Spirit – powerful in his ability to inspire faith, hope, and, most of all, love – that filled the prison guard is available to us today. God is present with us always, living inside us through the gift of the Spirit.

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Wednesday, May 12, 2021
(Lec. 293)

- 1) Acts 17:15, 22–18:1
- 2) John 16:12-15

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

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

FOCUS: God sends the Spirit to help us know and preach the truth.

Our Scripture passages today contain a message of hope: Any time we share the message of Easter, we are assured of the Spirit's guidance.

Paul, who once persecuted Christians, has now become a prolific evangelizer and persuasive preacher, proclaiming the faith he received at his dramatic conversion. After spending some time in Athens, he goes to the Areopagus, the center of cultural life in that city, to preach to the Gentiles. He appeals to their own religious beliefs, while also offering a correction. Calling them to examine their belief in divine origins and take it a step further, Paul tells them about a God who will judge the earth he has created. When he has finished preaching, some scoff at him, others are intrigued by what he has to say, and others become believers and join him. After this, he leaves Athens. He has planted the seed of the Gospel. Others will nourish it with the help of the Holy Spirit.

It is God, through the Spirit, who changes hearts. In today's Gospel reading, Jesus promises to send the Spirit to guide the disciples to all truth. Jesus could have told his disciples more while he was alive, but they would not have understood it. The Spirit does not come to reveal anything new, but to help them understand everything Jesus told them in light of his death and resurrection. The Spirit plays the same role in the Church today, guiding both individuals and the community of believers to the fullness of truth, and helping us to apply what we hear in the Scriptures to the changing circumstances of our daily lives.

Unlike Paul preaching to the Gentiles in Athens, today we often face people who have no religious beliefs or a distorted view of God. Yet Paul is convinced that God *is not far from any one of us*. Human beings are drawn to God as their Creator and Destiny. It is our joyful duty to share this Good News with others, bearing witness to the truth the Spirit reveals to us.

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NOTE: Regarding the Ascension of the Lord, the ecclesiastical provinces of Boston, Hartford, New York, Newark, Omaha, and Philadelphia have retained its celebration on the proper Thursday, while all other provinces have transferred this Solemnity to the Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 16. If transferred, Thursday, May 13, is observed as an Easter Weekday.

Thursday, May 13, 2021

(Lec. 294)

- 1) Acts 18:1-8
- 2) John 16:16-20

THURSDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Our Lady of Fatima)

FOCUS: Our grief has become joy.

In our Gospel passage from John, Jesus prophetically speaks to the experience his disciples will soon have. *Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy.* When Jesus is executed upon the cross, his enemies and those who do not believe will see this as a victory for themselves. But for those who follow Jesus – even though they mourn and grieve – there will be joy.

Joy will come in the risen Christ, whom the disciples cannot yet foresee; and it will come in the sending of the Advocate when Jesus departs from them, something else the disciples do not yet understand. The cross is imminent for Christ at this point in the Gospel, but his concern is for his disciples: that they understand that something larger than they can yet comprehend is at work in the world – the salvation of all.

We have our own crosses to bear, and those sorrows that bring us to our knees are agonies that – like that of Christ in the garden – will be redeemed through Christ's dying and rising. With sin still in the world, there will be grief. But in the presence of the Spirit who advocates for us and upholds and sustains us in our faith, there is the possibility of joy even in suffering. Both joy and suffering arise because we love, and love is at the heart of who we are and why we were created. And the fullness of joy awaits us in the place the Lord has prepared for us.

As our 50 days of Easter comes closer to the end, let us remember that the joy of Easter is the final word. We will face hardships, obstacles, and grief, but none of these will win. Christ is risen, and our life as a disciple speaks to that profound truth of our faith. As we celebrate the Eucharist today, let us bring before the Lord our griefs, and be reminded that they will turn to joy.

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Thursday, May 13, 2021

(Lec. 58)

- 1) Acts 1:1-11
- 2) Ephesians 1:17-23
or Ephesians 4:1-13 or 4:1-7, 11-13
- 3) Mark 16:15-20

Gospel related: CCC 2, 156, 161, 183, 434, 659, 670, 699, 888, 977, 1223, 1253, 1256, 1257, 15007, 1673

**THE ASCENSION
OF THE LORD
- SOLEMNITY**

FOCUS: The Great Commission is ours as well.

Today we celebrate Christ's ascension into heaven and his return to his Father's right hand. Soon, we will commemorate the birth of the Church at Pentecost. For over six weeks now, we have reflected on the glory of the risen Christ, and in the Gospel chosen specifically for today's feast, Jesus gives his great commission to the disciples: *Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.*

While the Scriptures don't indicate how far the Apostles traveled other than Peter and Paul, tradition has several of them getting as far as modern Russia, India, northern Africa, and Asia Minor. Regardless of where they did and did not go, they spent the rest of their lives fulfilling Jesus' final mission to go and baptize all who accepted him as the Risen One.

All but John, it is believed, suffered a martyr's death – the ultimate witness of faith. Not a bad track record for a bunch of guys who came across as pretty clueless a lot of the time during those three years they traveled with Jesus. With a great deal of patience, Jesus molded them into powerful witnesses of all they had seen and heard.

By virtue of our baptism, we, too, have been given the same great commission to witness our faith in the Risen One. We must not be bashful in sharing our faith with anyone who might approach us about what it means to follow Jesus. We are guided by the gifts of the Holy Spirit that have been sealed upon our hearts. God's wisdom, God's strength is our wisdom, our strength, for we do not do this on our own, but always in Jesus' name.

No one is asking for us to stand on a soap box at the corner of walk and don't walk – although some do in fact do this. Rather, it is by going about our daily routine with the spiritual awareness that Jesus goes with us into every moment, every encounter of our day, if invited to do so. With Jesus at our side, we can and need to do this.

Not everyone will be open, not every encounter will be a success. But as Saint Teresa of Calcutta is reported to have said, "God is not asking for us to be successful; God is asking for us to be faithful." The dismissal at the end of the liturgy is purposeful. We are blessed and we are sent. We are sent to spread the Good News that the Risen One, who has ascended to the Father, walks with us and is anxious to walk with anyone who invites him into their lives.

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Friday, May 14, 2021

(Lec. 564)

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

2) John 15:9-17

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

**SAINT MATTHIAS,
APOSTLE
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Let us be strengthened in the love we are called to share with others.

When we think of God's commandments, we often recall the ones that say "don't lie" or "don't steal." As important as these are, today's Gospel reminds us of what is at the root of all of God's instructions: *Remain in my love* and *Love one another as I love you*. The call to authentically love others, to truly see the good and the dignity of another, is a much higher bar than simply not causing that person harm. Love like Christ's can seem impossible. It is difficult, to be sure, but it is not impossible.

So how did Christ love as he did? And how do we imitate that? Christ loved through perfect obedience, and through perfect unity with the Father. *As the Father loves me, so I also love you*, he tells us. Jesus, himself the Incarnation of God's love, was also a Son enveloped by the Father's love, constantly relying on the strength of that love as he reached out to others.

His sinless nature meant that nothing came before that love of God, and love of us. No false idols took primacy of place in his life. That is something we struggle with, and God has given us the means to overcome these struggles, in perfecting us for his Kingdom. Through the presence of Christ in word and sacrament, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we have the grace to do what is asked. *If we choose to do so*. And, we really must choose to do so. For why else, for what other purpose, could our lives possibly be directed, but to that perfect union with God to which he calls us?

Living in this love is a place of deep joy but it requires effort and intentionality. God's love is ever-present – so much so that we can often miss it. But, if we have eyes to see, if we ask God to give us this insight, we can find God's goodness poured out on us in love in so many ways. The Eucharist we receive today is the most powerful reminder of God's total, intimate love for each one of us. In opening our eyes and our hearts to this love, may we be strengthened in the love we are called to share with others.

* * *

Saturday, May 15, 2021
(Lec. 296)

- 1) Acts 18:23-28
- 2) John 16:23b-28

SATURDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
USA: Saint Isidore)

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

FOCUS: The Father will always take care of our needs.

In John's Gospel today, we are nearing the end of chapter 16 and the discourse at the Last Supper. Jesus knows his time on earth is nearly over. He is preparing his disciples for the time when he will no longer walk among them. What is it that Jesus wants to make sure they know and remember? In these verses, he tells them, *Whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you.*

In other words, the Father – who knows what we need before we need it, and who answers all prayers, will receive our prayers through the love and intercession of Jesus. We pray to the Father through the Son, in union with the Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus, who is God's spoken Word on earth, our prayers are lifted to the Father and we are united to him and we grow in relationship with him.

True prayer speaks from the heart, and when we cannot speak, the Holy Spirit can speak for us. Authentic prayer seeks our good, and the good of others. We praise God, we ask him for what we need, and we beseech his forgiveness for our sins. Jesus is assuring us that even though he is no longer present in human form on the earth, our prayers do not go unanswered.

Prayer helps us to be close to God and to have the strength and grace to do his will. Prayer helps us follow his command to help build his Kingdom and to draw others into his family. Prayer helps us to live a God-centered life as we look to eternity. If our prayer centers on these things, it will always be answered. God will never abandon us. He will provide in abundance.

Jesus also tells the disciples, as his time at the Last Supper draws to a close: *The Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have come to believe that I came from God.* Jesus is promising them, and us, that we will remain connected to him and the Father through love. This love is the glue that joins us and assures us that God will give us what we need. We are never alone. We are always loved.

* * *

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

SUNDAY, MAY 16, 2021

**SEVENTH SUNDAY
OF EASTER**

(Lec. 60)

- 1) Acts 1:15-17, 20a, 20c-26
- 2) 1 John 4:11-16
- 3) John 17:11b-19

Gospel related: CCC 611, 858, 2466, 2746, 2747, 2749, 2750, 2758, 2812, 2815, 2821, 2849, 2850 CSDC 18, 39

FOCUS: Prayer is the foundation upon which the Christian life is built.

One of the consistent actions in the life of Jesus is his regular recourse to prayer. Here again in our Gospel, in the midst of the uncertainty and fear that surrounded his Last Supper, Jesus lifts his eyes to heaven and prays. This Gospel passage, found only in John, is often called the *priestly* or *royal prayer*. Not only does he pray for himself, seeking the reassurance of the Father, but he prays also for his disciples. He knows their weakness and how his forthcoming death will challenge them; they will need protection, encouragement, and strength if they are to go into the world as active missionaries. And so he prays.

We move forward from that Gospel moment to the days after the Ascension, the subject of our first reading. Here Peter and the other disciples are waiting for the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. With Judas Iscariot now gone, they must choose his replacement. Following the example of Jesus, they pray about it.

Then they gave lots to them, and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was counted with the eleven apostles. In a time of important discernment, they called upon the Lord, and allowed him to work in their midst. Prayer was the foundation of their choice.

This theme of prayer flows right through all our readings today, and yet the life of prayer can often be our greatest struggle. Building a prayer life takes commitment, perseverance, and discipline. But we have the example of Jesus, and the guarantee that when we pray we enter into relationship with the Father.

In his own priestly prayer, Jesus not only prayed for his disciples, but for all who would believe in him through their word – that is, you and me. So our prayer can then be grounded on and joined with his prayer, especially when we find the events of life so challenging that we cannot find the words or courage to voice those needs.

This joining of our prayer with that of Jesus is at the heart of what Saint John points out today in our second reading: *Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him and he in God.* Sometimes a formula for prayer can help us articulate that love and need – our liturgical and communal prayers certainly fulfill that need in so many ways. Other times, we rely on what pours forth from the heart even if it seems disjointed and inarticulate.

Bringing our praises and needs to the Lord is an act of love. Love is the motivation for prayer and the glue that unites all people of faith. It was love of the Father that allowed Jesus to offer his priestly prayer, and it was the love the community had for Christ and his Gospel that permitted it to seek God's guidance in choosing Matthias. In our times of prayer, may our love also guide our actions and shine forth in what we do.

Monday, May 17, 2021

(Lec. 297)

1) Acts 19:1-8

2) John 16:29-33

Gospel related: CCC 1808 CSDC 39

MONDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: *In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world.*

Of all the truths that Jesus spoke, the one where he says to his disciples – and us – *in the world you will have trouble*, has to be the most “accurate.” No kidding, right? His words are both an objective statement of fact, and a bit of a warning. The world is a fallen one, where sin exists and evil finds its way into the smallest cracks of our veneer. It’s also a challenging world, for followers of Christ, because there is still much work to be done in the Kingdom, and still a lot of opposition to it. No surprises linger in this pronouncement, but it is also not the entire message. For while trouble in the world is a fact, the deeper theological and important truth lies in his next words: *Take courage, I have conquered the world.*

The good news about the Good News is we are never left to our own devices. We are never told of a hardship we’ll face without a promise to help us; we’re never warned of trouble without an encouragement to be not afraid. When Jesus tells us, *Take courage, I have conquered the world*, he is not offering a platitude but asserting a firm truth we are to take to heart. This world may have trouble, but in Jesus we have peace. He has come to take us out of the world – not in a literal, adhering-to-the-laws-of-physics kind of way, but by grafting us to himself in baptism that we might share in his divinity and be set apart for the next world, even as we live in this one.

The disciples have just told Jesus in today’s Gospel that they finally understand him, now that he is *talking plainly, and not in any figure of speech*. And despite the somewhat odd proclamation of universal victory over the world [which is still standing], the meaning of Jesus’ words is as straightforward as possible: “Have no fear; this world full of trouble will not be the end of you.” In Christ we have peace; in Christ we have the promise of a future; in Christ we have the way to eternal life.

* * *

Tuesday, May 18, 2021

(Lec. 298)

- 1) Acts 20:17-27
- 2) John 17:1-11a

TUESDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint John I,
Pope and Martyr)

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

FOCUS: Our hope is in the Lord.

When Paul says his goodbye to the presbyters at Ephesus, he recalls his ministry among them. From the day he first came, he served with all humility, through tears and trials. He earnestly bore witness and did not at all shrink from proclaiming the entire plan of God. He gave his all in service of the Lord.

Paul shares that his fate is uncertain, though imprisonment and hardship likely await him. But his priority is his Lord Jesus. He desires to finish his course of bearing witness to the Gospel. With this as his focus, he is able to move forward in hope.

When Jesus is entering the time of his last hours on earth, he prays aloud to his Father, speaking of the work he has accomplished for him. He revealed his Father's name and glorified his Father on earth. He gave people his Father's words so they understood and believed that his Father sent him. He came bringing eternal life so that all might have that life in him, and with the Father. Now, having accomplished the work his Father gave him, Jesus desires to come to his Father and be glorified with him. He moves forward in hope, even to certain death.

Both Paul and Jesus have hope as they move forward. They responded to God's call and were obedient to what was asked of them. Their hope is not in clinging to this life or in denying death, but in looking forward to continuing to serve God and his people. What matters most to them is that those around them never lose their relationship with God, even though their "guides" (Paul and Jesus) will no longer be present among them in the same way.

These moments in the life of Paul and of Jesus can guide us in our own life transitions. We can make peace with the past by recalling how we responded to God and served his people, including in our homes, communities, and beyond. We can find hope in focusing on continuing this service, especially in those God-given relationships that matter most and will endure.

In our celebration of the Eucharist, we see the prayer of Jesus fulfilled through the mercy of God. In his body and blood, he continues his saving work in us.

* * *

Wednesday, May 19, 2021

(Lec. 299)

1) Acts 20:28-38

2) John 17:11b-19

Gospel related: CCC 611, 858, 2466, 2604, 2746, 2747, 2749, 2750, 2758, 2812, 2815, 2821, 2849, 2850 CSDC 18, 39

WEDNESDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
OF EASTER

FOCUS: We move forward in faith with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Many of us may remember our childhood experience of learning to ride a bike without training wheels. It tended to be a pivotal moment in one's childhood, and a milestone symbolizing a certain maturity and growth. For some, learning to ride without training wheels was effortless and thrilling. For others, it was a hard-won skill that came with much determination and maybe even a few skinned knees.

In both readings today, we are privileged to meet some disciples in *their* pivotal moments, as they prepared to lead "without training wheels." In the first reading, Paul is leaving the Church at Miletus and he gives the Church leaders final advice. In the Gospel, Jesus is praying for his disciples, and for their future, as they are sent into the world.

We can learn something from these moments. Jesus asked the Father to keep the Apostles united in God's name. He wanted their leadership to be consecrated to God and he wanted them to be *one*. Paul encouraged the Church leaders to be vigilant in caring for the weak and keeping the Church united. He also encouraged the Church at Miletus to stay true to the word of God and to stay united in beliefs.

"The training wheels came off," to use a phrase common in leadership and motivational circles today, but the balance they had in order to keep riding was provided through the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Church at Ephesus grew and prospered, and the faith spread across the land from evangelizers who moved on from there. The disciples who followed Jesus established the first Churches, and spread across the globe preaching the Gospel. Staying united to God and the Church community were vital to Christian maturity, and they succeeded in that.

The Holy Spirit is present to and within us to help us keep our balance. And whether we are still using training wheels, or occasionally need to revert to them, what matters is that we keep moving forward in building the Kingdom. Flat tires and skinned knees have nothing on the Lord who made the mountains low and the pathways straight for us (Cf., Isaiah 40:4).

* * *

Thursday, May 20, 2021

(Lec. 300)

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

2) John 17:20-26

THURSDAY OF

SEVENTH WEEK

OF EASTER

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Bernardine of Siena,

Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 260, 589, 611, 690, 729, 820, 858, 877, 2466, 26004, 2746, 2747, 2749, 2750, 2751, 2758, 2812, 2821 CSDC 34, 39

FOCUS: May we be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know Christ and the Father who sent him.

We know that the words Jesus spoke to his disciples in today's Scriptures are meant for us as well. But something very distinct happens in today's Gospel, at the end of his great priestly prayer at the Last Supper. As Jesus prays for his disciples, he also explicitly includes, *those who will believe in me through their word* – in other words, the future generations of disciples – us. It's for our unity that he sacrifices himself, so that we *may all be one*.

Jesus doesn't just seek unity for its own sake, but for a greater purpose – that we *may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know* that the Father has sent him. He suffered and conquered death to gather us into the Church, that we might carry out his mission of making the Father's love known to the world. Believers then and now are the fruit of that early missionary activity, and the Holy Church established for us is where we are united with one another and share in the same oneness that exists between Father and Son.

To become one, we must uproot the sins of judgment, rivalry, and envy from our hearts and refuse to tolerate the poison of gossip, lest we end up divided like the Pharisees and Sadducees. We must commit to growing in charity, humility, and patience. We accompany each other on our spiritual journey. We affirm and encourage each other, and humbly accept correction when our brothers and sisters try to help us grow in virtue. In this, we can, truly, change the world.

We could never accomplish this mission on our own strength, but with Jesus in us and us in him, all things are possible. Nowhere does this intimacy become more literal than in the Mass, where we receive his body and blood to become part of him.

So let us approach the Eucharist with joyful hope in the unity Jesus desires for us, and let his closeness empower us to change our lives and our communities.

* * *

Friday, May 21, 2021

(Lec. 301)

1) Acts 25:13b-21

2) John 21:15-19

FRIDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK

OF EASTER

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Christopher Magallanes,

Priest,

and Companions,

Martyrs)

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

FOCUS: Jesus calls all of us to tend his sheep, and strengthens us through the Holy Spirit.

By trusting in the Holy Spirit, Saint Peter – and we, too – can answer the call to tend Christ’s sheep.

Three times, Jesus asks if Peter loves him. Three times, Peter says he does. So Christ commands him to feed and tend his sheep, and feed his lambs. Peter would be sent to the Jews and the Gentiles – the entirety of Christ’s flock. He would gather souls for Christ as a shepherd would gather the sheep and lambs to himself.

But Peter would also face persecution and death as Jesus did – and this is Christ’s warning to him. But Peter does not balk. He follows Christ then, and he followed Christ until the time came when someone else would lead him where he did not want to go.

Saint Peter was able to fulfill Jesus’ commandment to “feed his sheep” and eventually glorify God through his own death, because the Lord did not leave him to his own devices. He did not command of Peter something that he would not help him achieve. He sent the Holy Spirit to be present everywhere with his disciples, then and now.

We have our own opportunities to share the Gospel, led by the Holy Spirit just as he led Peter to evangelize throughout the known world. We have a mission, and we ought to be listening for where Jesus is asking us to go. Jesus says to us, too: *Tend my sheep.*

Tending Jesus’ sheep can be accomplished in all manner of ways. Central to our ability to care for those for whom we have been given responsibility, however, will be the grace and assistance of the Holy Spirit. God does not leave us to our own devices.

God strengthens us through the Eucharist. At the end of Mass, we are sent forth to bring God into the world: “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.”

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Saturday, May 22, 2021
(Lec. 302)

- 1) Acts 28:16-20, 30-31
- 2) John 21:20-25

SATURDAY OF
SEVENTH WEEK
OF EASTER
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Rita of Cascia,
Religious)

Gospel related: CCC 515, 878

FOCUS: Jesus says to us: *You follow me.*

A somewhat odd exchange takes place in today's Gospel. Peter has just been told by Jesus, prior to this passage, *follow me*. So he literally does, as they walk along, but he also turns to see the disciple Jesus loved, also following. And Peter asks, *Lord, what about him?* Jesus replies, *What if I want him to remain until I come? What concern is it of yours? You follow me.*

Jesus' words, *what if I want him to remain?* signify that it is *his* will that guides and takes priority in the relationship between master and disciple. We are to follow him, and each of us will likely have a unique path in comparison to other disciples. And while we are meant to support one another in our lives of faith, what Christ asks of *us* is our concern; what Christ asks of others ... is less so. *What concern is it of yours?* Jesus asks Peter. In other words, "keep your eyes on *me*; follow *me*; listen to *my* voice and watch what *I* do. And let others do the same according to my will for them."

We are not being told not to be concerned for others, or not to care and support them. Instead, Peter, and we, are being reminded by Jesus that how he accomplishes our salvation is up to him (Cf. Mt 16:22-23, where Peter insists that Jesus should not have to suffer, and Jesus says, *Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do*).

This can be hard to remember, and is a lesson many of us may repeatedly have to learn. As we learn, we grow, and the process repeats itself. And, in the midst of this progression, Jesus says to us what he says to Peter: *You follow me*. Like Peter, we can continue to follow Jesus, keeping our eyes on him as we evolve in our understanding and deepen our faith.

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(Lec. 63)

- 1) Acts 2:1-11
- 2) 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13
or Galatians 5:16-25
- 3) John 20:19-23
or John 15:26-27; 16:12-15

Gospel related: **CCC** 91, 243, 244, 248, 263, 485, 575, 643, 645, 659, 687, 690, 692, 719, 729, 730, 788, 858, 976, 1087, 1117, 1120, 1287, 1433, 1441, 1461, 1485, 2466, 2615, 2671, 2839 **CSDC** 29, 39, 104, 491

FOCUS: As God's people, we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit who continues to guide us in our discipleship.

Today's Gospel passage comes from Saint John's Last Supper narrative. Jesus, knowing that he is about to die and return to the Father, promises his disciples that he will send the Advocate/Holy Spirit to assist them. While he has revealed much to his disciples in the time they have been together, he has *much more to tell*. Faith is an ongoing response to God's revelation to us – a lifelong journey. The Spirit will be a continuing presence to them, guiding them *to all truth*.

Before he ascended, Jesus had told his disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Spirit (Acts 1:4). Thus it is that we find that Jesus' disciples, who were observant Jews, *were all in one place together* on Pentecost. This group includes not only the Apostles but also *some women, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers* (Acts 1:14). We see the Church in its earliest form, consisting of those who were with Jesus during his public ministry who can serve as eyewitnesses. But with the aid of the Spirit their numbers begin to increase.

On Pentecost *they were all filled with the Holy Spirit*. They proceeded to speak in different languages, so that a large crowd from many nations, gathered in Jerusalem for the feast, heard them speaking in their own tongues. As God divided the nations at Babel, so now the Holy Spirit unites them so that they all might hear the Gospel the disciples are proclaiming. This leads to many in the crowd embracing the Good News of Jesus and being baptized. The nascent Church of Christ began to grow, and with the power, guidance, and protection of the Holy Spirit her mission of revealing to the world the Gospel of Christ spread to all nations. We here today are heirs to that Pentecostal moment, and to the life in the Spirit the early Christians proclaimed and passed on.

This proclamation is found in some of its best form in the words of Saint Paul today. He encourages the Galatians to *live by the Spirit*. The Holy Spirit, given to us in baptism, assists us in following God's commands. A life guided by the Spirit bears good fruit: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control*. Of all the things we could "produce" in our lives, why would we seek to do anything other than that which allows us to bring these good fruits into the world?

The Holy Spirit changed the world, and we are not so small that he cannot change us. For help against the desires of the flesh and the immorality, selfishness, jealousy, and outbursts of fury that arise from them, there is no better Advocate than the Spirit. As the Spirit sanctifies the Church, may he sanctify each one of us, and guide us in our lives of discipleship.

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Monday, May 24, 2021
(Lec. 572A)

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

MONDAY OF
EIGHTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM)

The Blessed Virgin Mary,
Mother of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 478, 495, 501, 544, 607, 624, 641, 694, 726, 730, 964, 1225, 2561, 2605, 2618, 2677, 2679

FOCUS: Mary is the Mother of the Church.

Many of us here may have long had an understanding of the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Mother of the Church, a Marian title in use by the Church since at least the 4th century by Saint Ambrose of Milan. But today's feast has been on the liturgical calendar only since 2018, when Pope Francis issued a decree establishing it and instructing its celebration to be on the Monday following Pentecost.

The decree reads in part: "This celebration will help us to remember that growth in the Christian life must be anchored to the Mystery of the Cross, to the oblation of Christ ... and to the Mother of the Redeemer and Mother of the Redeemed." Today's Gospel from John provides the beautiful link to which the pope refers. From upon the cross, Jesus sees his mother who is standing there with *the disciple ... whom he loved*. He says to her, *Woman, behold, your son*. To his disciple he says, *behold, your mother*. Note that the first time in John's Gospel that Jesus addresses his mother as "woman" is at the wedding feast in Cana (2:4). He also says *My hour has not yet come*. Today's Gospel is the second time he calls her "woman," and his hour *has* come.

Through his pronouncement upon those at the foot of the cross, Jesus brings all his disciples into his family. Mary, his mother, now also becomes the mother of all disciples. Just as Eve was given the moniker *mother of all the living* in the book of Genesis (3:20), so Mary, the New Eve, became the mother of all believers – the Church.

Mary experienced the greatest of joys and cruelest of sorrows. She knows our pains and is always available to comfort us on the dark days of our lives. Let us welcome this mother's love into our hearts.

* * *

Tuesday, May 25, 2021

(Lec. 348)

1) Sirach 35:1-12

2) Mark 10:28-31

TUESDAY OF
EIGHTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Bede the Venerable,

Priest and Doctor

of the Church;

Saint Gregory VII,

Pope;

Saint Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi,

Virgin)

Gospel related: CCC 1618

FOCUS: To respond in love to God's gift of love is *a just one's offering*.

Today's readings are connected by a common theme: what true sacrifice entails. That which is offered is clearly important. But equally important is one's sincerity and disposition before the Lord. The generosity of the Lord's promise to remain in a covenantal relationship, regardless of our sin, ought to be met with a sincere desire to maintain our right relationship with him.

In the first reading, Sirach is expounding on the issue of sacrificial offerings. The prescribed offerings of animals and grains were the means by which the Israelites atoned for their sins. Sirach is telling the Israelites that God wants much more than their material goods given for their own atonement. The real sacrifice, according to Sirach, is not in the killing of an animal but in honoring the commandments and ensuring that God's presence [in the temple] remained solidly in the midst of the people.

Moreover, for a sacrificial offering to be valuable, there must be a connection to charity – that is, love. Sirach writes, *In works of charity one offers fine flour, and when he gives alms he presents his sacrifice of praise*. He goes on to say that *a just one's offering enriches the altar* – and this is the aroma pleasing to the Lord. It is performed not to receive a reward or to benefit oneself alone, but with a generous spirit that gives praise and honor to the One who has given all to us. God is most pleased when charity is at the heart of the proffered gifts.

Charity is at the heart of every gift God gives us. This is seen most profoundly in the gift of his Son. For by his perfect sacrifice, all other sacrifices are made irrelevant. No more are we, his people, required to offer prescribed sacrifices at the altar. Instead, we offer ourselves as participants in the great, redeeming sacrifice of Jesus Christ. So when Peter begins to justify his presence and role as a follower by claiming that he has given up everything, Jesus stops him. It is not what Peter has given up that will give him a claim to the Kingdom, it is why he has given it up. To respond in love to God's gift of love – that is, giving up all for the sake of Christ and the Gospel – is *a just one's offering*.

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Wednesday, May 26, 2021

(Lec. 349)

1) Sirach 36:1, 4-5a, 10-17

2) Mark 10:32-45

WEDNESDAY OF
EIGHTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Philip Neri,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 474, 536, 557, 608, 618, 649, 994, 1225, 1551, 1570 CSDC 193, 379

FOCUS: Christ came to serve, and we are called to follow his example.

At first glance, today's Gospel reading appears to be made up of three distinct units: a passion prediction, a request from the sons of Zebedee, and a lesson about leadership. Upon reflection, we can see that these three pieces of the story are interrelated. The key to this interpretation comes at the end, when Jesus says, *For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.* Read as a whole, this passage tells us not only who Christ is, but who we are called to be as disciples.

This is the third time that Jesus has predicted his passion in Mark's Gospel, and it is the most detailed. And yet, the disciples once again demonstrate their lack of understanding. Following Jesus' description of his impending suffering, death, and resurrection, James and John ask him for seats at his right and left in his glory. They fail to see that to share in Christ's glory, they must first share in his suffering. Ultimately, Jesus tells them that those positions are not his to give.

Then, Jesus gathers the others to talk about what it means to have true authority, and leadership. A disciple's greatness is not defined by power, position, or prestige. Rather, to be the greatest disciple is to be the humblest servant. Christ gave us the perfect example of servant leadership, not only in how he lived, but also in how he died. He did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life for our sake, so that we might be saved.

To be faithful followers of Christ, we must do the same. We must have an attitude of service, and not a lust for power. Jesus has shown us the way to his glory, and it is the way of the cross. Like Christ, we must lay down our lives in service of others.

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Thursday, May 27, 2021
(Lec. 350)

- 1) Sirach 42:15-25
- 2) Mark 10:46-52

THURSDAY OF
EIGHTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Augustine of Canterbury,
Bishop)

Gospel related: CCC 548, 2616, 2667

FOCUS: We have witnessed the glory of God.

In each of our faith journeys, we have our own unique encounters with God's glory. God has revealed his glory to us in diverse, abundant ways in our lives. These have a profound impact on how we understand God, and how we understand others.

In our first reading from the Book of Sirach, the writer reflects on God's glorious work in nature. *How beautiful are all his works! even to the spark and fleeting vision!* He is basing his reflection off his own experience of what he has witnessed in the world. It is a hymn of praise not just for the beauty of nature, but for God's activity in the world. He is not a distant Creator, but an ever-present Creator. He has perfect wisdom and knows each of our hearts intimately. Like Sirach, we also have witnessed this glory of God. We have seen God's hand in our lives. We have seen God's searching of our hearts.

In the Gospel passage from Mark, Jesus heals a blind man. Here we have a miracle story where we are given a good amount of detail. We know it is outside of Jericho, we know the blind man is named Bartimaeus, and we know what family he comes from. These details help us understand the enormity of what Jesus does. Jesus' glorious healing is truly transformative. As a blind man, Bartimaeus would have faced hardship and rejection his whole life. Not only did his lack of sight make the day-to-day a struggle, but it was common for people to have assumed that he was sinful to bring on such a tragic condition. By his faith in Jesus' glory, he was healed from all of this long-suffering. God's glory shines in his life.

As we consider the moments in our lives where we have seen God's glory, let us remember how it has revealed to us something about God's nature and his work in our lives. And we give thanks that the Eucharist we receive is a sign of God's glory that continues to transform us.

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Friday, May 28, 2021

(Lec. 351)

1) Sirach 44:1, 9-13

2) Mark 11:11-26

Gospel related: CCC 2610, 2841

FRIDAY OF
EIGHTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The Lord gives abundant life.

The Gospel give us two stories today that may seem decidedly unrelated, but in fact are connected by a fundamental truth: To hear and heed the word of God is to have life, and have it abundantly.

In the two-part story of the fig tree, Jesus' cursing of it may seem to be fruitless, pun intended. After all, why curse a tree that isn't even expected to have figs at that time? But it's not about the fig tree itself – instead this action symbolizes what Jesus has found in reality. In preaching the Good News of salvation to the people of Israel, he has found only barren desert – an inhospitable environment with a people unwilling to accept his teaching and therefore unable to produce fruit for the Kingdom. Thus, as Israel is doomed to wither and die unless it repents, so is this fig tree.

It's not hard to see why this metaphor is used, for in this same Gospel Jesus enters the temple where he drives out the buyers and sellers, and overturns the money-changers' tables. Two sinful actions are being highlighted here. First, the *house of prayer for all peoples* had been turned into a noisy marketplace unfit for prayer – the sacred had been made profane. Second, it had become a *den of thieves*. Extortion and usury were built into these transactions, and therefore money, and dignity, were being stolen from those who may have been trying to honor their obligations.

Both of these stories, highlighting the decadence and fruitlessness of a life apart from God, are pulled together in contrast to Jesus' encouraging words to his Apostles at the end of this passage. He gives them, and us, this command: Repent and believe in the Gospel. "Forgive others, that God may forgive you" [repent] and *have faith in God. For all that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours*. These words remind us that to hear and heed the word of God is to have life, and have it abundantly.

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Saturday, May 29, 2021

(Lec. 352)

1) Sirach 51:12cd-20

2) Mark 11:27-33

SATURDAY OF
EIGHTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Paul VI,
Pope,
Saturday in honor
of BVM)

FOCUS: Seek wisdom, being open to the truth.

In today's Gospel, those who question Jesus come from not one group of people, but three: chief priests, scribes, and elders. These three groups of men were the entirety of the elite Jewish political and religious power in the first century.

Yet, here they are, the bastions of authority, asking Jesus where he gets *his*, in doing the things he does. In typical form, Jesus answers the question with a question: *Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was John's baptism of heavenly or of human origin?*

And here's the fun part: these elite, educated, gatekeepers of authority lie: *We do not know*. Whether through fear or embarrassment, they choose not to answer with what they know. And so Jesus wisely responds, "then I can't tell you where I get mine."

This is not a game. Jesus is not withholding information in some kind of tit-for-tat spat. The religious leaders have shown themselves incapable of speaking with authority, and therefore have no capacity to understand, or good-faith reason to be told, the truth about Jesus' power and dominion.

And that's the crux of the matter, isn't it? To be able to handle the truth, one must be open to it, not be afraid of or embarrassed by it, and be able to speak it. This is the wisdom we are meant to seek – paying heed to instruction and therefore profiting, as Sirach says in the first reading.

In other words, when we approach Jesus, we seek to know him better; we ask him to help us grow in faith, to teach us how to love more fully, and to conform us ever more closely to himself. We accede to his authority – rather than question its source – and in doing so we are entrusted with and empowered to act in his name, announcing the Gospel and leading others to him. What a gift! One for which we give *grateful praise* in the liturgy, and in this Eucharist.

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SUNDAY, MAY 30, 2021

(Lec. 165)

- 1) Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40
- 2) Romans 8:14-17
- 3) Matthew 28:16-20

Gospel related: CCC 2, 80, 189, 232, 543, 644, 645, 691, 730, 767, 788, 831, 849, 857, 860, 1120, 1122, 1223, 1257, 1276, 1444, 2156, 2743 CSDC 52

THE MOST HOLY TRINITY -SOLEMNITY

FOCUS: At baptism, we are adopted into the family of God and are invited to life in God for all eternity.

All of us were born into this world as sons and daughters, and dependent upon our parents or guardians for our existence. No matter how our life stories have unfolded, we are all connected to a biological, “natural” family in some way. But it is an earthly connection only, one that is temporary and finite.

Our celebration of the solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity helps us remember that we are also connected to a family that is eternal and infinite. God himself is a family, a communion of persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God created us in his image, as his children, and we were made to be members of this divine family. Humanity rejected this offer, falling out of right relationship with God through sin and disobedience. As such, we were destined to be kept from the divine inheritance because we were no longer rightful heirs.

Jesus came to reunite us to the Father and repair our relationship. Those who are baptized into Christ become children of God by adoption – by grace we are configured to the reality of Jesus’ Incarnation – thus making us both children and heirs to the promises of God. When we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are clothed in a white garment as a sign of the dignity with which we have been clothed by the Holy Spirit.

We have taken the name “Christian,” much as one who is adopted takes on the name of his or her adopted family. This is a permanent adoption that cannot be changed or diluted. As the *catechism* says, “Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark ... of his belonging to Christ. No sin can erase this mark, even if sin prevents Baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation. Given once for all, Baptism cannot be repeated” (CCC 1272).

No sin can erase this mark, but just as some children are estranged from their earthly parents, some children of God stray away from their heavenly Father. But he is always calling his children back to himself, no matter how far they stray. This is because we were made for eternity with him. We are invited into the fullness of relationship in the Trinity. Because we are children of God, we are also heirs of God – meaning that we inherit not only good gifts from God, but God himself. We are given Jesus Christ as our brother, so that we might share in his union with the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are given the Holy Spirit, so that we might know God as our Father and Jesus as our Lord.

It is an inheritance that we have begun to receive in this life, and we will continue to receive for all eternity. Through our celebration of the Most Holy Trinity, we praise God not only for who he is, but for who we are in him.

Monday, May 31, 2021

(Lec. 572)

1) Zephaniah 3:14-18a
or Romans 12:9-16

2) Luke 1:39-56

Gospel related: CCC 148, 273, 422, 448, 495, 523, 706, 717, 722, 971, 2097, 2465, 2599, 2619, 2675, 2676, 2677, 287, 2827 CSDC 59

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

FOCUS: *Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.*

The birth of a new baby is a wonderful, amazing event! The couple and their families prepare for the new life by reading books, visiting the doctors, getting clothes and baby items together, and telling everyone the news. Everyone is excited to meet the new bundle of joy!

This is likely how Mary felt, too, when she learned that her cousin, Elizabeth, was expecting. The Gospel tells us how she traveled *in haste* to Judah. We can imagine her excitement. She enters the house and greets Elizabeth with, what we suppose, is a hearty hug and an exuberant congratulation.

But this story is not just about Elizabeth's new baby. It is about the one who will prepare the way for the Lord, recognizing the Lord in his presence, even before they are both born. As Mary offers her well wishes to Elizabeth, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit, and her baby stirs within her. Or, as she says, *the infant in my womb leaped for joy*. At this moment, Elizabeth proclaims, *Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb*. Both Elizabeth and her unborn baby (who would become John the Baptist) recognize that Mary is carrying our Lord and Savior.

This is how Scripture first introduces the pending birth of Christ, from Elizabeth's proclamation. A small interaction between cousins reveals God's divine plan. Elizabeth asks, *And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* Elizabeth, one of great faith, sees in Mary what others did not yet: *Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled*. Mary's yes to God is obvious and incredible to Elizabeth.

On this feast day of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, let us celebrate the coming of the Lord, and ponder the great love the Father has for us in sending his Son. Let us pray for and comfort expectant mothers, for they, too, bring forth love co-created with God. Let us marvel at God's goodness.

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