

AUGUST

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**YEAR B
WEEKDAYS I**

SUNDAY, AUGUST 1, 2021

(Lec. 113)

- 1) Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15
- 2) Ephesians 4:17, 20-24
- 3) John 6:24-35

Gospel related: CCC 423, 698, 728, 1094, 1296, 1338, 2835

**18TH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: To accomplish the works of God we must believe in the One he sent.

In last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus fed a crowd of more than five thousand, and now much of that crowd has followed him to Capernaum in the hope that he will perform another sign. Jesus understands their hunger but knows it is not a spiritual one. They clearly haven't understood the true significance of what he did with those simple loaves and fishes. In an attempt to refocus their minds, Jesus tells them, *Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life.*

But as often happens, the crowd does not understand, and the people are unable to see their relationship with God and his generous care as a divine gift. Jesus reminds them that it was the Father who fed their ancestors with manna in their time of need. Yet even then, they remain stubborn, demanding something more – a never-ending source of bread to feed their stomachs forever. Little do they understand his words and the meaning behind them!

This part of the Gospel of John is referred to as the Discourse on the Bread of Life. Jesus begins to speak directly to the crowds and to identify himself as the one who feeds all who hunger for truth and knowledge of God – the true bread of life, given by the Father to satisfy the deepest spiritual need.

Today and for the next three weeks, as we hear the discourse proclaimed and the people's response to Jesus' self-revelation, we have the opportunity to think about our own response to the bread of life, now offered to us at this Eucharistic feast.

Like the people in today's Scriptures, we, too, can search out the wrong things in life: things that we think we need or that we are sure will fulfil our every desire. In the face of the dusty roads of life, we can grumble as the Israelites did, preferring the fleshpots of Egypt even as their fullness came with slavery. We can even ask, *What is this?* – refusing to be grateful that God chooses us to be his privileged sons and daughters, preferring to indulge in our rebellious grumbling and finding ourselves on the verge of refusing his gift of self.

Yet, as Paul tells the Ephesians – and his words ring true for us – we are not to live like Gentiles, but in Christ. There is truth about life that we have learned from Jesus and it urges us to live in *righteousness and holiness*. The Eucharist we celebrate today seeks to nourish our hearts and feed our souls. No matter what our response, God's unfailing love and abundant care are ever-present if we are only ready to accept them. For to *accomplish the works of God* is to *believe in the one he sent*.

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Monday, August 2, 2021
(Lec. 407)

- 1) Numbers 11:4b-15
- 2) Matthew 14:13-21

MONDAY OF
18TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Eusebius of Vercelli,
Bishop;
Saint Peter Julian Eymard,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 1329, 1335

FOCUS: Lord, we hunger for you.

Hunger is an experience that we face in different ways. On a basic level, we know what it is like to be hungry for food. But another common experience we share as humans is our non-physical hunger. Our hunger for love. Our hunger for community and belonging. Our hunger for fulfilling experiences. Our hunger for God. These types of hunger are about the deeper things that we need to sustain us in life.

Our readings today show God's love as a response to our hunger in life. In our ancient history, when we were wandering in wait for the Promised Land, God provided manna to sustain us. God was not distant. He was with us on the long journey to the Promised Land. He meets us in our hunger.

In the Gospel, God is once again with us in our hunger. As the crowds gather around Jesus, they are searching for something deeper. Jesus recognizes this. His heart is moved with pity, and he begins to cure the sick. When he recognizes their hunger, he is able to feed the five thousand with just five loaves and two fish – and there are leftovers. This story reveals God's abundance in a profound manner. God's love for us is such that he recognizes our longings and provides for more than what we need.

Today, gathered at this table, we bring our deeper hunger. As all God's children have been before us and will be after, we will be fed. We come to this table to be nourished by a God who loves us abundantly.

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Tuesday, August 3, 2021
(Lec. 408)

1) Numbers 12:1-13

2) Matthew 14:22-36

or Matthew 15:1-2, 10-14

Gospel related: CCC 448 CSDC 453

TUESDAY OF
18TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The Lord speaks to us and bids us come to him.

In the first reading, Miriam and Aaron complain against Moses, seemingly bothered by the special relationship he had with the Lord. Scripture tells us that Moses *was by far the meekest man on the face of the earth*. Unlike the other prophets who saw the Lord through visions and dreams, the Lord spoke to Moses *face to face ... The presence of the Lord he beholds*.

Peter also enjoys a unique relationship with the Lord. In today's Gospel, Jesus commands Peter to get out of the boat and come toward him. Peter, full of excitement and trust, steps out and walks across the water. Suddenly the wind picks up and Peter begins to sink. One can picture Peter in this moment, understandably afraid, taking his eyes off Jesus. He cries out, *Lord save me!* and Jesus replies, *O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*

As we turn to the Eucharist, we behold Jesus Christ: body, blood, soul, and divinity. We behold the presence of the Lord, who speaks to us through word and sacrament. Moreover, he comes to dwell within us. May this sacrament provide us with the grace to keep our eyes on Jesus, trusting that not even the strongest wind can separate us from God.

Wednesday, August 4, 2021
(Lec. 409)

- 1) Numbers 13:1-2, 25-14:1,
26-29a, 34-35
- 2) Matthew 15:21-28

Gospel related: CCC 439, 448, 2610

WEDNESDAY OF
18TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint John Vianney,
Priest)

FOCUS: The Lord is our strength.

One of the four basic elements, or types, of Christian prayer is a prayer of supplication, petition, or intercession. In other words, we pray to God for help. It might be a need that we have for ourselves, or it might be asking God for help for a friend or family member. It might be for a concern that we have for the world. When we ask God for help, we are placing our trust in him, acting on our faith. And we know he hears us, because the entire story of our salvation is one of him hearing us and coming to our assistance. He does this most perfectly when he sends us his Son.

The Canaanite woman in today's Gospel shows a powerful faith, which may surprise us. Given her different background, one would assume that she would place her faith in someone other than Jesus. And yet, she shows great conviction in asking Jesus to pity her and help her daughter. She is vulnerable, but she is relentless in asking Jesus to help her desperate situation. In the end, Jesus acknowledges her incredible faith and heals her daughter from her affliction.

Today, let us attend to where our faith is. Wherever we would place it, we know that God can strengthen it. His powerful presence is always in our lives, and we can always place our trust in his great love for us.

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Thursday, August 5, 2021
(Lec. 410)
1) Numbers 20:1-13
2) Matthew 16:13-23

THURSDAY OF
18TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
The Dedication of the
Basilica of Saint Mary Major)

Gospel related: CCC 153, 424, 440, 442, 540, 552, 553, 554, 586, 607, 869, 881, 1444, 1969

FOCUS: Jesus conquered death forever and his true glory is revealed.

Our Gospel passage today takes place in the region of Caesarea Philippi. It was a verdant and fertile area, home to many pagan temples during the Greek and Roman periods. Specifically, it was the religious center for worshipping the Greek god Pan. The city was a hub of immorality, and a large cave in the area was believed to hold the gate to the underworld where the fertility gods lived in the winter.

It is here in this ideal setting where Peter makes a glorious proclamation: that Jesus is *the Christ, the Son of the living God*. Peter will become the rock upon which the Church is built, and *the gates of the netherworld* – the very gates and cave openings the disciples could see – would *not prevail against it*.

After Jesus praises Peter, he speaks of how the Church will come about: through Jesus going to Jerusalem, suffering, being killed, and then being raised. That's when Peter sticks his foot in his mouth. He says, in so many words, "not on my watch you won't." This shows Jesus, and us, that he still didn't get it. *You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do*, Jesus says.

The issue is trust: Trusting that what Jesus says, what he has in mind for us, and what he must do for us are good and necessary. Trusting that we don't have to keep telling him *how* to fix things; we can just ask that he please fix them. Trusting that out of suffering, new life emerges. Out of pain and struggle, there is hope. Through the cross, Jesus conquered death forever and his true glory is shown. *And the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail*.

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Friday, August 6, 2021

(Lec. 614)

1) Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

2) 2 Peter 1:16-19

3) Mark 9:2-10

Gospel related: **CCC** 151, 459, 552, 649

**THE TRANSFIGURATION
OF THE LORD
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Enlightened by Christ and at the proper time, Peter will work to build something in response to the Transfiguration.

Today we celebrate the feast of the Transfiguration. In the presence of Peter, James, and John, Jesus is transfigured in such a way that the glory of his divine nature shines forth in dazzling brightness. There, on the Mount of the Transfiguration, Moses, the lawgiver, and Elijah, the great prophet, appear with the transfigured Jesus.

Peter is caught up in this holy moment and is seemingly so confused by what is happening that the only thing he can think to do is to build something. Peter suggests building tents on the mountaintop, so that Jesus, Moses, and Elijah might remain there. Doing so would allow this mysterious and powerful experience of the shining presence of God and the prophets to remain present to Peter and the others.

Yet, just as quickly as the Transfiguration occurs, it is over. Peter, James, and John are told to listen to the Son of God, and so they do, as they make their way down the mountain with Jesus. He tells them to keep the incident to themselves for the time being. Once Jesus has risen from the dead, they will understand the full import of what they have witnessed. Only then will they be able to tell others.

So it comes to pass that, following our Lord's resurrection, Peter and the others are soon found in and around the temple in Jerusalem. They are no longer dazed and confused, huddled and afraid. They boldly proclaim the name of Jesus and teach and heal in the name of the risen Lord. It is then that God begins to capitalize on Peter's instinct to build something – a place where others might encounter the power and the beauty of the risen Lord, as well as the challenge and the encouragement of the prophets.

Responding to God's call in their lives as Apostles, Peter, James, John, and the others begin to build – not tents, but the Church. Their apostolic efforts and their sacrifice, joined with Christ's saving self-sacrifice on the cross, begin the process of building the Church – a spiritual home for so many through the centuries. Through the Church, Jesus will continue to heal and teach, comfort and forgive, bring food to the hungry, rest to the weary, and hope for the world.

And so it is down to our day. The Eucharist we gather to celebrate and to receive on this feast gives us the strength and grace to continue to build up the body of Christ that is the Church. May the shining presence of Christ always be seen and shared here.

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Saturday, August 7, 2021
(Lec. 412)

- 1) Deuteronomy 6:4-13
- 2) Matthew 17:14-20

SATURDAY OF
18TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Sixtus II, Pope,
and Companions, Martyrs;
Saint Cajetan, Priest;
Saturday in honor
of BVM)

FOCUS: Be faithful to God in good times and bad, growing in humility and gratitude.

In today's first reading, Moses instructs the Israelites to remain faithful to God when they enjoy prosperity. Everything they have is a gift from God, who brought them out of slavery in Egypt. God will eventually lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, where they will enjoy large cities they did not build, an abundance of goods they did not work for, and cisterns, vineyards, and olive groves they did not dig or plant. Moses commands them: *The Lord, your God, shall you fear; him shall you serve, and by his name shall you swear.* They are to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and strength – and to drill these words into their children.

We are their children, and it is helpful for us to be reminded of Moses' words. For we, too, can easily fall into the mindset of mistakenly believing that all the good things in our lives come purely of our own merit, our own hard work. While we certainly must work hard and cooperate with God, we must also acknowledge that even our existence is a gift from God. We must cultivate hearts of gratitude, thanking God continuously for his great gifts.

The father in today's Gospel knelt before Jesus and asked for pity for his son. He approached with a heart open to God's gifts and a faith that honored the power of Jesus to do his Father's will. If we, too, humbly turn to him in faith, he will hear our prayers.

Practicing gratitude cultivates humility because it helps us understand that all we are and all we have come from God. Practicing gratitude in good times, therefore, helps us remain faithful during bad times. Today, let us pray that the Holy Spirit strengthens us in these virtues.

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 8, 2021

(Lec. 116)

1) 1 Kings 19:4-8

2) Ephesians 4:30–5:2

3) John 6:41-51

Gospel related: CCC 151, 259, 591, 728, 1001, 1355, 1406, 1428, 2837

19TH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus is the bread of life sent down from heaven to feed God's people. And in partaking of this food, we are changed.

Today's reading from the Gospel of John is from chapter 6, which scholars and editors name the Bread of Life Discourse. In this lengthy oration, Jesus is professing that he is the *bread of life* sent down from heaven, by the Father, so that *whoever eats this bread will live forever*. It is a pivotal section in Jesus' ministry, because this is the time when many who follow him will find his words too difficult to hear, and will leave him. We don't hear that part yet. What we do hear is the truth and foundation of what we profess and believe when we offer our "Amen" when receiving the body and blood of Christ. Jesus is *the bread that came down from heaven*. And in partaking of this bread – his body, blood, soul, and divinity, we are changed. We become united with God and his work. We are then sent forward to make God's kingdom present on earth through our own efforts.

The Father who sent the Son has always fed his people – for a greater purpose. The Lord provided manna in the desert to Moses and his people – and they continued on their journey to the Promised Land. In today's first reading from Kings, Elijah is despondent and prays for death. But the Lord provides, sending an angel to rouse him and feed him, that he might continue his forty-day-and-forty-night trek to Mount Horeb. There he will encounter the Lord directly, and be commissioned to go back to his prophetic mission.

That the Lord feeds and nourishes his people is no surprise. Scripture is full of stories on this account. What is different about today's declaration, however, is how that food transforms us. What Jesus offers outshines the simple hearth cake Elijah gets or even the manna given to Moses and the Israelites. Jesus goes beyond just giving food. He is more than a messenger of God or even a prophet like Moses. Jesus is God's Son. In giving the bread, he gives us much more. Jesus tells us that he is the bread of life. Eating this bread not only sustains us for our labors, but it fundamentally changes us. Eating this bread that is offered gives eternal life. It gives us a new relationship with God. We are united to God the Father through his Son, and we are sent – to be helped by the Holy Spirit – to proclaim the Good News of Christ. To be *imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us*.

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Monday, August 9, 2021

(Lec. 413)

1) Deuteronomy 10:12-22

2) Matthew 17:22-27

MONDAY OF

19TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross,
Virgin and Martyr)

Gospel related: CCC 554, 586

FOCUS: The fulfillment of God's law is love.

Today's first reading summarizes what the Lord requires from his chosen people, Israel. They are asked to love and serve the Lord with their whole heart and their whole being and to keep the Lord's commandments and statutes. While this request may seem daunting, Moses reminds them that the law has been given for their well-being.

God, to whom the heavens and the earth and everything on the earth belong, has chosen them as his special people to love. Therefore, Moses calls them to *circumcise [their] hearts*. It is a call to conversion: to not be so stubborn and self-reliant and instead open their hearts to the Lord and trust that all God's works are for their good, even the law.

While God had chosen to love the Israelites through the law in the past, this covenantal relationship was extended to all of humankind when the Son of God became man. The beginning of today's Gospel reminds us of all that God has done for us. Not only did God become man, but he was persecuted, died, and rose again to save us. Much as the Israelites were saved from slavery to the Egyptians, we have been saved from slavery to sin and death.

At our baptism, we were initiated into this paschal mystery. With the gift of new life in Christ, we also received the responsibility to conform our lives to his. Like the people of Israel, we can show our love for God by obeying the commandments and loving our neighbors, especially the most vulnerable. Earlier in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus preached that he did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it (Mt. 5:17). God gave us the law not to limit our freedom, but to help us experience true freedom. God is our beginning and our end. To reach our final happiness, we must follow the law of love given by the Father and fulfilled by the Son.

Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Virgin and Martyr (1891-1942) Born into a devout Jewish family, philosopher Edith Stein converted to Catholicism in 1922. The gifted teacher and writer professed vows as Teresa Benedicta of the Cross with the Carmelite Order in 1938. Arrested in 1942, Teresa died in the gas chambers of Auschwitz for refusing to deny her Jewish roots or her Catholic faith. She was canonized in 1998.

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Tuesday, August 10, 2021

(Lec. 618)

1) 2 Corinthians 9:6-10

2) John 12:24-26

Gospel related: CCC 2731, CSDC 570

**SAINT LAWRENCE,
DEACON AND MARTYR
- FEAST**

FOCUS: God's power transforms death into abundant life.

Today the Church celebrates the feast of Saint Lawrence, a deacon of the Church in the fourth century. We know little about his life, but one story has been passed down and has edified the faithful for centuries. Saint Lawrence lived in a time of persecution, and handled the money for the Church in Rome. After Pope Sixtus II was martyred, Lawrence prepared for his own arrest by selling the material possessions of the Church and giving the money to the poor. When the emperor asked Lawrence to give the Church's treasures to the empire, Lawrence agreed to deliver them a few days later. When the emperor's prefect arrived, Lawrence presented a group of the poor, including orphans and widows, and simply stated, "these are the treasures of the Church." This bold action enraged the emperor and led to Lawrence's martyrdom.

Lawrence's story is an example of the Gospel truth we hear today: *Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat, but if it dies, it produces much fruit.* It's an example not so much because Lawrence was martyred, but because even before his physical death he died to self: relinquishing every bit of his worldly security by selling all the material possessions he had access to – and giving life to the poor as a result.

The power of God transforms every death into life and brings forth abundant fruit where no one would have imagined. God embraces the poor and lowly as his treasures, confounding the way of the rich and powerful. God's grace transforms normal people into saints whose legacy builds God's kingdom for years to come. We celebrate what God has done in Saint Lawrence and beg for the grace to be transformed as well into who he calls us to be. May our participation in this Eucharist bring about our death and rising in Christ and an abundance of fruit in the vineyard of the Lord.

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Wednesday, August 11, 2021
(Lec. 415)
1) Deuteronomy 34:1-12
2) Matthew 18:15-20

WEDNESDAY OF
19TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Clare,
Virgin)

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

FOCUS: God entrusts to us the message of reconciliation.

Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Let's take a minute to look around – to look at those with whom we are sharing this space. We are not just randomly gathered, we are gathered *in his name*. Thus, as he promised, Jesus Christ is in the midst of us. Let us rejoice and be glad! Right here, right now, Christ is with us. How blessed are we? We have the gift of his presence, and we can take comfort in his love and be grateful for his mercy. We can listen to his message.

His message is one of reconciliation. The verse we heard with our Alleluia, before the Gospel, says, *God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.* And in the Gospel itself, Jesus is speaking to his Apostles, knowing that his time on earth is coming to an end, and laying a foundation for them to carry on: They will have the power to absolve sins. This is the foundation of our sacrament of reconciliation.

But, as always, he is speaking to us as well. Within this guided structure of life in community, Jesus tells us to seek out our brother who has sinned against us and, in humility and charity, tell him the offense. This is not a free pass to judge others. It is an opportunity to ensure that brokenness does not continue to grow and fester; it is a chance to invite them back into our life with Christ. It also means being open to recognizing when we are at fault, and to humbly accepting the need for repentance and reconciliation. Our mission is to be Christ to others, and to let others be Christ to us. Our call is to forgive and be forgiven, to show each other the Father's love.

Christ is present to us, with his mercy and forgiveness. Let us be Christ to one another with the same.

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Thursday, August 12, 2021

(Lec. 416)

1) Joshua 3:7-10a, 11, 13-17

2) Matthew 18:21-19:1

THURSDAY OF

19TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Jane Frances de Chantal,

Religious)

Gospel related: CCC 982, 2227, 2364, 2843, 2845

FOCUS: Forgive one another from the heart

Everybody knows about the parting of the Red Sea. Many of us may even be able to conjure up the famous scene, from the movie *The Ten Commandments*, of Charlton Heston standing above the waters, staff and arms raised while clouds swirl and waters recede. The Hebrew people make it safely through the breach, while the pursuing chariots of the Egyptian army are swallowed up in the tumultuous return of the waves. It makes for great theater.

The story we heard from the book of Joshua today isn't quite as dramatic from a Hollywood standpoint. But it is no less important. As with Moses, it is a story of exodus and conquest. It is a story of God's deliverance of his people and the fulfillment of his promises. It is a story of God's presence among his people, in the Ark of the Covenant, as they move from desert wanderers to a nation united in their completion of the final passage to a land of their own.

It is here they would begin their generations of vacillating faithfulness to and rebelliousness from the Lord. It is to their descendants that God would send prophets, kings, and judges. It is from their offspring that the Messiah would come, teaching the ways of the kingdom of heaven and offering instruction on mercy and forgiveness. The Lord has held back bodies of water for us; he has fed us when we were starving; he gave our ancestors land whose riches and bounties were not labored for by them. Most importantly, he gave us his Son, that we might be made worthy through him of the Father's compassion. Is it really too much to ask that we do as Christ commands, and forgive one another from our heart? It may not be exciting theater, but it makes for an authentic human experience.

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Friday, August 13, 2021
(Lec. 417)

- 1) Joshua 24:1-13
- 2) Matthew 19:3-12

FRIDAY OF
19TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saints Pontian, Pope,
and Hippolytus, Priest,
Martyrs)

Gospel related: CCC 796, 922, 1579, 1605, 1610, 1614, 1615, 1618, 1620, 1644, 1652, 2053, 2336, 2364, 2380, 2382 CSDC 209, 210, 217, 219

FOCUS: May what God has created and made manifest among us in love bear the fruit he intends it to bear.

In today's Gospel, Jesus extols God's gift of married life. These can be a difficult words for many to hear, due to the pain of divorce or abandonment; a lack of commitment; or even the absence of the opportunity for marriage for those who greatly desire it. This pain and brokenness is not to be overlooked. In fact, its existence shows the immensity of the truth of which Jesus speaks, for why would we grieve if this union were not something to be cherished?

In his pastoral letter *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis re-emphasizes Jesus' words that, "what God has joined together, man must not separate." He continues, saying that God's grace which has brought two people together in marriage, "should not be viewed as a 'yoke' imposed on humanity, but as a 'gift' granted to those who are joined in marriage" (AL 62).

Marriage is God's gift of love shared by a man and a woman, a gift of faithfulness that sanctifies them. The gift of married life is rooted in love which always seeks the greatest good for one's spouse; it is rooted in forgiveness and mercy. This is the same love that God showed to Israel; it is the same forgiveness and mercy he granted them – all of which is what Joshua was reminding the elders of the tribes of Israel in today's first reading.

But clearly marriage is not the only relationship for which Jesus' – and Pope Francis' – words have relevance. We fail one another, and we fail as God's children when sin and brokenness prevent any God-given gifts from bearing fruit – no matter the relationship, not just marriage. But God's grace and the help of the Holy Spirit are there to assist us in loving one another as Christ loves us. It is not easy. We are not perfect. But the word of God is there to guide us. His mercy endures forever. Let us avail ourselves of it, with contrition and repentance where needed – that the beauty of what God has created and made manifest among us in love may bear the fruit he intends it to bear.

Saints Pontian and Hippolytus (3rd century A.D.) After serving as pope from 230-235, Pontian was arrested during a persecution of the Church and banished to a life of slavery on the island of Sardinia. Hippolytus was a priest – eventual bishop and "anti-Pope" – in Rome in the third century who opposed Pope Callixtus' lenient approach to allowing back into full communion with the Church those who had worshiped false gods. Hippolytus was a great scholar and foremost authority on Church liturgy. He, too, was arrested for his Christian beliefs in 235 and sent to Sardinia, suffering the same fate as Pontian. Hippolytus was reconciled to the Church before being martyred.

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Saturday, August 14, 2021
(Lec. 418)
1) Joshua 24:14-29
2) Matthew 19:13-15

SATURDAY OF
19TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Maximilian Kolbe,
Priest and Martyr)

FOCUS: Remember the great works of the Lord.

The first reading today concludes the Book of Joshua and contains his final speech to the Israelites. By this time in the Exodus, many of the children of Israel whom Joshua addresses were born long after the great events of their redemption from Egypt.

Fear the Lord and serve him completely and sincerely, Joshua says, cast out the gods your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt. "Go all in," Joshua says, and make no room for strange gods. And the people promised Joshua, We will serve the Lord, our God, and obey his voice.

The Israelites' response is a great model for us. They remember the great works of God and his deliverance, and that leads them to an act of faith in the God of their fathers. Joshua had warned them three times, saying, *you may not be able to serve the Lord*. But at each juncture, the people still answered affirmatively. *So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day.*

Just as the children of the Exodus were the ones to whom the Promised Land ultimately belonged, so it is to the children of God that the kingdom of heaven belongs. As we accept our role in the covenant, coming to Christ in faith and being sealed with his Spirit, we, too, affirm that *we will serve the Lord, our God, and obey his voice*. As it was difficult for the children of Israel to be faithful to the covenant in a hostile environment, so will it be for us in the world. Temptation in the form of other gods and idols will befall us.

Thus, we are to remember the great works of the Lord; to respond to him with an act of faith; and to keep going. Go all-in, with a child-like openness to the gifts that await us.

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 15, 2021

(Lec. 622)

- 1) Revelation 11:19a;
12:1-6a, 10ab
- 2) 1 Corinthians 15:20-27
- 3) Luke 1:39-56

Gospel related: CCC 148, 273, 422, 448, 495, 523, 706, 717, 722, 971, 2097, 2465, 2599, 2619, 2675, 2676, 2677, 2807, 2827
CSDC 59

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY - SOLEMNITY

FOCUS: From beginning to end, Mary's life was one of faith and prayer.

Today we celebrate the fact that Mary was assumed, body and soul, into heaven. Christians in both the East and the West have a long tradition of celebrating the dormition ("falling asleep") of Mary. In large part because of these long-standing liturgical traditions, Pope Pius XII defined the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary on Nov. 1, 1950. In his encyclical *Munificentissimus Deus* (Generous God), he also cited Mary's intimate connection with her Son – the new Adam – and his victory over sin and death.

To understand the end of Mary's life, one will have to fully appreciate the beginning of it. From the moment of her conception by Saint Anne and Saint Joachim, Mary was free from sin. [We celebrate this on Dec. 8.] The Holy Spirit was preparing her by his grace so that she would be capable of welcoming the Son of God (CCC 722). Years later, when the Angel Gabriel approached this young maiden from Nazareth, her obedient "yes" was made possible by her deep faith.

Convinced that *nothing will be impossible for God* (Lk 1:37), Mary sets off to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. In today's Gospel, Elizabeth names Mary as *blessed among women* and identifies her as *the mother of my Lord*. Indeed, the baby in her womb who leaped for joy was destined to become the greatest prophet to recognize the Messiah (CCC 523) – John the Baptist.

And how does Mary respond to her cousin's greeting? She responds in prayer. *My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his Name.* She gives all the glory to God! She goes on to name all that God has done to raise up the lowly. This must have been typical of Mary. If prayer is communion with God, she must have developed a life-long habit of prayer; and when she is in ultimate communion with the God she was carrying in her womb, how much easier it was to sing God's praise. This "Magnificat," or "Canticle of Mary," is one of the most ancient Christian hymns. It is modeled after similar songs of praise in the Old Testament. We still use it in our liturgies, particularly at Evening Prayer.

Our life of faith, too, must be sustained in prayer – both personal and communal prayer. Our participation in the liturgy both expresses and nourishes our faith (CCC 1123). Making time in our day for personal prayer, too, enables us to appreciate God's abiding presence and places us in deeper communion with him. If we follow Mary's example – a routine of prayer, a habit of praise, and a total submission to God's will – we will join in her heavenly reward.

* * *

Monday, August 16, 2021
(Lec. 419)

- 1) Judges 2:11-19
- 2) Matthew 19:16-22

MONDAY OF
20TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Stephen of Hungary)

Gospel related: CCC 2052, 2053, 2075, 2400 CSDC 22, 181

FOCUS: Jesus longs to satisfy our hearts.

It can be tempting to judge the ancient Israelites harshly when we hear of their idolatry. Why would they turn away from such a mighty God and place their trust in the gods of other nations who had (quite literally) done nothing for them?

Most of the answer can be found in their pride and disobedience, of course; but they were also deeply influenced by the culture that surrounded them. While this does not mitigate their sin, found in *their evil practices or stubborn conduct*, it may help *us* recognize that the ludicrous nature of the lies that they believed are not that different from the ones that we do.

For do we not also have difficulty recognizing the falsehoods that keep us from fully following Christ? Like the young man in our Gospel, we can easily believe the distorted truth that our possessions, or our wealth, or any of our earthly attachments will give us the security and comfort that will satisfy the longings of our heart. We think these things will give us peace. We think these things will make us happy.

After all, what (or whom) *do* we turn to when we are struggling? What are the idols in our lives? What do we look to for security, comfort, or happiness?

While the temptations are strong, we see that God never rests, never relents in his pursuit of his people. Again and again, God sends judges to the Israelites. He goes even further – he sends his beloved Son. Jesus comes to us and invites us, *come, follow me*.

Jesus longs to satisfy our hearts, and he meets us here, gives us all of himself in the Eucharist. And so we meet him in return, bringing our longing, our anxieties, all of our need to him today. He alone is our peace. He alone is our treasure.

* * *

Tuesday, August 17, 2021
(Lec. 420)

1) Judges 6:11-24a

2) Matthew 19:23-30

Gospel related: CCC 226, 276, 308, 765, 1058, 2053 CSDC 181

TUESDAY OF
20TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Offer all we have as sacrifice to God, for the sake of Christ's name.

Jesus is quick to offer warnings to the rich, the powerful, and the comfortable. Today's reading is no exception. Even the disciples are *greatly astonished* when Jesus bluntly declares that *it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God*.

Why is this so? Is God truly opposed to our comfort or to our enjoyment and use of material goods? No, the things in themselves are not unholy. The danger lies in our relationship to these things, and whether or not we place our ultimate hope for salvation in the wealth, power, or control that we have.

Who then can be saved? the disciples asked. Jesus answers: *For men this is impossible but for God all things are possible*. Of course we cannot save ourselves – but that doesn't mean we are exempt from any responsibility. Even Gideon, the most insignificant of *the lowliest in Manasseh*, listened to God's instructions and obeyed – offering what he had to God, *first*. God accepted this offering, and offered him *shalom* – peace, wholeness, welfare, and safety.

Perhaps, then, it is best to think of these words not as a warning, or a command, but a description, a description of a promise: *Everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times more!* It is not simply the "giving up of things" of which Christ speaks. It is the giving up – the offering up as personal sacrifice – of all we have, *for the sake of [Christ's] name*. Pray that God may free us from any attachments. For *God*, all things are possible.

* * *

Wednesday, August 18, 2021
(Lec. 421)
1) Judges 9:6-15
2) Matthew 20:1-16
Gospel related: **CSDC** 541

WEDNESDAY OF
20TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Respond with thanksgiving for the gift of God's kingdom.

Humans, it appears, are "wired" for fairness.

Perhaps that is why, in today's parable, the laborers who had been working all day, and who received the same wage as those who had worked only an hour, complained to the landowner. "How can this be fair?" they ask. They compared the hours worked. They expected more.

But the owner of the vineyard clarifies that he has not cheated them out of anything. They agreed to a wage; he provided the wage. Their error, he suggests, is in their comparison with others. Their error is their presumption that *they* can dictate what is done with the owner's money. He asks: *Am I not free to do as I wish with my own money?* Their error lies in their own expectations, and in their own negligence in not considering the generosity of the landowner.

Let us consider our own lives. How often do we become disgruntled, not because of our own condition in life, but because of our own condition *compared* to others? When we begin to compare, we begin to nurture expectations about what is fair, what is just, how we should be treated by others, or how others should not have more than we have. Yet Jesus reminds us to focus, not on ourselves, not on our own expectations, and certainly not on others. Rather, we are invited to direct our attention to the generosity of a loving God, one who wills for all to be called out of idleness, to be called into his Kingdom. It is a kingdom of inclusion, not exclusion.

As we prepare ourselves to celebrate the Eucharist, let us respond with joy to a loving God who invites us to his table, regardless of our own merits, regardless of our own work; let us respond with thanksgiving for the gift of his kingdom.

* * *

Thursday, August 19, 2021
(Lec. 422)
1) Judges 11:29-39a
2) Matthew 22:1-14

THURSDAY OF
20TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint John Eudes,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 546, 796

FOCUS: Accept God's generous invitation with gratitude.

The parable of the wedding feast in today's Gospel has three interesting elements. First, we have a feast which *is ready*, and yet the host – the king – declares that *those who were invited were not worthy to come*. Second, in response to the first point, the host tells his servants to just *go out ... and invite* whomever they find. And finally, when the servants do just that, the host rejects one of their choices – physically throws him out of the party – because the guest is not dressed properly. If any of us were this king's event planner, we might look for another job.

In the immediate context, the parable refers to the history of the Israelites, and their treatment of the prophets who repeatedly invited them to return to the Lord. The Lord sent prophets, judges, and kings – but the feast, as it were, never got started. And then God sent his Son, who quite literally *brought the wedding feast to them* by being the bread of life, but the people were – still! – not prepared.

But this parable refers to us as well, whenever we give greater priority to our worldly affairs than to God's abundant gifts and gracious friendship. It convicts us for the times we ignore his invitation to partake in the feast of faith, love, and discipleship. It alerts us to our need to be daily clothed with the armor of God so as to fulfill our baptismal promises, while also being prepared for Christ's return, and the fullness of the wedding feast to which we are called. Let us accept the king's generous invitation, and approach with gratitude the Eucharistic feast.

* * *

Friday, August 20, 2021

(Lec. 423)

1) Ruth 1:1, 3-6, 14b-16, 22

2) Matthew 22:34-40

FRIDAY OF
20TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Bernard,
Abbot and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 581, 1824, 2055, 2083 CSDC 112, 580

FOCUS: Love God, and you will love your neighbor.

In today's Gospel from Matthew, a scholar of the law asks: *Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?* By "in the law," the questioner was referring to all of the 613 commandments spelled out in the Torah. This was an interesting question, because all commandments were intended to be obeyed and kept equally. Jesus identified one from Deuteronomy (Cf., Dt 6:5) – love God – and one from Leviticus (Cf., Lv 19:18) – love your neighbor.

These two interlocking commandments identify our deepest obligation – to love with our entire being the one who created us, and to love all who are created in his image. They are inseparable, comprising all the other commandments. For in loving God, we are naturally led to loving others and doing what is right and just for them. Love is itself the law.

The story of Ruth staying with her mother-in-law Naomi, after each had been widowed, exemplifies a love that seeks God first. Ruth and Naomi were of different, warring tribes – the tribes of Moab and Israel, respectively – and it would have been safer, easier, and likely more acceptable for Ruth to return to her people, and let Naomi return to hers. But Ruth does not choose the safe, easy, culturally acceptable way. Her love for and devotion to Naomi drive her decision. *Do not ask me to abandon or forsake you!* Ruth says. *For wherever you go, I will go, wherever you lodge I will lodge, your people shall be my people, and your God my God.*

Ruth chose love over all things – and would bear great fruit for her neighbors, that is, the world. She would marry a Hebrew man and bear a son. That son would be the grandfather to David, from whom Christ descended. Ruth's adherence to the command of love is one worth emulating, that we may continue to build and bring forth the kingdom of God.

* * *

Saturday, August 21, 2021
(Lec. 424)

- 1) Ruth 2:1-3, 8-11;
4:13-17
- 2) Matthew 23:1-12

Gospel related: CCC 526, 2367

SATURDAY OF
20TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Pius X,
Pope)

FOCUS: We are called to live humbly in service to each other as God's children.

Ruth's hard work, humility, and kindness to her mother-in-law Naomi inspired Boaz to welcome her into his household, and to eventually take her as his wife. Ruth was a Moabite who had married into the tribe of Israel and had lived in the land of Moab, but was widowed before having children. Rather than stay with her own people after her husband's death, she had followed Naomi back to Naomi's lands.

Ruth's story is one that shows that God's blessing extends to all people, not just the Israelites. Boaz, as a humble servant of God, welcomed Ruth, the foreigner – and widow. Together they would have a son, Obed, who would one day become the grandfather of David. And from David's house the Messiah – Jesus Christ – would be born. Thus, Ruth is listed in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus.

One could imagine that Jesus had this story of Boaz and Ruth in mind as he addresses *the crowds and ... his disciples* in today's Gospel. The context of his invective here includes the failure to care for the vulnerable in the community – including widows (Cf., Mt 23:14). Jesus is warning them to not follow the example of the scribes and Pharisees, for they *preach but they do not practice*. They make life difficult for people by tying up *heavy burdens hard to carry*, and *All their works are performed to be seen*, for the sake of acknowledgement and pride.

This should not be our motivation for doing good works. Instead of following their example, Jesus tells us, we should humble ourselves, becoming the servant of others – as we see that both Ruth and Boaz did – for *Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, but whoever humbles himself will be exalted*.

As we break bread today at the Lord's table, we pray that we may hear his word and live it out in our lives.

* * *

SUNDAY, AUGUST 22, 2021

(Lec. 122)

1) Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b

2) Ephesians 5:21-32
or 5:2a, 25-32

3) John 6:60-69

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

21ST SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus gives himself to God and to us completely, especially on the cross and in the Eucharist.

“Choose; and choose wisely.” This phrasing could be from any modern adventure or superhero movie. It even sounds like something a gameshow host might say. Despite the levity with which these words are often uttered in the mainstream, for a Christian they are at the heart of discipleship: Parents offer them as advice to children with regard to their decision-making and growing in virtue; Joshua gives it as a command; and Jesus demands we give an account – in other words, “decide what you will do.”

If it does not please you to serve the Lord, Joshua says to the tribes of Israel, decide today whom you will serve, the gods your fathers served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are now dwelling. As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

This instruction from Joshua was given in the face of his impending death. Moses and he had brought the Israelites through the Exodus and into the Promised Land, always under the providential and merciful hand of God. God had promised to be faithful, and he had kept that promise. Now it was time for the people of the covenant to decide then and there who they would be.

Today’s Gospel is the conclusion of the Bread of Life Discourse in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John. This is the fifth Sunday in a row where we have reflected in the Mass on just this one chapter in the Gospel. No other chapter receives such attention in the Sunday liturgy. In this chapter, Jesus has walked on water and fed thousands with the loaves and fishes. He has announced himself as the true bread sent down from heaven, and made it clear that those who do not eat his flesh and drink his blood will not have eternal life.

This is where the crowds took issue with Jesus. This is where they had to decide what they were going to do – whether they would choose to continue following him or not. And, for the first and only time in any of the Gospels, some disciples chose to stop believing in Jesus and would follow him no further: *This saying [about him being the bread of life] is hard, they said, who can accept it?*

Do you also want to leave? Jesus asks the Apostles. Perhaps he is asking the same thing of us. Jesus’ life is about servant leadership and a total commitment to the fulfillment of the will of the Father. He gives himself to God and to us completely, especially on the cross and in the Eucharist. In Jesus, there is no room for self-doubt, a divided heart, or a lackluster effort. We must give an account of our faith. To express our belief in Christ’s Real Presence in the Eucharist, we come to the altar offering our Amen to his Truth. Thus, it is the grace of the Eucharist that gives us the strength to say with Peter, *Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*

* * *

Monday, August 23, 2021

(Lec. 425)

1) 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5, 8b-10

2) Matthew 23:13-22

MONDAY OF
21ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Rose of Lima,
Virgin)

Gospel related: CCC 586, 2111

FOCUS: The Good News is found entirely in Jesus Christ.

There is an old joke about two friends who both love baseball. One day they are sharing their hopes that there is baseball in heaven. They make each other a promise that if one of them dies they will try to let the other one know the truth about baseball in heaven. After one of them dies, he appears to his friend in a dream. He says to his friend, "I have good news and bad news. The good news is that there is baseball in heaven. The bad news is that you are in Thursday's lineup playing shortstop."

It's funny, but it has one flaw as an analogy: there is no "bad news." It's all Good News, even if part of it requires something extraordinary of us. Life as a disciple has a bit of this same dynamic. What Jesus promises brings us hope and eternal life, and it also has an inherent sacrifice – "the first shall be last," or "blessed are the meek." Sometimes we balk in trying to live as we should, but we know we're headed on the right path and have the sacraments to help us when we divert from it.

This is why, in his great mercy, the corrections and rebukes of Jesus are also Good News, despite at first glance seeming otherwise. In today's Gospel, Jesus is speaking to the scribes and Pharisees, and uses very strong language. *Woe to you!* he says, *blind guides* and *blind fools*. This sounds more like a fan yelling at the umpire than Jesus inviting us into the Kingdom.

But if we return to our friends who love baseball, we see how both of these are situations where Good News is being proclaimed. The promise that the one friend is playing shortstop in heaven in a few days may be a bit abrupt, but it really is good news: he is playing baseball in heaven in a few days! Likewise, when Jesus warns those who doubt or reject him, it is out of his divine love and mercy that knows no bounds. Jesus wants those religious leaders, and us, to be saved. His correction is an invitation to repent and to embrace the Kingdom that he proclaims.

* * *

Tuesday, August 24, 2021
(Lec. 629)
1) Revelation 21:9b-14
2) John 1:45-51

**SAINT BARTHOLOMEW,
APOSTLE
- FEAST**

FOCUS: God, who knew us from the beginning, longs to show us his glory.

Before Nathanael was called to meet Jesus, before Nathanael was born, before Nathanael's ancestors were even born, God knew him. Yes, Jesus tells Nathanael that he saw him under the fig tree – which led Nathanael to proclaim that Jesus was the Son of God – but Jesus correctly tells Nathanael he will see greater things. Indeed he did: one of the Twelve Apostles, Nathanael witnessed numerous miracles, including the resurrected Christ.

Some scholars believe Nathanael is one in the same as Saint Bartholomew, whose feast day we celebrate today. This saint, though we know little about him, is one of the Twelve Apostles whose names are inscribed on the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem described in today's first reading. Consider this: Before Nathanael existed, God knew he would be a "foundation stone" for his Church. Philip called Nathanael to meet Jesus, and because Nathanael followed, he bore witness to God's glory.

In life, we are both Philip and Nathanael. Sometimes, we are asked to bring others to Christ. Other times, we are called by friends, family, or strangers to meet Christ in a new or deeper way. "Come and see" are the words of an evangelist. Do we let our encounters with Jesus motivate us to bring others to "come and see," to learn more about Jesus? When others invite us into a deeper relationship with the Lord, do we approach Jesus and expect to see and experience amazing things?

The truth is, our Lord knew each of us long before we were born. He can do so much more than see us sitting under a fig tree or in a pew at Mass. With our cooperation, he can make us saints. Our loving God wants to show us the great things Nathanael saw, such as *angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man*. He wants to welcome us into the new and eternal Jerusalem described by John as a radiant and splendid city.

Today, let us pray for two intentions. The first is that the Holy Spirit will inspire our hearts to be like Philip, to go to a loved one and tell them about Jesus. All our hearts have an empty space that only Jesus can fill. Christ is the answer to that inexpressible longing. Two, let us pray that we will respond like Nathanael when Jesus calls us closer to him or someone calls us on behalf of Christ to a deeper relationship with our Lord. The God who knit us in our mother's womb, who knows us intimately, is waiting for us.

* * *

Wednesday, August 25, 2021

(Lec. 427)

1) 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13

2) Matthew 23:27-32

WEDNESDAY OF
21ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Louis;
Saint Joseph Calasanz,
Priest)

FOCUS: Humility builds up where hypocrisy decays.

Jesus says a lot about hypocrisy in Matthew's Gospel, especially as he calls out the scribes and Pharisees in this series of *Woe to you!* indictments. The scribes and Pharisees are among the worst offenders. They make themselves out to appear righteous, while inside their hearts is the decay of their evildoing. Jesus' words are quite illustrative: *You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of filth.*

Rather than hypocrisy, Jesus wants humility. Paul's words to the Thessalonians are a tribute to this. They [Paul, Timothy, and Silas] did not take financial advantage of the Thessalonian Church; and they behaved *devoutly and justly and blamelessly* toward the believers. And rather than setting themselves above the others, as tombstones rise above the dirt, they treated the fledgling Church there *as a father treats his children, exhorting and encouraging* them to walk in a manner worthy of God. And perhaps most importantly for the sake of teaching us about humility, Paul gives *thanks to God unceasingly*, for God's work in and through him. It was God's word that the people received, not Paul's. Paul is humble enough to give the proper glory to God.

In preparation for the Eucharist, we will soon pray: "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed." May Jesus respond to our humility with his mercy and healing grace.

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Thursday, August 26, 2021
(Lec. 428)

1) 1 Thessalonians 3:7-13

2) Matthew 24:42-51

Gospel related: CCC 673, CSDC 259

THURSDAY OF
21ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We are called to be faithful servants.

Jesus' message to us in today's Gospel is very clear. We need to strengthen our hearts and stay awake because we do not know when the Lord will come. At all times, we must be prepared for this glorious moment. This can feel like an intimidating command.

How do we make sure we are living faithfully by this command? In the Gospel, Jesus uses a parable to explain the difference between being prepared and being unprepared. The faithful servant who is prepared knows when to distribute the food at the right time. This servant knows what the master has asked of them, and it is a regular habit. On the other hand, the unfaithful servant figures that the master is going to be a while. So, he decides to mistreat the other servants and eat and drink to excess.

Like the faithful servant, we know what God asks of us. Jesus has given us an example to follow. The more we practice living in a faithful way, the more it becomes like a habit. In the parable, the faithful servant's work was ultimately about caring for the master's house. For us, the more we follow God's will, the more we serve his creation. And the more we practice this faithful way of living, the more we bring the light of Christ to others by being his presence in the world. When we slack off, we turn inward and do not serve those who need us.

To strengthen our hearts and to stay awake takes practice. May the Eucharist we receive today nourish us so that we may nourish others with the love of Christ.

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Friday, August 27, 2021

(Lec. 429)

1) 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

2) Matthew 25:1-13

Gospel related: CCC 672, 1618

FRIDAY OF
21ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Monica)

FOCUS: Come, Lord Jesus.

Stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour. These are the words we hear as we await the Lord's return. This will be a truly jubilant moment, where "Christ will come in glory to achieve the definitive triumph of good over evil" (CCC 681), and bring those who believe and accept his grace and divine love to immeasurable and eternal joy. Since we know these words of Christ do not mean he wants us to physically stay awake at all times, without sleeping, we might look at another way of *staying awake*. Perhaps it might be adopting a disposition and enthusiasm for Christ's Second Coming not unlike that of children eagerly anticipating Christmas morning. One might think we would at least wake up each day asking, "is today the day?" and be disappointed to learn that no, today is not the day and we must continue to wait.

But most of us rarely ask ourselves, or even contemplate, the possibility that today could be the day. And yet, it could be. Why do we not approach each day with this question? Is it because it's depressing to think this way? Let it not be! Let us remember the promise of that day and the hope that it will be the best day. Pope Benedict XVI conveys this hope and promise in his 2007 encyclical, *Spe Salvi*: "In Christ, God has revealed himself. He has already communicated to us the 'substance' of things to come (9). This substance, Pope Benedict says, is "more like the supreme moment of satisfaction ... like plunging into the ocean of infinite love, a moment in which time – the before and after – no longer exists ... a plunging ever anew into the vastness of being, in which we are simply overwhelmed with joy" (*Spe Salvi*, 12).

This is worth staying awake for. This is worth keeping our lamps trimmed and burning. For the will of God is our holiness: to live here with the Holy Spirit he has given us that we might live as saints with him for eternity. Come, Lord Jesus.

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Saturday, August 28, 2021
(Lec. 430)
1) 1 Thessalonians 4:9-11
2) Matthew 25:14-30

SATURDAY OF
21ST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Augustine,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 546, 1029, 1720, 1936, 2683 CSDC 259, 326

FOCUS: We have been called and chosen by God.

In choosing us, God also entrusts us with a sacred two-fold responsibility. The parable Jesus tells in today's Gospel illustrates this. First, we are to prepare for the return of Christ. Second, we make that preparation by living and proclaiming the Gospel. Like the servants entrusted with their master's possessions, we are entrusted with what is most important: the Good News of Christ! With that come options: we can either live it to the full, investing ourselves in building the Kingdom, or allow ourselves to bury this great gift in fear, thereby neglecting our responsibility.

In writing to the Thessalonians, Saint Paul is well aware of the difficulties many were experiencing in living these responsibilities. As part of Greek culture, they were deeply influenced by the search for wisdom and truth. But some had great difficulty in accepting that these truths had to be lived out in the daily events of life. Christian fellowship, Paul writes, must foster unity and fraternity within the community and yet avoid being exclusively inward looking. In that short passage, Paul points out that not only is God the source of these gifts, but he is also teaching them how to put them to daily use.

As he often does, Paul exhorts them to go further: to live a tranquil life, to mind their own affairs, and to work with their own hands. By doing this, they become for others committed and productive witnesses to the power of the Gospel, making its message come alive in the daily events of life.

As the parable tells us, to those who are faithful in small matters will be given great responsibilities. Let us then be faithful, so that we may indeed share in the master's joy as good and faithful servants.

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SUNDAY, AUGUST 29, 2021

(Lec. 125)

- 1) Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8
- 2) James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27
- 3) Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Gospel related: CCC 574, 581, 582, 1764, 2196

22ND SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Pure religion is *pure-hearted*, directed toward others with care for their well-being.

The readings today discuss two very different kinds of service to God. On the one hand, there are believers who offer God “lip-service.” These are the ones Jesus criticizes so harshly, quoting Isaiah: *This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.* On the other are those who offer what we might call “heart service.” People who are *doers of the word and not hearers only.* As James writes, *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction.*

Rob Adams was on the receiving end of this pure form of religion. When he was 11 years old, he and his family had no home and spent six nights a week sleeping in the bed of his parents’ pick-up truck. One night a week, they were able to afford a motel. He was often hungry, and his biggest meal was lunch, when kind cafeteria ladies overloaded his plate. Just before Christmas that same year, a family from their church went out of town, leaving Rob’s family not only the keys to their home, but a Christmas tree, Christmas presents, and a refrigerator so stocked with food that Rob cried when he opened it.

The family from their church did not just profess their faith to God with “lip-service.” Rather, they gave what they had to others. Rob suggests that there was not any judgment, and the family did not provide extensive rules for their home; they just let his family enjoy freedom and dignity for the holidays. It changed his life, and he decided to do something for others one day.

The Pharisees and scribes in today’s Scripture demonstrate this “lip-service” to God. They, and anyone like them, immerse themselves in religious customs, but because their hearts are far from God, they are filled with malice. They direct their worship to God, but to fellow believers, direct their arrogance and judgment. No good deeds result from this – no building up of the kingdom of God occurs with this. No life-changing-for-the-good experiences happen in this environment. No opportunities to witness to the goodness of God arise from this.

Yet for those who are doers of the word, and who care for others in their affliction, there is room for bountiful harvest. Today, Rob Adams runs a national nonprofit organization whose mission it is to serve full meals on Thanksgiving to families in need. He began with the goal of providing 10 families a full meal, but this effort has grown to include 800 volunteers and more than 2,500 boxes of food, 53 pounds each, for hungry individuals and families in Utah and cities in Texas, Ohio, and Florida.

What is within our hearts? Do we offer lip service – or heart service – to God? Any small act of kindness or a small gesture from a pure heart can change another’s life, and build the Kingdom in ways we could never envision.

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Monday, August 30, 2021

(Lec. 431)

1) 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

2) Luke 4:16-30

Gospel related: CCC 436, 544, 695, 714, 1168, 1286, 2443 CSDC 28

MONDAY OF
22ND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God offers eternal life to all who believe in Jesus.

In today's readings, the word of God is brought to a diverse group of people from across the ancient world: Israelites, yes, but also Gentiles. In the Gospel, Jesus mentions Elijah being sent to a widow in Zarephath, rather than Israel; and of all the lepers in Israel, only Naaman the Syrian was cleansed. In the first reading, Paul is writing to Christians in Thessalonica, in northern Greece – some 1,500 miles from Jerusalem. And now, here we are, on the other side of the world, hearing this same word.

Jesus is present among us, speaking these words to us: "I am here. I bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free. I am here to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."

It is up to each of us to decide how we will respond. Will we let him into our lives to free us from slavery to sin, to heal our spiritual blindness? Or will we react like those in the synagogue at Nazareth, becoming angry and pushing him away?

Saint Paul told the Thessalonians that those who believe in Jesus will rise again, just as Jesus did. This is an incredible promise that gives us great hope, not only for ourselves, but also for the faithful departed. The promise of eternal life for all who believe is extended not just to those of Israelite ancestry, but to all the sons and daughters of God the Father, through Jesus Christ.

As we approach the altar today, let us pray on the image of Jesus saying to each of us, individually: "I am here." May the Holy Spirit strengthen us to welcome Jesus into our hearts.

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Tuesday, August 31, 2021

(Lec. 432)

1) 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6, 9-11

2) Luke 4:31-37

TUESDAY OF
22ND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: We witness to the power of God in our lives.

Imagine we are in the town of Capernaum in Galilee during the events of today's Gospel. We do not hear much about what the crowd is like, but we do hear that *they were astonished at his teaching because he spoke with authority*. Perhaps it was like nothing they had heard before he came. Then they witness Jesus perform an exorcism by his words. Again, they marvel at his power.

We can consider how we have shared experiences of our faith life with the crowd in Capernaum. In our faith life, what is it that has gripped us with amazement? Once we consider this, we can think about what it reveals about God's power. In the Gospel, Jesus uses his power to teach and to heal. This is what grips them. Although Jesus is not present on earth like he was then, we, too, are taught and healed by God, even in our different circumstances today.

Our wonder at God's work does not stop with what we have observed or witnessed. The Gospel passage ends by saying that the *news of [Jesus] spread everywhere in the surrounding region*. We, too, are called to consider how we might witness to our faith so that it spreads beyond just our interior life.

Let us also not forget that each time we gather for Mass, we are experiencing the power of God. We gather here to witness the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. Let us give thanks for what we have authentically received from Christ.

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