

FEBRUARY

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**YEAR B
WEEKDAYS I**

Monday, February 1, 2021
(Lec. 323)

- 1) Hebrews 11:32-40
- 2) Mark 5:1-20

MONDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Whatever binds us, Christ can free us.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, several prominent Old Testament figures are mentioned: Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, and Samuel. Some of them won great victories. Some suffered terribly. All had faith, but that faith did not protect them from harm, it only meant they did not suffer in vain. Their example was meant to strengthen the faith of the early Christians to bravely face the persecutions they were experiencing.

Today's Gospel includes a story that also would have helped the faith of the early Christians. It is a great tale of liberation: a man – possessed, shunned, suffering, and self-harming – is released from the prison of his torment. Through the simple allowance of the unclean spirits' request (to leave the man and enter the swine), Jesus has cured the man. No exotic rituals took place, no fancy promises were made, no bargains struck. A request for deliverance was made, and the Lord granted it.

The early Christians probably desired deliverance from their persecution. They likely also prayed to be freed from any sin that remained in them. These Scriptures would have reminded them that the promise of a future was theirs. Any suffering they endured was not in vain: Christ had come, and Christ would come again.

The same message is meant for us. Whatever chains bind us, whatever suffering we endure, whatever negativity we encounter – through others or from our own selves – Christ is who can free us. Like the unclean spirit, we should desire this freedom – and we need to ask for it. Christ will answer.

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TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2021

(Lec. 524)

1) Malachi 3:1-4

2) Hebrews 2:14-18

3) Luke 2:22-40 or 2:22-32

Gospel related: CCC 149, 529, 575, 583, 587, 618, 695, 711, 713

**THE PRESENTATION
OF THE LORD
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Faithfulness to the Lord leads to receiving a greater measure of God's graces.

Today is the feast of the Presentation of the Lord, and it is worth noting that, when Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to Jerusalem, they were, for once, doing the usual and ordinary thing: fulfilling the requirement of the Mosaic law. That is, unlike the Annunciation, Joseph's dream regarding taking Mary into his home, and the post-birth flight to Egypt, Mary and Joseph received no overt, personal directive from God, or visit by an angel, before carrying out their presentation of Jesus. In their faithfulness to and love for God, they consecrated Jesus to the Lord as a matter of course, following a time of ritual purity.

That they did so in the temple is somewhat unusual, for it was not a requirement. But doing so meant that they encountered two of those praying for and *awaiting the consolation of Israel*, in the persons of Simeon and Anna.

Simeon and Anna were both prophets, and in seeing the Christ-child, they each recognized that they beheld the salvation of Israel, and each spoke about the child.

Scripture says that Joseph and Mary were *amazed* at what was said about Jesus. They did not expect to receive these incredible prophecies in the midst of simply fulfilling the law. God was able to bless Joseph and Mary in this particular way because of their choice to present Jesus in the temple.

Sometimes the blessings of God *precede* our choices to follow him and, at other times, the blessings of God flow *from* our choices to follow him. Many of us were likely baptized as infants. We were brought to the church by our parents, and initiated into the family of God because of our parents' choice on our behalf. They spoke for us, before we could speak for ourselves, out of love and devotion to God. Our parents' choice to have each of us baptized allowed us to be adopted into the Body of Christ, and to be given the gift of faith. The blessings of baptism and the grace we received preceded and informed our free choice to follow the Lord.

However, as we grew older in the faith, we grew in the necessity of freely choosing, for ourselves, to follow God. We have taken the gift of faith and made it our own. In choosing to be present at Mass today, for example, we do so out of faithfulness to and love for God. Because of this, God will be able to bless and strengthen us in the Eucharist. This is very profound! The choices that we make in faithfulness to God have incredible significance. These choices give God an open door for his presence to fill our hearts and his will to be accomplished. While our choices for God can seem small and ordinary, they can lead to extraordinary graces and encounters with Jesus Christ.

Mary and Joseph's lives with Christ are meant to inspire and guide our own cooperation with the Lord. Let us pray that we imitate their ordinary example of simple obedience and, by doing so, open the door wide to God's grace.

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Wednesday, February 3, 2021
(Lec. 325)

- 1) Hebrews 12:4-7, 11-15
- 2) Mark 6:1-6

WEDNESDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Blaise,
Bishop and Martyr;
Saint Ansgar,
Bishop)

Gospel related: CCC 500, 699, 2610 CSDC 259

FOCUS: Turning moments of temptation and struggle into moments of strength and Godly peace.

As we continue to hear from the Letter to the Hebrews, the writer moves to the thorny questions of our own individual struggles with sin and how we deal with the reality of suffering in our lives. We are never alone in those struggles, but always have the support and comfort of a great cloud of witnesses – the saints “who give us their companionship, lend us courage by their example and sustain us by their prayers” (see Prefaces I and II of Saints).

Yet while we have this saintly support, we also must recognize that we, too, have to play our part. How? First of all, by resisting the temptation to sin, and second, in the way we respond to those struggles when they do inevitably come along – by seeing them as opportunities to grow in holiness and trust in the Lord.

The Letter to the Hebrews was written at a time when many of the early converts to the new faith were struggling to remain faithful. In the face of much persecution, many considered turning back to Judaism and rejecting Christ and his offer of grace and salvation. So the issue was a real one – the struggle that offered either life or death.

And that struggle continues even to this day. Many who have heard the Gospel continue to turn away and seek alternative ways of living and believing. So the words of today’s reading are as valid for us as they were in the first century.

No one can ever truly escape temptation and suffering in this life – and while we do not reach out and search for them – they inevitably come along. But what we do with them speaks volumes about who we are in Christ. We can simply see them as total negatives or we can, as the writer reminds us, see them as opportunities to grow in faith. Let us strive to treat struggles as moments of discipline, painful and yet strengthening – moments that will pass but can bring with them a deeper sense of peace, holiness, and grace.

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Thursday, February 4, 2021
(Lec. 326)

- 1) Hebrews 12:18-19, 21-24
- 2) Mark 6:7-13

Gospel related: CCC 765, 1506, 1511, 1673

THURSDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Let us walk trustingly in the way that Jesus shows us.

It's a good thing we don't ever think of Jesus as a CEO. First, because it would be wildly, theologically inaccurate, but also because it would not be a good success story, as far as CEOs go. Let's look at today's Gospel. Jesus gives instructions to the Twelve before sending them out, *two by two*. Amazingly, he expects the Twelve to go out with very little: no money or food, and not even an extra set of clothes. They can have their sandals and a walking stick.

There will be no reserving and expensing hotel rooms. Instead, as they journey throughout the towns and villages, and as they go about doing God's work of healing, they are to rely fully on the hospitality of those to whom they are sent. They are expected to trust in the goodness of the people they meet, and ultimately in God's providence. A CEO who operated this way would probably have complaints from human resources, government oversight, very few shareholders, and soon very few employees!

Thankfully, we are not a human institution led by a CEO, but a divine institution sustained, prospered, and upheld through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Humans may administer the temporal aspects of the divine, but everything we are and do is through the grace and providence of God. That's the message of the Gospel today.

Let's shift the focus from what the Twelve are *not* to take, to what God *gives*. Jesus reinforces the fact that everything we need and have comes from God. Through Scripture and prayer, Jesus gives us the same lessons he gave his Apostles. In our own spiritual journey, we are called to rely upon God and upon others as we go about doing the work of God's kingdom. In whatever circumstance we find ourselves, if we listen to God and depend on him, we can accomplish what he asks of us.

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Friday, February 5, 2021
(Lec. 327)

- 1) Hebrews 13:1-8
- 2) Mark 6:14-29

FRIDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Agatha,
Virgin and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 523

FOCUS: *The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?*

In our reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, the author encourages his readers to *remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.*

The faith we imitate is one that shows hospitality to a new neighbor; that supports just prison reforms; that honors our marriage vows. It is a faith that ensures that Christian love continues, as the author of Hebrews instructs. We are able to do this because, as this same author says, *God will never forsake you or abandon you.*

God's love, God's strength, and God's grace dwell within us, and thus we have the courage and ability to live in imitation of that profound faith. We can follow the leaders of old, and the leaders of today, who are committed to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. No leader is ever perfect in living out this high ideal. There are leaders among us, though, who strive to put Christ first. These are the men and women we seek out for guidance and direction.

We also draw guidance from the saints of the Church – saints such as Saint Agatha whom we honor today. Rather than deny her faith, she suffered martyrdom at the age of 20. So notable were her actions that her name appears in the first Eucharistic Prayer of the Church.

The author of Hebrews also recalls the message of Psalms 27 and 118: *The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?* To have the courage and confidence to walk in Jesus' footsteps today, let this be our prayer as well. For God is *our* helper. We will *not* be afraid. Therefore, what can anyone do to us?

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Saturday, February 6, 2021
(Lec. 328)

- 1) Hebrews 13:15-17, 20-21
- 2) Mark 6:30-34

SATURDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Paul Miki
and Companions,
Martyrs)

FOCUS: *Come away ... and rest a while.*

Today we have a short Gospel passage that is unique in its content. There is no miracle story or parable. Instead, there is a very simple account of some interaction between Jesus and his Apostles: *The Apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."* The Apostles have been busy working, building the Kingdom as Jesus has taught them. Now they need rest. Jesus didn't need to share any inspiring words or teach them something new about the Father. He looked at them and saw that they needed rest.

From the beginning, rest was a part of God's plan. God made rest an essential part of the week. In the creation account in the Book of Genesis, God created and then God rested.

The section of the *catechism* that addresses the topic of working and rest is titled, fittingly, "A day of grace and rest from work." It goes on to say: "Sunday is a time for reflection, silence, cultivation of the mind, and meditation which furthers the growth of the Christian interior life" (CCC 2186).

And while we sit here together on a Saturday, talking about Sunday, the lesson, as we may infer from the *catechism*, is larger than that. It's not just about *when* we rest and make holy the day of the Lord (as important as that is), but *in whom we rest*. We come to rest in God – here in our worship together, but also whenever we turn our hearts and minds over to him. Sharing our joys and our good news (as the Apostles did with Jesus), or our sorrows and our burdens.

God has given us the gift of rest. When he offers, *come away ... and rest a while*, we should accept.

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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2021

(Lec. 74)

1) Job 7:1-4, 6-7

2) 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

3) Mark 1:29-39

Gospel related: CCC 2602

**FIFTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: In Christ we experience hope and healing.

It is not a very uplifting way to start our Liturgy of the Word this Sunday, is it, to hear Job's expressions of despair? Life has become unbearable to Job. He describes life as drudgery and misery, without hope or happiness. He has lost his children, his wealth, and is stricken with boils from head to foot. Have we ever felt that we just can't handle one more hardship in our life? Our circumstances may be different, but the feelings are the same. Job gives expression to a universal human experience of grief and despair.

The despair of the first reading is contrasted with the hope of the Gospel. Simon's mother-in-law is lying sick at home, unable to get up. Jesus grasps the hand of Simon's mother-in-law, helps her up, and her fever leaves her. Outside her door, there is a whole town's worth of people with various diseases, or who are possessed by demons, whom Jesus also cures. Jesus brings hope to this despairing community. Then he goes on to preach and cure in other villages. As he proclaimed: *For this purpose have I come.*

This is our hope: the hope of God's people for the coming of the Kingdom. It is hope for the fulfillment of God's promise to heal the broken-hearted and bind up their wounds. In Jesus we experience this fulfillment. Like Simon's mother-in-law, we are able to get up and live again. She was able to get up and serve Jesus. So, too, others touched and cured by Jesus are able to get up and live again.

Living in hope saves us from the misery, if not necessarily the tragedies, experienced by Job. Living in hope – having met Christ and received the Good News of the kingdom of God – allows us to live for the sake of the Gospel as we await Christ's return, as Paul did.

Like Job, we know despair; like Paul, we know hope. Knowing both is a part of the human condition. Our call is to live by hope, to be a people of hope, and to – like Paul – share our hope freely with others.

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Monday, February 8, 2021
(Lec. 329)

- 1) Genesis 1:1-19
- 2) Mark 6:53-56

MONDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Jerome Emiliani;
Saint Josephine Bakhita, Virgin)

Gospel related: CCC 1504

FOCUS: God is beyond what we can fully comprehend, but we know he is attentive to every need we have.

Is God far away? Distant? The master designer of the universe who is removed from our daily lives? Or is he near, knows every aspect of our lives, and cares for the frailest, the most vulnerable, and the weakest?

God is both. He is transcendent: he is beyond what we can comprehend, and not limited by the material universe. But he is also immanent: dwelling within us and permeating all creation. God is beyond, and within.

The first reading from Genesis highlights the vastness, the mystery, the grandeur of creation and of God. God created the heavens and the earth. God speaks, and it is done! God is all-powerful, the master designer. If one has ever looked at the stars on a clear night, one can be in awe of the beauty, the vastness, and the mystery of the universe, or if we have seen the Grand Canyon, it may have made us feel very small.

In the person of Jesus, we see the closeness and the intimacy of God. Today's Gospel speaks of this loving care. Jesus goes into towns and villages, and people scurry to bring him the sick and the poor. In fact, the *mats* upon which they carry the sick is a Greek word which means the bed of the poor. The poor, the most in need, are brought to receive Jesus' special attention. People *beg*, asking to touch the edge of Jesus' cloak, that he may heal them. Again, the Greek is important, for here the word *beg* means literally "to call to the side of." They call upon Jesus to be *at their side*.

We are God's creation, formed in his image and likeness. To save us, God became one of us. Our lives are not "nothing," and God cares for each and every one of us. He is at our side. God is beyond what we can fully comprehend, but we know he is attentive to every need we have.

Saint Jerome Emiliani (1486-1537) – Jerome Emiliani was a former soldier turned priest, who ministered to hundreds of children in 16th-century Venice when war and famine left them orphaned. He cared for them at his own expense, eventually founding three orphanages. In 1532, he founded the Somaschi Fathers, dedicated to caring for orphans and educating youth. He died in 1537 from an illness he contracted while caring for others.

Saint Josephine Bakhita (1869-1947) – Kidnapped as a child and sold as a slave, Josephine was purchased at age 12 by the Italian Consul, and taken to Italy to serve as a nanny. While staying with the consul's children at a convent, she was baptized. She joined the Canossian Sisters of Charity in 1896 after the Italian government recognized her as a free person. She served the community for 25 years, and was beloved for her joyful nature and melodic voice. She is the first Sudanese saint.

Tuesday, February 9, 2021
(Lec. 330)

- 1) Genesis 1:20–2:4a
- 2) Mark 7:1-13

Gospel related: CCC 581, 2196, 2218, 2247

TUESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Let us honor God with our whole heart.

The Pharisees and scribes come at Jesus with a pointed question, asking why Jesus and his disciples eat their meals with unclean hands. In other words, “Why do you neglect our laws, and our Jewish tradition?”

Jesus’ reply is equally pointed. He rebukes the Pharisees and scribes for their hypocrisy, saying that they have replaced honoring God with honoring their religious traditions, and focusing on empty rituals. While their words and actions look pious on the outside, their hearts are far from God.

Perhaps a return to the creation story in today’s first reading will help us understand Jesus’ point. Long before there was Scripture or tradition, moral norms or religious laws, there simply was creation – the sea, the earth, and all its inhabitants. With the creation of man and woman, God declares creation *very good*, for they are made in God’s image and likeness. Creation itself is God’s Divine Revelation.

Jesus is the mediator and fullness of all revelation. Better put, as the divine-human being, Jesus *is* the final Word of God. The scribes and Pharisees, however, were so intent on following their tradition that they failed to see God’s very self, the Word made flesh, standing right in front of them. Questions of cleanliness, fasting, and refraining from work on the Sabbath monopolized their religious devotion, as if these practices themselves could earn them God’s love. Jesus, on the other hand, yearned for them simply to receive the love of God that already was in their midst.

The scribes and Pharisees thought they needed to earn God’s mercy through their traditions and laws. We do not. Though we are undeserving of it, we have the mercy of God obtained for us through the sacrifice of his Son. Yet we, too, must heed Jesus’ warning. Outward piety in words or actions is no substitute for honoring God with our hearts. Love remains in our midst – all around us in God’s creation, in our neighbors, and in ourselves. May we have the grace to receive it.

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Wednesday, February 10, 2021
(Lec. 331)

- 1) Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-17
- 2) Mark 7:14-23

WEDNESDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Scholastica,
Virgin)

Gospel related: CCC 574, 582, 1764

FOCUS: Purity of heart gives rise to holiness.

In today's first reading, we hear an excerpt from the second creation story found in Genesis. In this account, *God formed man out of the clay of the ground* and breathed life into him. God then *planted a garden*, and settled the man in the garden to cultivate it, giving him only one command: Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Of course, we know that the man, Adam, and the woman who is soon created to join him, Eve, will disobey. Partaking of its fruit is not what defiles Adam and Eve. It is the pride within them which gives rise to the sin of disobedience and gives them impure hearts.

The context for the story we hear in today's Gospel is that Mosaic laws guided what the Israelites could and could not eat. It was a matter of purity and holiness. Yet Jesus teaches that *nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person*. This is because they enter the stomach and not the heart. Jesus goes on to explain that what defiles a person are the evils that come from within their hearts, providing a list of examples that range from folly to murder.

This scene is part of a larger motif in the Gospels where Jesus is critical of any outward practices of religion that are not performed with pure hearts. In a religious culture that had grown preoccupied with the exterior, Jesus offers a correction by emphasizing the importance of interior motivations. What arises from within the heart determines the holiness and purity of the action.

The evils that come from within us come from placing our own desires ahead of God's desires. Pride, quite literally, came before the Fall. We ought to pay attention to our motivations and intentions, knowing that it is easy to fool others with what we "show" on the outside, but God knows the truth. May the Bread of Life we eat today purify our hearts, enabling us to know, love, and serve God.

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Thursday, February 11, 2021
(Lec. 332)

- 1) Genesis 2:18-25
- 2) Mark 7:24-30

Gospel related: CCC 2616

THURSDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Our Lady of Lourdes)

FOCUS: Each and every one of us is called in faith.

Today's Gospel introduces us to a Syrophenician woman who asks Jesus for help. It is helpful for us to remember, as the audience for this story, that she was coming to Jesus as a Gentile, someone who did not share the same Jewish background as Jesus. Even so, she had faith that he could help her daughter, who was possessed by a demon.

The dialogue between the woman and Jesus is somewhat odd: They discuss an image of who is gathered to eat at the table. Jesus says to her, *Let the children be fed first. For it is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.* The woman says in reply, *Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's scraps.*

Jesus is impressed with this statement of faith. As sort of an unexpected figure in the Gospels, the woman nonetheless demonstrates a remarkable, holy longing for God. And as with the Epiphany story, this sequence of events is meant to remind us that Jesus came not just for the children of Israel – the Jewish people of the covenant – but for all people. The faithful, but nameless, woman is telling Jesus by her retort to his apparent dismissal that even as a Gentile, she has a right to the food at the table. Her faith is steadfast, and her daughter is healed.

As we turn to the Eucharist, let us remember that we are all called to the table of the Lord. Not all will answer; not all will come to Jesus with steadfast faith. But each and every one of us is called by God: the God who created us to be united to one another and to himself. We each bring our own personal faith journey to the Eucharist. May the Real Presence nourish us and give us strength on this holy pilgrimage to life everlasting with the Lord.

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Friday, February 12, 2021
(Lec. 333)

- 1) Genesis 3:1-8
- 2) Mark 7:31-37

Gospel related: CCC 1151, 1504

FRIDAY OF
FIFTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Original sin arose from pride in the will and disobedience in action.

Today's first reading begins the familiar story of the disastrous fall of the human race. The serpent asks, "*Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?*" When she responds, he counters with a total lie: "*You certainly will not die!*" He then proceeds to enumerate the so-called advantages of eating the forbidden fruit.

The woman buys into this deception. She doubts God's goodness, and decides that she can do better than what God has commanded her to do, and she transgresses God's edict: *She took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.* She had become proud and disobedient, asserting herself and her wisdom and knowledge over that of God's.

Saint Augustine writes very clearly and coherently about this in his book, *City of God*: "Our first parents fell into open disobedience because already they were secretly corrupted; for ... what is the origin of our evil will but pride?" Pride and falsehood go hand in hand, because pride tells us that we, in deciding to act contrary to God's will, know better than God what will make us happy. It denies God's love for us, in imagining that what he wants for us isn't best.

Contrast this scenario with today's Gospel. Rather than asserting themselves as having the will and knowledge, the people come to Jesus in humility and beg him to cure the deaf man. Of course Jesus does, and the people are astonished and cannot wait to share the good news. What they share, however, is about what the Lord did for them, not what they did on their own.

The physical healings that Jesus performed in his earthly life point to the spiritual healing that he offers to all. It reminds us that we are not God, nor ought we try to place anything before him in importance. In humility, may we make use of the healing and nourishment that he gives us, especially in the Eucharist.

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Saturday, February 13, 2021
(Lec. 334)

- 1) Genesis 3:9-24
- 2) Mark 8:1-10

Gospel related: CCC 1329

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

FOCUS: We can offer what we have for the Lord.

Servant of God Dorothy Day once recounted: “Young people say, ‘What can one person do? What is the sense of our small effort?’ they cannot see that we can only lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time; we can be responsible only for the one action of the present moment. But we can beg for an increase of love in our hearts that will vitalize and transform all our individual actions, and know that God will take them and multiply them, as Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes.”

It is easy to become discouraged by our individual meekness, and the weakness of our humanity. But in today’s Gospel, we can find relief in the fact that Jesus does not ask any of his disciples, or anyone in the crowd, to feed the people. Rather, he points out the need that he sees – hungry people who have not eaten for days – and he addresses it. Jesus asks folks to simply give him what they have, and he takes the meager seven loaves and few fish and miraculously feeds the thousands, with leftover to spare.

We can imitate Jesus and pay attention to and really see the needs of those around us. Who are the hungry people in our midst? What are they hungry for? Folks may require basic necessities such as food and shelter. Or maybe they are hungry for companionship or healing? Or maybe they are hungry for justice and peace?

When we see need, we simply must give Jesus whatever we have to offer so that he may multiply it for the ones we serve. Whatever resources we have to offer, even if they may seem small in the face of weighty problems, are made all the more abundant with God’s grace. We know that in God’s providence, our humble efforts in giving of ourselves are exactly what God is asking of us. Let us ask the Lord to grow our resources into the miracles needed to heal a broken and distressed world. With Christ as our Hope, let us give of ourselves with Love, while resting in Faith in our Generous God.

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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2021

(Lec. 77)

- 1) Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46
- 2) 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1
- 3) Mark 1:40-45

Gospel related: CCC 1504, 2616

**SIXTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: Jesus wants to heal us of everything that causes separation or broken relationships.

God created us because he wants to be in relationship with us. He does not have to love us. God *wants* to. The reason we exist is *relationship*. We were made for love. This is a kind of Good News that is not possible without the Divine, for no other love for us is so pure, so unconditional, so freely given.

But, in spite of the perfection of this design, we are also broken by sin. Even though we are made for relationship, so many things separate us and limit the love for which we were created.

Our first reading reminds us that physical circumstances such as illness can separate us from one another. There are many other physical forms of separation, such as a job that takes a loved one far away, an emotional wound that demands physical distance as a response, and, of course, death itself.

But spiritual separation also wounds us. Just as leprosy could be passed from one person to another, so also sin infects and hurts those around us. We can see how gossip or lack of integrity influences others. Selfishness or greed hurts those who are most vulnerable. The damage of sin is infectious, just as physical illness is contagious.

This is the brokenness into which Jesus enters with his mercy. *If you wish, you can make me clean*. The leper's faith can lead us also to this confidence today. Jesus, the eternal Word of God, *moved with pity*, draws near to us! He reaches out to us, in a particular way through his sacramental presence in this Mass, because he *wants* to heal every separation, whether it be physical, emotional, or spiritual. He does *will* to make us clean.

What wounds can we bring to him today? What broken relationship, separation, or sin needs his healing presence? This is why Christ invites us here, this is why he draws near and reaches out to us. *I do will it*, he tells us, *be made clean*.

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Monday, February 15, 2021
(Lec. 335)

- 1) Genesis 4:1-15, 25
- 2) Mark 8:11-13

MONDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Our worth is not measured in earthly successes, but by the grace of God.

Watching others receive praise can fuel a person's insecurities and build up resentment toward those who are successful. But those feelings do not come from God, but from our own pride or feelings of human jealousy or envy.

We see an example of this type of resentment in today's first reading. Cain is *crestfallen* when Abel finds favor with God. Even though God tells Cain to be proud of his offering, Cain is still upset that Abel's offering was seemingly better. He let his resentment fester in his soul until it turned into hatred for his brother. A hatred deep enough for him to murder.

The Gospel reading also deals with someone wanting to see some kind of favor or praise. In this case, the Pharisees wanted a sign from Jesus. Like Cain, the Pharisees desired something very specific from God and felt angry when their expectations were not met. They, too, allowed their hatred to lead to murder, as they would kill Jesus.

The majority of human resentment clearly does not result in the killing of another, but it certainly leads to the death of goodwill, opportunities, cooperation, and relationships – just to name a few human interactions. And this is because we let these thoughts of failure and inadequacy – which again, are not from God! – convince us they are true.

But the Lord's words to Cain are helpful here. He says, in response to Cain's offering: *If you do what you can, hold up your head; but if not, sin is a demon lurking at the door: his urge is toward you, yet you can be his master.* Perhaps we might think of it like this: If we are truly doing our best for the Lord, that is enough for him. He is well-pleased by that. It is the demon who tries to convince us otherwise.

And so today, we rest in the security of God's love. Our worth is not measured in earthly successes, but by the grace of God.

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Tuesday, February 16, 2021
(Lec. 336)

1) Genesis 6:5-8;
7:1-5, 10

2) Mark 8:14-21
Gospel related: CCC 1329

TUESDAY OF
SIXTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Let us strengthen our faith by surrounding ourselves with goodness.

What we surround ourselves with does affect us, and Lent is a good time to examine what that “surround sound” is. If we are not seeing or hearing enough truth, goodness, and beauty in our days, this season is a good time to refocus our efforts. It is better to be leavened with virtue than with vice.

In the first reading, God’s solution to a world full of wickedness and “bad leaven” was to send a great flood to destroy all but a few people and animals. While he has thankfully promised to never destroy the world through floodwaters again, we can ask him to help wash us so that we may have a fresh start. Certainly, the God who created us desires to help us on our journey to be closer to him and grow in holiness.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus warns the disciples against having the same attitudes toward him that the Pharisees and Herod did. The Pharisees and Herod were self-indulgent in their belief of their superiority, and their righteousness. This little bit of leaven could easily grow and influence the disciples’ thoughts and beliefs. It doesn’t take much – only about a quarter of an ounce of yeast is needed to make a loaf of bread rise. Therefore, they needed to be conscious of who they listened to, and to make sure it was Christ, and not the Pharisees.

Today, as we prepare our hearts to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, let us ask the Holy Spirit to show us the aspects of our lives that need a little extra cleaning, and to help us listen to Christ, and not any other voice trying to get our attention.

Come, Lord Jesus, fill our hearts!

* * *

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2021

ASH WEDNESDAY

(Lec. 219)

- 1) Joel 2:12-18
- 2) 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2
- 3) Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

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

FOCUS: Listen to God's direction in the silence of our hearts.

So Lent is here once again. Whether we come today with no idea of what we'll do for Lent this year or whether we come with a clear plan, we have the opportunity to think about what Jesus asks of us in the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

First, Jesus expects us to actually practice these disciplines. Notice that, in the Gospel, Jesus didn't say *if* you pray, but *when* you pray; not *if* you give alms, but *when* you give alms; not *if* you fast, but *when* you fast. Clearly, Jesus expects his followers to practice these disciplines.

Next, not only does Jesus expect us to engage in the disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, he is instructive as to how we *should* and *should not* do them. We should do them in *secret*, for if we do them *in secret*, only God will see what we are about and will reward us.

Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them, Jesus says. This is what the hypocrites did *in the synagogues and in the streets*. In a sense, the real issue with the way the hypocrites did these deeds wasn't so much their public nature as the motivation behind them. The hypocrites did these things in public not out of true devotion to God and therefore love of neighbor, but out of a desire for the praise and affirmation of others.

But Jesus is telling us that the true motivation for our prayer, our almsgiving, our fasting, should be our love and devotion to God. From that love naturally flow prayer, fasting, and almsgiving for the sake of purifying ourselves before God, and for the sake of extending the mercy he has given to us, to others. *That* should be our starting point.

What we do for Lent doesn't have to be flashy, it doesn't have to be grand. For prayer, we could do something as simple as pray the Lord's Prayer when we first wake up, and ask for the grace to be charitable and forgiving that day; we can pick equally simple things for almsgiving and fasting. It is not the grandiosity of our actions that will lead them to yield fruit in our hearts, but rather, pleased by our desire to be changed into his likeness through them, it is the Lord who will make them bear fruit.

Confident that the Lord will help us identify what specifically we should do this Lent, let us take a moment of quiet and listen to God's direction in the silence of our hearts.

* * *

Thursday, February 18, 2021
(Lec. 220)

- 1) Deuteronomy 30:15-20
- 2) Luke 9:22-25

Gospel related: CCC 1435

THURSDAY AFTER
ASH WEDNESDAY

FOCUS: To choose life means to lose it to and for Christ.

In the first reading, Moses sets before the people what seems to be a clear-cut choice. They must decide between life and death, blessing and curse, prosperity and doom. It seems so obvious how this should go, what the right answer is. But it does not go so easily for God's people. Things get much more complicated and less clear. Their journey toward the Promised Land is marred by hardship and infidelity. By God's grace they make it, but it is no utopia. There is conflict, persecution, and exile.

By the time of Jesus' birth, they are in desperate need of a Messiah. They long for a clear path and way back to God. But the Messiah they are given is not the righteous revolutionary they longed for. Jesus gives them no simple formulas or easy answers. Rather, Jesus speaks in contrasts and ironies: the Son of Man himself must suffer; he must be killed and be raised; they, too, must lose their life to save it.

What began in our first reading as a seemingly simple message to the people of God – "choose life" – has become by the Gospel less clear but much more profound: "Lose it for me." If we want to choose life, we have to lose it. Well, we all lose it in the end, to be sure, but who do we lose it to, and what do we lose it for? This is what matters. Do we lose it to Christ? Do we lose it for the sake of the cross and following him? Or, do we lose it to the world and for the sake of self-profit and personal gain that, in the end, never materializes?

As we *begin* our Lenten journey, let's take some time to be sure what our *end* is: to whom and for whom we do this. If it is not for Christ and to follow him, our salvation will never be realized. It must be for him – the one who loves us and leads us beyond ourselves and the illusion of personal gain to share in his life, death, and resurrection.

* * *

Friday, February 19, 2021
(Lec. 221)

- 1) Isaiah 58:1-9a
- 2) Matthew 9:14-15

FRIDAY AFTER
ASH WEDNESDAY

FOCUS: Fasting from those things that separate us from the Father can draw us closer to him and to others.

In this season of penitence and cleansing, we work to prepare our hearts for the Resurrection. Fasting is a part of that preparation. The Church teaches that we practice fasting and abstinence on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, but many people extend it beyond that.

Fasting is usually associated with food, but as Christians we are called to refrain from other things as well. We need to fast from sin, to abstain from anger, to turn away from evil, to silence unkind words, and to separate ourselves from temptation. Fasting from those things that separate us from the Father can draw us closer to him and to others. We move closer to God in a holy journey toward Easter.

Today's readings both address fasting. Isaiah tells the people that the Lord is not pleased with their behavior. They are wicked, and sinful. *On your fast day, says the Lord, you carry out your own pursuits, and drive all your laborers.* This is not the kind of fasting the Lord desires. Fasting ought to set free the oppressed, share bread with the hungry, and clothe the naked.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is directly asked about fasting. He answers the question with a question: *Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?* Christ is indeed our bridegroom, to whom we as the Church are wed and thus united to God. A wedding is a joyful event, full of feasting and praise. Mourning occurs when the bridegroom departs. Then will his disciples fast.

We fast because while Christ is present among us, we are not yet finally and fully together with him in the eternal wedding banquet. We fast because when we deprive ourselves of something, we make more room for God and his grace, which in turn helps us to grow in holiness and virtue. And when our love of God is what draws us to the fast, we receive the joy of loving him even more.

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Saturday, February 20, 2021
(Lec. 222)

1) Isaiah 58:9b-14

2) Luke 5:27-32

Gospel related: CCC 588

SATURDAY AFTER
ASH WEDNESDAY

FOCUS: Jesus restores the relationship between God and all humanity.

Isaiah encourages the Israelites to live lives pleasing to the Lord. By letting the Lord guide their ways, they will be *like a watered garden* or *like a spring whose water never fails*. By following God's ways, they will be known as *repairer[s] of the breach* and *restorer[s] of ruined homestead[s]*.

In today's Gospel, Jesus calls Levi, who's better known to us as Matthew, to be one of the Twelve. Jesus then chooses to dine with Levi and a large crowd of tax collectors, which greatly upsets the Pharisees. Tax collectors were deeply despised by the people. This encounter is but one example of how Jesus, in his public ministry, restores the relationship between God and all humanity.

This season of Lent offers us an opportunity to reflect on how we might allow Jesus to repair our spirits when we are troubled by events in our lives, or when we fall into temptation and sin. Lent also offers us a time to evaluate how we are helping others bring goodness and beauty to their lives.

When our spiritual lives have a breach, we know we are able to mend it by celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation. When we are physically (and mentally and psychologically) in need of healing, we know we are able to celebrate the anointing of the sick. Both of these sacraments restore us to be like *a watered garden* or *a spring whose water never fails*. Both of these sacraments help us become living examples to others of how Jesus can be the repairer and restorer in another's life if he is but allowed into their darkness and pain.

We must not forget we have been called to be missionary disciples of Jesus. It is through our efforts in his name that the darkness is dispersed by the light. It is in his name that the hungry are fed. It is in his name that the imprisoned find hope. It is in his name that the orphan finds a safe harbor. It is in his name that we bring repair and restoration to a hurting world.

Let us walk in his ways, let us delight in the Lord.

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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2021

(Lec. 23)

1) Genesis 9:8-15

2) 1 Peter 3:18-22

3) Mark 1:12-15

Gospel related: CCC 333, 538, 541, 1423, 1427

**FIRST SUNDAY
OF LENT**

FOCUS: God calls us to a deeper life of faith this Lent, which prepares us to receive him and to go on mission.

In the first reading, having saved Noah and all who had been on the ark, God establishes his covenant with Noah and his descendants after him. As a sign of this covenant, God placed the rainbow in the clouds.

Saint Peter says that Jesus suffered for us *that he might lead [us] to God*. That's the good news of the Gospel – the doors to salvation in heaven have been opened to us!

Today's Scripture passage about Jesus' 40 days in the desert is from Mark's Gospel, and it is far shorter than that in Matthew or Luke. Mark focuses less on the temptations themselves and ends with the heart of the New Testament message: Jesus says, *This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel*. Jesus' time in the desert was one of preparation for his ministry. We can prepare during Lent for the upcoming Paschal Mystery by thinking of three questions.

First: How have we been saved by God already in our lives? Are there times of trial from which we've been delivered? It's so easy to see only what's in front of us, and the sufferings of the moment. Reflect back on years gone by and actively look for ways that God has delivered. This should serve to deepen our trust in God.

Second: How have we been led to God? How have we been blessed, and saved? What methods of prayer brought us closest to him? Take those lessons and take advantage of them this Lent.

And the third question: How might we best follow the Lord into the desert? Perhaps focusing on all the penitential practices of the season might be a way to open our hearts to the Kingdom. The Kingdom, having been rooted in our hearts, enables us to bring it to others.

As we prepare to receive the Eucharist, let the grace of the sacrament bring us ever closer to further union with our saving Lord.

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Monday, February 22, 2021

(Lec. 535)

1) 1 Peter 5:1-4

2) Matthew 16:13-19

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

**THE CHAIR OF
SAINT PETER THE APOSTLE
- FEAST**

FOCUS: The authority Jesus gave Peter is a gift which has been passed down, in an unbroken line, to each pope.

Today is the feast of the Chair of Saint Peter – but why a whole feast day for a chair? While there is a literal and very old chair in Saint Peter’s Basilica, we are celebrating the spiritual authority that the chair represents. We are celebrating the gift of shepherding the Church that Christ bestowed upon Peter – a gift which has been passed down, in an unbroken line, to each pope.

Sometimes it seems as if society thinks of “authority” as something to be avoided, overturned, ignored, or resisted. The truth is, though, this world needs authority in its different forms (e.g., scientific, moral, governing, spiritual) in order to function well. This is not to be confused with authoritarianism, or a kind of dictatorship. Instead, it is servant leadership: wisdom and knowledge embodied in a person who cares for and leads his or her people. When this is done well, those who are subject to the authority are empowered to grow in freedom and to reach the fullness of their potential.

Peter professes his belief that Jesus is *the Christ, the Son of the living God*. Jesus blesses Peter for the wisdom and knowledge he displays, and gives him the keys to his Kingdom as well as the power to bind and loose. These expressions are reminiscent of a king’s second in command in the ancient kingdom of Judah (Isaiah 22:22). The Church has always understood this to mean that Peter and his successor popes are entrusted not only with leadership of the Church on earth, but with preserving and transmitting Christ’s teaching. Christ established the Church, but would soon depart from it. Thus, whomever he chose to shepherd it would need the gift of authority in order to fulfill its mission of safeguarding the Truth.

If this mission of evangelizing were left simply to human effort, it would not have survived. The Church has remained one, holy, catholic, and apostolic through God’s preservation of her, and the constant work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the authority and power granted to Peter (and his successors) isn’t his own. He can speak the Truth only because the Father has revealed it to him. He can be the Vicar of Christ on earth only because Christ works in and through him. And to this day, when the pope or the bishops together with him proclaim a definitive teaching on faith or morality, it’s the power of the Holy Spirit that preserves them from error (*Lumen Gentium* 25). We refer to such papal teaching as “ex cathedra,” or “from the chair.”

The chair of Peter is a sign of the rock on which Jesus has built our Church – his guarantee of unity and truth for all time. Let’s give thanks today for the gift of our pope, his brother bishops, and the guidance of the Spirit ensuring that *the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail* against us.

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Tuesday, February 23, 2021
(Lec. 225)

- 1) Isaiah 55:10-11
- 2) Matthew 6:7-15

TUESDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
OF LENT
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Polycarp,
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 443, 1165, 1969, 2608, 2632, 2659, 2668, 2736, 2776, 2792, 2841, 2845 CSDC 492

FOCUS: God provides all we need for life and life abundantly.

Our first reading from Isaiah contains one of the Old Testament's most beautiful metaphors about the power of God's word. Water falls to the earth, soaks the soil and brings life and food, and then returns to the heavens – the same process of precipitation, evaporation, and condensation that we first learned about in grade school. The prophet draws on an image as basic as it is profound: There is no food, no growth, no beauty in the created world without water. And just as much as the soil and plants need water, so do we. From basic survival to human thriving, water makes life possible.

So it is with the word of our life-giving God. Just as water surrounds us, God's word is around, within, above, and below us. Just as water in all its forms makes our life possible, God's word creates and nourishes us. Just as water makes the earth fertile and fruitful, God's word brings about abundant life and beauty. The Lord says this life and beauty are his will, as his word achieves the end for which he sends it.

God's word goes before us and acts without our needing to do anything, yet we are made to be more than passive recipients of this goodness. Each of us was created to receive gratefully, drink deeply, and bear good fruit.

In today's Gospel, Jesus' teaches the disciples how to pray. Prayer is God's gift of communication with him. In prayer, we become aware of God's constant love for each of us and for the whole world. When we raise our hearts to him and call God "Father," we can learn anew that we are his beloved children. In prayer, we look to him for everything and confidently receive the gifts he desires to give. At this Mass – the pinnacle of our prayer – he is here to give and to receive our response. May we drink deeply of his grace and may his word bring the good fruit he desires.

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Wednesday, February 24, 2021
(Lec. 226)

- 1) Jonah 3:1-10
- 2) Luke 11:29-32

WEDNESDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: Jesus, like Jonah, came with a call to repentance.

In the Gospel today, Jesus rebukes the generation around him, telling them that no sign will be given them except the *sign of Jonah* and that *there is something greater than Jonah here*. The “sign of Jonah” here can be construed as the repentance of the entire city of Nineveh – beginning with the king! – due to Jonah’s preaching of repentance and the threat of annihilation.

The Ninevites are the good example; they are a sign of God’s word working in them and changing their hearts. This fact is striking. These are the enemies of God’s chosen people. They are notorious sinners, violent and merciless. And they will rise at the judgement? They will condemn this generation of Israel? Yes, because at the preaching of Jonah, they repented.

The Ninevites are a sign not because of their inherent faithfulness to the law, or their wisdom or virtue. They are an example to us, though, because they listened to Jonah and turned from their evil ways.

Jesus, like Jonah, came with a call to repentance. In his merciful love he asks us to turn back to him, to set down the evil we have done and to accept the forgiveness offered by the Father. And while the evil generation of which Jesus spoke, and which surrounded him, would be blind to the living sign right in front of them, we are not. We have seen the risen Lord, and we have partaken of him in the Eucharist. The very sign that generation sought but could not comprehend is present to us fully and completely today.

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Thursday, February 25, 2021
(Lec. 227)

- 1) Esther C:12, 14-16, 23-25
- 2) Matthew 7:7-12

Gospel related: CCC 1789, 1970, 2609, 2821 CSDC 20

THURSDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: In prayer, approach God with a loving humility; from that position, we can be confident that he hears us.

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. We like having warranties and guarantees. Retailers upsell extended warranties; customers demand (rightly!) that those from whom they obtain a product guarantee its quality, usability, and durability. Human beings and human products fail. God does not. And in today's Gospel, Jesus literally gives us the ultimate, perfect, unbreakable guarantee. It's free, and yet we sometimes have trouble buying it.

Queen Esther harbored no doubts. Up against genocide and the possibility of her own death, Esther pours out her heart to God. She is a great example for us of how to pray – whether we're in the throes of desperation or not.

First and most importantly, Esther names and blesses God. We, too, should start prayer by praising God for who he is. He is the God of our ancestors – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – and the God and Father of our Savior – Jesus. He is also our God, our Father, with whom we are united in and through the Son and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Second, Esther remembers that God always frees those who are pleasing to him. We can think of the times he has helped us in the past and give thanks to the Lord for what he has done. Remember the times that he saved! Remember the grace-filled times. Our response to that could only be thanks and praise.

Third, Esther approaches in humility and honesty: She is vulnerable and helpless in the situation, and she is not ashamed of that. For us today, this is no less true: We are completely dependent upon God. This is both a wonderful and humbling thing that many of us need reminding of, over and over.

This is exactly how Jesus wants us to come to the Father when we pray. It's in this spirit that he tells us to ask, seek, and knock. Go to him in confidence!

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Friday, February 26, 2021
(Lec. 228)

- 1) Ezekiel 18:21-28
- 2) Matthew 5:20-26

Gospel related: CCC 678, 1034, 1424, 2054, 2257, 2262, 2302, 2608, 2792, 2841, 2845

FRIDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: Following Christ goes deeper than just following the letter of the law.

We have all heard the expression “It’s not the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law that matters.”

In today’s Gospel from Matthew, Jesus, in essence, says they both matter. He teaches his disciples that there is more to understanding “Thou shalt not kill” than just “not killing.” As one scholar notes: “The law must be interiorized so that it penetrates one’s heart and leads one to live according to God’s ultimate intentions” (Mitch, Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p.96).

This reading references anger as the interior sin that leads someone to kill, and is part of a longer instruction by Jesus of sins that start deep in the heart. That’s where we have to correct our behavior. It’s no coincidence that this Gospel comes early in Lent – a time when the Church asks us to look deep into our hearts and repent for our sins. Repenting includes changing not just our outward behavior, but the bad habits and vices which lead to them.

The first reading from Ezekiel is a nice prelude to the Gospel. Through Ezekiel, the Lord says, *If the wicked man turns away from all the sins he committed, if he keeps all my statutes and does what is right and just, he shall surely live. He shall not die!*

Both our readings today tell us that correcting our mistakes – reconciling our sins – is a necessary component of preserving the life we have been given by God. We find our life in Christ, whose sinless perfection guides us and, through grace, enables us to conform ourselves to it. We have a merciful God who desires for us to be with him for eternity. He gives us the opportunity and means to live a life directed toward that goal, and in preparation for it. The law may point us in the right direction, but having a heart for the full meaning behind it and the intentions to live by that understanding are what create the room for God’s grace to be a guiding light along the path.

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Saturday, February 27, 2021
(Lec. 229)

- 1) Deuteronomy 26:16-19
- 2) Matthew 5:43-48

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

SATURDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
OF LENT

FOCUS: The new covenant offers a closer relationship with God.

What God promises the Israelites through Moses is something rather incredible. If ordinary men and women observe God's law and listen to his voice, then God will raise them into something extraordinary. They will enjoy a uniquely close relationship with God, and he promises to *raise [them] high in praise and renown and glory*. All this, for obeying the God who had already brought them out of slavery in Egypt!

Then we read today's Gospel, and it sounds like Jesus is challenging us to do the impossible: *Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect*. In the new covenant, we are called not only to follow the law, but to radically love our neighbor. Jesus is telling us that doing the bare minimum no longer suffices. At first, this impossible task sounds like bad news, rather than the Good News the Gospel promises.

But Jesus knows we cannot be perfect on our own; he sent us the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, to help strengthen us in virtue in addition to giving us himself in the Eucharist.

In the Gospel, Jesus' words could be interpreted as something like this, "*If you want to be part of the new covenant, then you must abide by these high standards.*" And *if you are part of the new covenant, then what happens? Then* Jesus promises us a closer relationship with God than anything the Israelites could have imagined! We will live with him forever in heaven, and we will consume his body, blood, soul and divinity each Mass. The God who created each of us will dwell in our very hearts.

We know – and Jesus knows – we cannot do this on our own. Therefore, he strengthens us when we receive him in the Eucharist. The Holy Spirit is always with us to strengthen and guide us. Our generous Father is giving us all the grace we need to live the radically holy life that we are called to live. Holiness, and ultimately perfection, are not just meant for canonized saints. No, we are all called to holiness. We are all called to an abundant life in Christ.

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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2021

(Lec. 26)

- 1) Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18
- 2) Romans 8:31b-34
- 3) Mark 9:2-10

Gospel related: CCC 151, 459, 552, 649

**SECOND SUNDAY
OF LENT**

FOCUS: Jesus is God's *beloved Son*, who was sacrificed for us.

Take your son Isaac ... whom you love ... (and) offer him up as a holocaust. These are shocking words to us, but would not necessarily have been so for Abraham. Child sacrifice was an accepted practice in Abraham's time among the polytheistic religions. But our God does not desire human sacrifice. Thus – and what is even more shocking in this story – God stops him! No pagan deity – the false gods of the polytheists – would ever have stopped a sacrifice. God was putting Abraham to the test, and for his faithfulness he was granted righteousness and became the father of a great nation, through whom, *all the nations of the earth shall find blessing.*

Christ is a descendant of Abraham, and theologians point out the parallels between this episode and the crucifixion. Just as Jesus carried his cross, Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice. Abraham was *willing* to sacrifice his beloved son for God. God *did* sacrifice his Son for us.

God's sacrifice of his Son for us is at the heart of Saint Paul's message to the Romans today. *If God is for us*, he says, *who can be against us?* God loves us, and this love was made known when God *did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all.* Because of this we have reason to hope, since Jesus *intercedes for us.*

This hope is brought to light in today's Gospel account of the transfiguration of Jesus. Accompanied by three of his disciples, Jesus goes up a mountain. While they were there, Jesus *was transfigured before them.* Then Moses and Elijah appeared, and *they were conversing with Jesus.* Overshadowed by a cloud, the disciples hear a voice declaring, *This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.* And suddenly they are once again alone with Jesus.

The transfiguration of Jesus demonstrated his divine nature and manifested the glory he had always possessed, and would return to upon leaving his earthly human body. It is also a prefiguring of the glory we shall one day obtain in our resurrected bodies. If we live and die with Christ – if we do in fact *listen to him*, for he *intercedes for us* – then we shall take our place among our ancestors, as Christ showed on that mountain.

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