**JANUARY**

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**YEAR B**

**WEEKDAYS II**

**Mo****nday, January 1, 2024 THE OCTAVE DAY**

(Lec. 18) **OF THE NATIVITY**

1) Numbers 6:22-27 **OF THE LORD;**

2) Galatians 4:4-7 **SOLEMNITY OF MARY,**

3) Luke 2:16-21 **THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD**

[not a Holyday of Obligation]

Gospel related: **CCC** 486, 525, 527, 2599

FOCUS: God gazes upon us with love, for we are his beloved children.

*The Lord let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!*

It is clear from this prayer of blessing given to Aaron and his sons that the Lord takes great delight in looking at us! Each day, God gazes upon us with love. His face is shining down upon us, just as the sun shines upon the earth.

Imagine a parent holding a baby, staring into his or her eyes. The meeting of their eyes reveals a longing for connection and an intimacy that surpasses a mere glance or superficial look. Their mutual regard allows them to delight in each other’s presence. No words are needed at this moment, for the eyes speak “I love you” louder than any words can. This is the face shining on us, looking upon us, and beholding *our* countenance.

We live in an age of unprecedented distraction, however, where an “attention economy” vies for our gaze. We spend a large portion of each day staring at screens that purport to depict reality when, all around us, the reality of God is staring us in the face. How can we slow down and set aside our distractions, often our all-important to-do lists, to recognize the Lord in our midst? How do we behold the Lord’s face in return of his contemplation of us?

Through the Incarnation, made possible by Mary’s irrevocable “yes” to become the mother of God, the face of God was made visible on earth in a whole new way. No doubt, Mary held Jesus and locked eyes with her son; they peered with utmost wonder into each other’s faces. Today, we still can see the face of Christ all around us – through the beauty of creation, our neighbor, and even our own selves.

As Mary held Jesus and contemplated all that he was, so the Fatherholds us.As a child lies in the arms of his or her mother or father and the two behold one another, so we remain in the arms of the Father who loves us without fail. God looks upon us with a love that casts out our inner darkness and insecurity, our anxiety and sin. In prayer we allow God to see us, love us, and give us peace. And as we return his gaze and witness the face of Love, we know we are God’s beloved children.

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Tuesday, January 2, 2024 CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(Lec. 205) (OBL MEM

1) 1 John 2:22-28 Saints Basil the Great

2) John 1:19-28 and Gregory Nazianzen,

 Bishops and Doctors of Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 575, 613, 719

FOCUS: Be prepared to give testimony to your belief that Jesus is the Christ.

When we tell other people about a person or a cause we truly believe in, we reveal the importance of that person or cause in our life. Once we have made such anassertion, it is hard to take it back. It becomes the yardstick by which others measure our integrity and decide whether we are honorable or being hypocritical.

Today’s readings focus on the importance of being honorable people, especially by testifying to what we believe in and being faithful to that belief. The Gospel begins with the words: *This is the testimonyof John*. When John the Baptist answers the questions posed by the priests and Levites, he must make a choice. Out of pride he could affirm his own self-importance. Or out of fear he could refuse to answer at all. John does neither of these. He testifies to the truth that God put in his heart – that he has an important, but limited role in preparing people for the coming of Christ. Because of this, John is honored in the Scriptures for his courage, humility, and integrity.

The first reading focuses attention toward us. The author of the letter is essentially asking, “Are you willing to testify to the belief that *Jesus is the Christ*? That Jesus is your north star, your guiding light, the focus of your life? That through him you believe you will experience the fullness of life, both in this life and the next?” The author is kind but firm in challenging us to give voice to these truths. Let us receive Christ in the Eucharist today, then go forthand witness to our belief in him through our words and actions.

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Wednesday, January 3, 2024 CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(Lec. 206) (Opt. Mem.

1) 1 John 2:29–3:6 The Most Holy Name of Jesus)

2) John 1:29-34

Gospel related: **CCC** 408, 438, 486, 523, 536, 608, 713, 719, 1137, 1286, 1505

FOCUS: Christmas cannot be separated from Good Friday or Easter.

Merry Christmas! Perhaps it seems strange to say or hear those words now that we are past New Year’s Day. Much of the secular world has already packed up the Christmas decorations and moved on. The Church, on the other hand, invites us to sit with the mystery of the Incarnation and ponder this core tenet of our faith.

Today’s Gospel offers a specific moment that we are reminded of at each Mass: the moment when John the Baptist sees Jesus and declares, *Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*.

This would have signaled to ancient Jews that Jesus, as the “Lamb,” would be sacrificed as a sin offering to blot out the sins of God’s people. This little baby whose birth we have just celebrated was born for one purpose– and it’s an uncomfortable one, if we really think about it. Jesus was born to die. He was born to be the sacrificial Lamb whose complete and perfect gift of self would reconcile us to the Father. If the blood of a spotless lamb sacrificed on the Passover could save the firstborn son of each Hebrew family, how much more can the precious blood of Jesus save those who love him?

Christmas cannot be separated from the Paschal Triduum. Christmas cannot be separated from Good Friday, or from Easter. The Incarnation was the essential first step of Jesus’ role in salvation history, and it was proclaimed by his cousin John the Baptist when Jesus himself was baptized in the Jordan River: *Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*

We could say those same words when we gaze upon the Child Jesus in the manger.

Merry Christmas, indeed!

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Thursday, January 4, 2024 CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(Lec. 207) (OBL MEM

1) 1 John 3:7-10 USA: Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton,

2) John 1:35-42 Religious)

Gospel related: **CCC** 608, 719

FOCUS: Discipleship must be practiced in close relationship with our Lord, Jesus.

Before there were trade schools and long before we were able to look up how to do anything on YouTube, when someone wanted to learn how to practice a trade or craft, they would appeal to a master tradesman or craftsmanfor a position as an apprentice. The apprentice would learn through observing and working closely with the master. Rather like Jesus would have learned carpentry from Joseph.

In today’s Gospel, when Jesus saw two disciples following him, he initiated the conversation by asking them, *What are you looking for?* Almost as if they were not quite sure what they were seeking, but somehow knew that Jesus was at the heart of their quest, they respond with the question, *Teacher, where are you staying?* Jesus then invites them to begin their apprenticeship, so to speak, as his disciples when he says, *Come, and you will see.*

From this exchange, we can conclude that following Jesus requires us to encounter Christ in the context of a personal relationship. How do we cultivate our friendship with the Lord? If communication is the key to every healthy relationship, then prayer is a must. We can also know Christ through his disciples around us, through reading the Scriptures, through the sacraments, and through the stories of our Christian family heroes, the saints. Furthermore, Jesus has told us that we can encounter him through our service to the least among us – the poor, the stranger, the imprisoned.

As we prepare our hearts to encounter the Lord at the Eucharistic table, let us ponder our own progress as Christian disciples and how we might invite others to share in the joy that comes from our God.

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Friday, January 5, 2024 CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(Lec. 208) (OBL MEM

1) 1 John 3:11-21 USA: Saint John Neumann,

2) John 1:43-51 Bishop)

Gospel related: **CCC** 878

FOCUS: Discipleship requires love in word and action.

*Follow me*, Jesus called out to Philip. Philip responded to Jesus by running to get his friend, Nathanael, who he brings to Jesus. Despite his initial skepticism, Nathanael answers Jesus’ call. Jesus’ voice still calls out today, inviting those who hear to follow him. Today’s readings teach us lessons about what it means to be a disciple.

After receiving his call, one of the first things Philip does is to share that Good News with his friend, Nathanael. We can imagine the enthusiasm and amazement of these friends as they meet the long-awaited Messiah. Their joy must have been infectious and drawn others to Jesus.

The reading from the First letter of John explains that sharing the Good News goes beyond mere words – it includes action and truth. We cannot simply say that we love our neighbors; we are called to demonstrate that love through action. Loving others is not simply an emotion, but rather it is a choice that requires an ongoing effort of the will.

This call to follow Jesus invites us to reflect on our own lives. In the first reading, John writes that, *if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence in God*. John seems to be referring to the human conscience – that by examining our conscience with humility and honesty we will know whether or not we have lived out the call to love others. This reading gives us the opportunity to reflect on our own words and actions – to be honest with ourselves and in our relationships.

When we obey God’s commands and follow him, we can find confidence in our relationship with God. We pray that Philip and Nathanael will remind us of this important lesson so that we may share in the confidence of Christ.

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Saturday, January 6, 2024 CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(Lec. 209) (Opt. Mem.

1) 1 John 5:5-13 USA: Saint André Bessette,

2) Mark 1:7-11 Religious)

 or Luke 3:23-38 or 3:23, 31-34, 36, 38

Gospel related: **CCC** 151, 422, 535 **CSDC** 378

FOCUS: Living our faith requires humility and courage.

In today’s first reading, John defines victory *over the world* as having faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. It is only in and through Jesus that we can leave this world of sickness, sadness, sin, and death behind and enter into eternal happiness where we will truly be free.

Jesus is as powerful as he is merciful. In the first reading, we are told that Jesus testifies by water and blood, and in the power of the Spirit. These are the waters of our baptism and Jesus’ precious blood in the Eucharist. Through these gifts, God gives us a share in Jesus’ victory.

For John, the testimony of God is far greater than any other. The Spirit of God given to us helps to give witness to our faith when it is challenged or doubted by others.

To defend our faith, we need the courage and humility of John the Baptist, who made it very clear in Mark’s Gospel that he was the messenger, not the message. John’s baptism of repentance was preparing people to receive Jesus’ baptism of forgiveness. In that moment when God spoke from the heavens and the dove of the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, there could be little doubt that a new era had dawned. Prayers were answered and prophecy was being fulfilled.

The same Spirit that descended upon Jesus has been given to us. May welisten to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as we set forth to be missionary disciples announcing the Gospel of the Lord.

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**SUNDAY,** **JANUARY 7, 2024 THE EPIPHANY**

(Lec. 20) **OF THE LORD**

1) Isaiah 60:1-6 **- SOLEMNITY**

2) Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

3) Matthew 2:1-12

Gospel related: **CCC** 439, 486, 528, 724

FOCUS: We are meant to reflect and shine the light of Christ to the world.

Today we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord – the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to the whole world. Isaiah had prophesied that nations would walk by God’s light, gathering under his radiance. He spoke of caravans from Midian and Ephah and Sheba coming to praise God, bringing gold and frankincense.

We are the new Jerusalem of which Isaiah speaks – our light has come and the glory of the Lord shines upon us, manifested in the infant Jesus. There is greatjoy in these words: Our Redeemer has come. The long-awaited Messiah is revealed to us, bringing salvation and peace.

But there is also a challenge in Isaiah’s words, and in the revelation of Jesus Christ. If *nations shall walk by your light*, as Isaiah says, that means we must be lit up. We must be strikingly different from the *darkness [that] covers the earth*. Our very lives should offer a contrast to the norms of our culture.

As members of the Church, we are called to bear light into the darkness of all the earth. To bring light to the widow across the street who is lonely. To bring light to our child’s teacher who is bearing the weight of personal struggles on top of the work of education. To bring light to our brother who is struggling in his marriage. Whatever the darkness around us, we are called to *rise up in splendor!*

But how can we answer such a call, when we might be struggling with darkness of our own?

The Lord tells us: *Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you.* Jesus Christ has come to earth to dwell with us. The Light of the World was born in Bethlehem and has united himself with our humanity:*Upon you the Lord shines, and over you appears****his*** *glory.*

We do not have to produce this light. We must *receive* Jesus, the Light of the World. Jesus has come to give all the love we need, all the wisdom called for, all the virtue necessary to be a light to others.

Jesus our Light is speaking to us in this liturgy, giving himself to us in this Eucharistic feast. We are, like the moon, simply called to reflect the light that is poured out on us so lavishly. Let us offer this King of Light our treasures today, and prepare our hearts to receive all the gifts he pours out on us in this Blessed Sacrament.

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Monday, January 8, 2024 **THE BAPTISM**

(Lec. 21) **OF THE LORD**

1) Isaiah 55:1-11 **- FEAST**

 or 1 John 5:1-9

2) Mark 1:7-11

or

1) Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

 or Acts 10:34-38

2) Mark 1:7-11

Gospel related: **CCC** 151, 422

FOCUS: We are called and sent by the Lord.

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Lord’s Baptism, where Jesus comes to John to be baptized. But it is not just an ordinary baptism. No, the heavens are torn open and the Spirit descends with a divine voice affirming Jesus as his Son.

These striking details are important. The divine has come to walk the earth. It is important to note that at this point, Jesus had not yet begun his formal public ministry. But his baptism points to a time of fulfillment. In Isaiah we hear:*Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations*.

Today’s feast is an invitation for us to refresh in our hearts what we have been called to through our own baptism. Whether we were baptized as a child or an adult, our baptism has made us new and sends us out to follow the example Jesus has shown us through his ministry. Although our baptism happens only once, the grace of the sacrament continues to unfold before us each day. Being part of the Church, our one baptism shapes each day of our lives. It is the foundation of our faith life and impacts everything we do. We may have come to take it for granted, but if so, let us take today as an opportunity to re-center ourselves in this unfolding grace.

All of us are gathered here around this table to rekindle our commitment to our calling. May the grace we receive in this Eucharist strengthen our faithfulness to what God is calling us to in life. Let us go forth, remembering as we make the sign of the cross with holy water where we have come from and where we are going.

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Tuesday, January 9, 2024 TUESDAY OF

(Lec. 306) FIRST WEEK

1) 1 Samuel 1:9-20 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 1:21-28

or

1) 1 Samuel 1:1-8 (305) and 1 Samuel 1:9-20 (306)

2) Mark 1:14-20 (305) and Mark 1:21-28 (306)

Gospel related: **CCC** 438, 541, 787, 1423, 1427, 1673, 2173 **CSDC** 49

FOCUS: *The Lord puts to death and gives life*.

How should we respond to the presence and action of God in our lives today? The readings for today reveal some key responses.

In the first reading, Hannah approaches God with a heart-felt plea for a child – and immediately trusts that God has heard her. God blesses her with a son, and in the few verses after this passageHannah praises God and surrenders Samuel to him. In the Gospel, members of the crowd respond to Jesus’ teaching and to his authority over evil spirits with awe, recognizing Jesus’ mastery over the teaching of God and the evil spirits.

While our world is very differentthan it was in the times of Hannah and Jesus, God’s love for us and desire to answer our prayers has not changed – and neither has the power and authority of our risen Lord Jesus. If we take the time to pray and to observe the world around us, we can see that God is still very present in our world and in our lives, working through the people we love or through the movements and hearts of people who strive in various ways to make the world a better place.

Like Hannah and the crowd in the Gospel, we can trust God’s power and love for us, and rely on Jesus’ mastery over the demons and evils of our time – and the chaos that often envelops our daily lives. Let us stand in awe before our Lord, who is present to us daily and has authority over creation.

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Wednesday, January 10, 2024 WEDNESDAY OF

(Lec. 307) FIRST WEEK

1) 1 Samuel 3:1-10, 19-20 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 1:29-39

Gospel related: **CCC** 2602

FOCUS: Hear and listen to the voice of the Lord.

Samuel was a precocious devotee. He was so alert for the voice of the Lord he thought that what he heard was real. Finally, Eli realized that it *was* real. Samuel was not delusional; he was attentive. And Eli helps him to make sense of his experience.

In the Gospel, after spending much time healing the sick and driving out demons, Jesus tells his disciples it is time to move on. They need to *go on to the nearby villages*...*for this purpose [has he] come*. The disciples are devoted to him; they are attentive to his desires and his teaching. They hear him, and obey.

Eli, Samuel, and the disciples all hear God’s word, though in very different ways. In order to do so, each of them has to be open to it – to create a place in their hearts for the word of God to dwell. They have to be willing to say, *Here I am*...*speak, for your servant is listening*.

We, too,have to be willing and open. We, too,have to be attentive. And “attentive” is a great word. It’s an adjective with two parallel meanings: concentrating and considerate. We might think of the first as dealing with the mind – the intellect – and the second with the heart –the will. These are both intrinsic aspects of what it means to be human: we have hearts and minds; we assent to God with our intellect and our will.

So we cultivate awareness of God in our lives –by being mindful, heedful, and vigilant. We grow indevotion, andwith grace we become more accommodating and obliging to the promptings of the Spirit. We hear God’s word. We listen to what it says. And we act on what we are called to do.

God is always and everywhere attentive to us. Let us heed the words of today’spsalmist – *to do your will O my God, is my delight* –and delight in serving the Lord.

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Thursday, January 11, 2024 THURSDAY OF

(Lec. 308) FIRST WEEK

1) 1 Samuel 4:1-11 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 1:40-45

Gospel related: **CCC** 1504, 2616

FOCUS: God chooses to give his mercy abundantly.

In the first reading, desperate Israelites under attack from their Philistine enemies try to manipulate God to act in their favor by carrying the ark of the covenant into battle. The ark was a sacred relic of God’s chosen people, housing the tablets on which God had inscribed his commandments and serving as representation of the presence of God among them. The strategy proves disastrous, as the Israelites are defeated, Eli’s sons Hophni and Phinehas are killed, and the ark of God is captured.

In the Gospel, the power of the Lord is approached far differently. The leper trusts that Jesus can heal him, but he also has the humility to know that the choice is up to Jesus. Jesus does heal the leper, with the result that the leper is now free to move about as he wishes in the community, a freedom that Jesus no longer has because of the crowds who wish to approach him. Jesus’ love and mercy are given freely despite the pain that results for him, a foreshadowing of his loving sacrifice on the cross.

We must learn that when we feel desperate for a particular result, as if we always know best, that is a cue instead to trust not only that God wants to help us but that he will do so in the best way at the best time. Like the leper, we rejoice when he does so, just as we rejoice in coming to the altar to receive his greatest gift for us, the Eucharist.

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Friday, January 12, 2024 FRIDAY OF

(Lec. 309) FIRST WEEK

1) 1 Samuel 8:4-7, 10-22a IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 2:1-12

Gospel related: **CCC** 430, 473, 574, 589, 1421, 1441, 1484, 1502, 1503, 2616

FOCUS: *For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord*.

In today’s Gospel, we hear of another miracle of healing. Often, in the accounts of these miracles, the individual who is receiving the healing has great faith that Jesus can heal them. Today, however, we hear that the four men who lowered the mat through the roof were the ones who had faith that Jesus could heal the paralytic.

Faith, while a virtue that we claim for ourselves, is also a virtue of a community. The faith of others on our behalf can have a huge impact on us. We see this when parents present their child for baptism. It is the faith of the parents that brings the child to the holy waters. It is that same faith that they wish for their child to have, even though the child cannot yet speak for himself or herself.

While the miracle we hear of today in the Gospel does not explicitly say that the paralytic was not able to speak for himself, Mark focuses on the four men who had faith enough that Jesus could heal him. What happens? Jesus heals him because of the faith of these four men.

This is the beauty of the body of Christ, the Church. Each of us will go through trials and hard times where our faith may be tested. However, the faith of our brothers and sisters in Christ can strengthen us to continue to move forward. Jesus can speak to us, even through others and their faith.

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Saturday, January 13, 2024 SATURDAY OF

(Lec. 310) FIRST WEEK

1) 1 Samuel 9:1-4, IN ORDINARY TIME

 17-19; 10:1a (Opt. Mem.

2) Mark 2:13-17 Saint Hilary,

 Bishop and Doctor

 of the Church;

 Saturday in honor

 of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC** 545, 574, 1484, 1503

FOCUS: Heed Jesus’ call to follow him.

Today’s Gospel narrative highlights the tension between the faithful Jewish people and the Roman tax collectors. Levi is a Jewish man who must have a talent with numbers and so he works for the Romans as a tax collector. Such a career provided one with money and security, but often at the expense of relationships within the Jewish community, including friends and perhaps even one’s family. They were rejected, as were lepers and prostitutes. Many believed tax collectors did not follow the law of Moses.

The depiction of the relationship between tax collectors and Jews is not hard to imagine. Even modern Christians can think of analogous examples of personal activities or public careers that mimic these conflicts. Anything that does not act in or toward the service of love is a failure of the great commandment *to* love. Jesus, the embodiment of the law of Moses, helps us see the full intent of God’s commandments as that which is directed toward right relationship with him, and love.

In the final verse of today’s Gospel, Jesus succinctly quiets the Pharisees and illuminates the true issues at hand. Following the law is good and proper. They have had the law to guide them. They attend synagogue. They believe and follow the law. However, there are many more, such as tax collectors and sinners, who do not. God sends his Son to speak to everyone. God invites all people into right relationship with him and one another. Jesus speaks to those rejected by the Pharisees, those seen as unworthy, and persuades them they have a place if they choose to do as Jesus asks: *Follow me*.

We have heard the call, and we have chosen a place at the table. May our own lives reflect the goodness with which we have been blessed.

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**SUN****DAY, JANUARY 14, 2024 SECOND SUNDAY**

(Lec. 65) **IN ORDINARY TIME**

1) 1 Samuel 3:3b-10, 19

2) 1 Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20

3) John 1:35-42

Gospel related: **CCC** 608, 719

FOCUS: *Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will*.

In today’s first reading, we learn of the prophet Samuel’s first encounter with the Lord God. As we heard, Samuel slept in *the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was*. You’d think that spending time in the place where the Lord God abided among his people would mean Samuel might be somewhat familiar with God. But that was not the case, *because the Lord had not revealed anything to him as yet*.

Everything in God’s time, right? Some of us might have this in common with Samuel: either we do not quite understand what God is saying to us, or the Lord has not yet revealed to us what he intends to reveal. Like Samuel, the Lord is calling us but we struggle to discern what, if anything, God is saying to us. We’re just regular people with jobs and families, just trying to live a good life. What could the Lord God possibly call ordinary people like us to do?

Today’s Gospel story reveals at least one thing God is inviting all of us to do, something that is within the reach of any of us: to point the way to Christ, and to invite others to join us on the journey. In the Gospel, John the Baptist points his disciples to Jesus. They seek him and, after spending time with him, have been convinced that they have found not just a teacher as they initially thought, but, rather, something greater, the Messiah. Having arrived at this significant realization, how did Andrew respond? He went and brought his brother to Jesus.

How many of us have someone in our lives who doesn’t know Jesus? Someone who doesn’t know the joy of knowing him, of trusting in him, of receiving his love, his forgiveness, his healing and mercy? We probably all do. And so this is our encouragement to not shy away from inviting these loved ones to meet Christ.

In his Letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds us that we are temples of the Holy Spirit. The next time we find ourselves in conversation with a family member and feel that stirring sense that we should invite them to give Jesus a chance, let us ask the Holy Spirit for help. The Holy Spirit can fill us with the courage to speak, and can give us the words to lovingly extend an invitation to an encounter with Christ, the Lord.

Maybe it is true that God is not calling us to be another Samuel. But perhaps God is calling us to be one of the means through which he extends his offer of salvation to others. Let us ask for the grace to respond as Samuel did: *Speak, for your servant is listening,* and to trust that God will take it from there.

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Monday, January 15, 2024 MONDAY OF

(Lec. 311) SECOND WEEK

1) 1 Samuel 15:16-23 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 2:18-22

Gospel related: **CCC** 796

FOCUS: *The word of God is living and effective*.

New wine in old wineskins and patching old cloaks with shiny new material. Old things and new ones often do not mesh. There is something incompatible about them. A floppy disk will not work in a new computer. And an old engine will not run a new car.

But we still have wine and we still fix holes in our clothes. We still use technology and drive cars. The old things are necessary and desirable, but they may have to be handled differently. That is what Jesus was talking about. The new covenant required a departure from old ways. This is another way of saying an understatement of truth: Jesus changes things.

In taking on our humanity, Jesus raised us to a new level. We became participants in our own salvation; we are expected to be spiritually more mature, more conscious of the consequences of our actions.

That means we are to be more thoughtful in determining what God is asking of us – what boundaries we should set for ourselves in order to remain true to God. He trusts us to learn from his Son and follow his example in our lives. As we approach the Eucharistic table today, let us thank God for trusting us to be the sons and daughters he knows we can be. Let us take the old, fundamental structure of our faith and see where we need to embrace new understandings of how we are to make them work in today's age. God is putting great trust in us. Let's not disappoint him.

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Tuesday, January 16, 2024 TUESDAY OF

(Lec. 312) SECOND WEEK

1) 1 Samuel 16:1-13 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 2:23-28

Gospel related: **CCC** 544, 581, 582, 2167, 2173 **CSDC** 261

FOCUS: Jesus Christ, as the bearer of God’s love, is indeed Lord of the sabbath*.*

We are all used to interpretations of rules, whether they be at the hands of Olympic judges, trial juries, or work supervisors. Interpretation of rules is at the heart of our Gospel from Mark today.

Jesus and his Apostles were constantly on the road, sometimes going long periods without eating or resting. Sometimes, there were great crowds following Jesus who also went without eating for long stretches – as witnessed by the stories of the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand. Today’s Gospel, however, is simply about Jesus and his hungry Apostles.

The problem was that the Pharisees who witnessed them *picking the heads of grain* interpreted their actions as a violation of Jewish laws banning work on the sabbath as described in the Book of Exodus (34:21). Jesus then cited the highly revered King David, who had to use holy bread from the high priests one sabbath to feed his men. Jesus and his disciples were on an even greater mission and thus should be allowed the same sabbath dispensation as David and his troops. It was all a matter of interpretation.

Except, it’s actually more than that. The events that occur just prior to those of today’s Gospel included Jesus talking about old and new things, and the necessity of new wine being poured into new, not old, wineskins. Jesus is himself the new wine – the new covenant. Therefore, what has been – the old – must be replaced. Whereas the laws for the sabbath were kept as a matter of righteousness, God has already made us righteous in his Son and his Son’s life, death, and resurrection.

The sabbath, then, is not something for which we were made – to legislate into holiness – but is something holy that was made for us. God’s love, his goodness and peace – his rest, or sabbath – was made for us. And Jesus Christ, as the bearer of that love, is indeed Lord of the sabbath. God has dismissed interpretation and revealed the only Truth: His Son is the Savior of the world. In him we have our hope; in him we find peace; in him we find rest.

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Wednesday, January 17, 2024 WEDNESDAY OF

(Lec. 313) SECOND WEEK

1) 1 Samuel 17:32, 33, IN ORDINARY TIME

 37, 40-51 (OBL MEM

2) Mark 3:1-6 Saint Anthony,

 Abbot)

Gospel related: **CCC** 574, 591, 1859, 2173 **CSDC** 261

FOCUS: Christian discipleship requires courage.

The story of David bringing down the mighty Philistine is a favorite of many. (We don’t hear his name in today’s reading, but he has been identified in an earlier verse as Goliath.) Who does not like to see the “little guy” triumph over the powerful, overcoming seemingly impossible odds? Despite Saul’s reservations, we all like to identify with the underdog, even more so when we know that God is on his side.

So, what does this story and our Gospel passage teach us about the life of Christian discipleship? Perhaps it is best summed up in one word: courage. David, the shepherd-poet, confidently and courageously steps forward and volunteers to fight the Philistines, despite their military superiority. Yet even the king is unconvinced, for all he can see before him is a young man, untrained in war with more bravado than experience.

The scene is more reminiscent of a Hollywood movie than a moment of faith; even the powerful Goliath is dismissive of the young David. But despite his age and lack of military training, David has one great gift – total confidence in God and the courage to trust in his strength. He does not hesitate, nor does he show fear.

Jesus embodies this same confidence as he enters the synagogue and heals the man with the withered hand. He doesn’t just trust in the Father, he and the Father are one. He does the Father’s will. Jesus knows the Pharisees are watching his every move and that a healing would be seen as a breach of the sabbath, but he heals him anyway. Like David, he won’t be dissuaded or deterred – truth cannot be hidden.

Do we have that same confidence and courage in living out our lives, or do we allow ourselves to be limited by our fears and the opinions of others? One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is courage: the courage we need to be faithful in our daily lives, to stand up for the Lord and his Gospel. Let us use that gift to live faithfully in Christ.

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Thursday, January 18, 2024 THURSDAY OF

(Lec. 314) SECOND WEEK

1) 1 Samuel 18:6-9; 19:1-7 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 3:7-12

Gospel related: **CCC** 1504

FOCUS: *I know that God is with me*.

In Psalm 56, the psalmist proclaims *I know that God is with me.* Do we believe this? How can we know God is with us today?

Today’s Gospel provides us with some clues. We see people pressing in on Jesus, seeking to touch him. They likely had heard stories of Jesus healing others and sought his healing touch as well. Jesus responds, healing some physically and some spiritually.

How can we draw near to Jesus today, and experience his healing power? One way is the sacraments. In particular, we can come to Jesus in the sacraments of healing: anointing of the sick and reconciliation. In the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, Jesus offers his presence which can heal, strengthen, and console the sick and suffering.

Through the sacrament of reconciliation, Jesus forgives our sins and heals our soul. The effect of this healing is to restore our relationship with God. With the obstacles of sin removed, we can come closer to God and the Church. But the healing presence of Jesus is not limited to these two sacraments of healing. It is also found in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, Jesus offers grace to those ready to receive him, which strengthens and heals their souls. The same Jesus who healed the crowds in the Gospel story is fully and personally present in the Eucharist: body, blood, soul, and divinity. We can talk with him, gaze upon him, and ask him for his help and his healing.

As we approach the altar and Jesus is present to us in holy Communion, let us ask him to show us his presence and give us the healing grace we need today.

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Friday, January 19, 2024 FRIDAY OF

(Lec. 315) SECOND WEEK

1) 1 Samuel 24:3-21 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 3:13-19

Gospel related: **CCC** 551, 552, 765, 787, 858, 1577, 1673

FOCUS: Strive for holiness and to live as the Lord’s anointed ones.

Early in his ministry, Jesus chose 12 of his followers to be Apostles, entrusting them with a mission to preach and heal in his name. Many would abandon him, one would deny him, one would betray him. Another would come later, to take his place in lieu of the betrayer. Paul would call himself an apostle, though he wasn’t one of the original Twelve. Each of them had a role, a mission, and a vocation to embrace.

We, too, have a role, a mission, and a vocation to embrace. We are anointed in baptism – twice! – first with the Oil of Catechumens, signifying the strengthening and healing that Christ brings in the sacrament. Then we are anointed with the Oil of Chrism, signifying that we as baptized are set apart to live the life of Christ.

We see the significance of anointing in today’s first reading about David and Saul. Even though David has already been anointed as Saul’s replacement, he will not raise a hand against Saul. He regrets even cutting the end from Saul’s mantle, because Saul is the Lord’s anointed one. Though Saul had seen David as a rival and sought to kill him, David’s generosity softens him. Saul acknowledges that David has acted righteously by not killing him when given the chance.

Even as God’s anointed ones, David and Saul remained human, as did the Apostles. Those in apostolic succession – bishops and priests – are human, too, as are all the baptized. None of us is perfect.

Therefore, as we are sent out to be a Eucharistic people, may we remember to pray for the clergy and for each other. Pray that we may be an image of Christ to the world, striving for holiness and living as the Lord’s anointed ones.

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Saturday, January 20, 2024 SATURDAY OF

(Lec. 316) SECOND WEEK

1) 2 Samuel 1:1-4, IN ORDINARY TIME

 11-12, 19, 23-27 (Opt. Mem.

2) Mark 3:20-21 Saint Fabian,

 Pope and Martyr;

 Saint Sebastian,

 Martyr;

 Saturday in honor

 of BVM)

FOCUS: Step outside of yourself, and give yourself to the Lord.

The Gospel passage today is only two verses, and yet it tells us so much in those few words. In this early part of Mark’s Gospel (chapters 1-3), Jesus has moved between open areas, mountainsides, synagogues, and homes. He has been immersed in crowds, and removed himself from them.

Today we hear there is a crowd present that makes it impossible *for them even to eat*. (Previously, in chapter 2, the crowd prevented men from bringing a friend to Jesus and they had to lower him through the roof.) There is something visceral in this portrayal of crowds having a physical, deleterious effect on Jesus’ actions. It’s discordant, like a note that is played flat.

Certainly, in some passages, the crowds turn on Jesus, but that does not seem to be the case here. Just a few verses earlier, Jesus had cured many and, as a result, people were *pressing upon him to touch him* (3:10). In this passage, the crowds are again converging on Jesus because they want to be near him and feel his healing touch.

Mark says that Jesus’ relatives *heard of [the gathered crowd]* and *they set out to seize him*, saying “*He is out of his mind*”. The irony here is that Jesus came so that we – and they, the crowd, and all people – might eat of the bread of life. Yet even his relatives missed the point. Had they managed to seize him, far more was at stake than his ability to eat his meal.

Jesus was accomplishing the Father’s work, and it was like nothing the crowds or his relatives had ever seen or understood. We can forgive them for thinking this was all incomprehensible. They had yet to learn that we all must have the heart and mind of Christ to advance the kingdom. To conform ourselves to him in this way literally means we need to “step outside of ourselves” and abandon ourselves to him.

Perhaps being considered “out of one’s mind” isn’t necessarily a bad thing after all.

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**SUN****DAY, JANUARY 21, 2024 THIRD SUNDAY**

(Lec. 68) **IN ORDINARY TIME**

1) Jonah 3:1-5, 10

2) 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

3) Mark 1:14-20

Gospel related: **CCC** 541, 787, 1423, 1427, **CSDC** 49

FOCUS: *Repent and believe in the gospel*.

Time is a profoundly precious resource. When we think about the resources available to us, we often focus on material things. While we may be able to increase the amount of money in our bank account or affect the outcome of a given project, we can never manufacture more time.

Today’s readings invite us to recognize the precious nature of time. We often focus either on what will happen in the future or on what happened in the past. But the present moment is where we can act, for good or for bad. We cannot change what has already happened. What might be in the future is still only in our mind, only in our imagination. But this moment, right now, we can make a choice. It is precious and unrepeatable.

Today’s readings call us to listen to God’s voice in every moment of our day, and to act, with the help of his grace. They call us to keep our eyes focused on Christ, here and now, but also to keep a view toward the eternal. As we say *yes* to Jesus today, Christ shapes our hearts for the eternal *yes* to heaven that will be offered at the end of our earthly lives.

In our first reading, the people of Nineveh listen to God’s call and respond actively. Jonah had only gone a single day’s journey through the city when the people answered the call to conversion. They acted, they turned away from evil, and they were saved from destruction. The Letter to the Corinthians also reminds us of the urgency to act now, to make the choice to participate in the transformative work God is doing in our world. And our Gospel contains the striking image of Simon, Andrew, James, and John abandoning their nets and following Jesus.

Jesus is calling *us* today. Maybe he is calling us to drop something that we have been clinging to so we can follow him more fully. Maybe he is calling us to lay down our weeping or our rejoicing, to move into a new phase accompanied by his presence and love. Maybe he is calling us to turn away from a particular habit, or seek his healing in the sacrament of reconciliation. Maybe he is simply calling us to listen to his voice more closely, to make time to read Scripture, to pray, to reflect, to talk with a spiritual mentor or a friend.

Today Jesus is calling us near, calling us to the profound intimacy of the Eucharist. In this precious and sacred time, he wants to nourish us and give us all we need to answer his call, big or small. May we be given the grace to open our hearts as we receive this Eucharist – to act in this moment given to us and receive the boundless love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

NOTE: For the Day of Prayer, any readings from the *Lectionary for Mass Supplement*, the Mass “For Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life,” nos. 947A-947E, or the *Lectionary for Mass* (vol. IV), the Mass “For Peace and Justice,” nos. 887-891

Monday, January 22, 2024 MONDAY OF

(Lec. 317) THIRD WEEK

1) 2 Samuel 5:1-7, 10 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 3:22-30 (USA: Day of Prayer

 for the Legal Protection

 of Unborn Children)

Gospel related: **CCC** 539, 548, 574, 1864

FOCUS: Be prophets who proclaim God’s truth, so that the world may embrace the sanctity of all life.

At our baptism, we were baptized into Christ’s ministry as priest, prophet, and king. Each of these roles offers us a special connection to God and to God’s people. The priesthood of the baptized gifts each of us with the grace to be able to pray to God, for ourselves and for the world. The role of king is one of leadership, calling to mind that as sisters and brothers in Christ, we lead one another to a closer communion with each other and with God. The third role, that of prophet, does not mean that we predict the future. Rather, prophets are those people who share God’s truth with the world so that the kingdom of God may flourish.

Today’s Gospel illustrates clearly how Jesus exemplifies the role of prophet. In his interaction with the scribes, he teaches them using parables, so they may understand how their misguided words offend God. In most matters, Jesus offers the gift of forgiveness. But here he concludes that whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness. This is a sin against the person of God who moves among us, sustaining our lives, and imparting his gifts so we may grow closer to him.

As modern-day prophets, we look to Jesus as an example of how to right the wrongs of this world, including those sins that threaten the sanctity of life. That starts with bringing the people closest to us closer to God. As a quote often mistakenly attributed to Saint Francis says, we do this through our actions and, if necessary, we then use words. Today, let us call upon the Holy Spirit to inspire us to be prophets who bring God’s light into the darkness of the world. Nourished by the Eucharist, may we boldly go into the world to be prophets for the Lord.

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Tuesday, January 23, 2024 TUESDAY OF

(Lec. 318) THIRD WEEK

1) 2 Samuel 6:12b-15, 17-19 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 3:31-35 (Opt. Mem.

 USA: Saint Vincent, Deacon and Martyr;

 USA: Saint Marianne Cope, Virgin;

Gospel related: **CCC** 500

FOCUS: Come dance before the Lord with abandon.

In today’s first reading, King David goes to the house of Obed-edom to get the ark of the covenant. Just before the verses we heard today, the Scriptures recount that David had seen the blessings that were bestowed on the household of Obed-edom because of the presence of the ark of the Lord. He decides to bring the ark back to the City of David, that is, Jerusalem.

David and all the people are ecstatic at what they have witnessed, and David comes *dancing before the Lord with abandon*. He makes a great feast. He rejoices.

In this moment, David and his people epitomize what it means to be in relationship with the Lord: feeling the joy, freedom, blessing, and love that is inherent in such a relationship. God is nothing but goodness – a constant outpouring of love, grace, and mercy. Yet how often do we truly abandon ourselves before him – letting go of all cares and worries – and simply bask in the perfect truth, beauty, and goodness that surrounds him?

Too often as adults we are not able to abandon ourselves to the Lord because we may be self-conscious and/or self-centered. It’s hard to dance when our own thoughts crowd out the sacred music that surrounds us!

When we deepen our relationship to God, we may lose something of ourselves, but we will gain something far richer. We can find the freedom to dance, to sing, and to rejoice in the Lord.

Jesus tells his disciples that his family includes anyone who follows the will of his Father. This family may know heartache, difficulty, and even suffering (as all saints suffered difficulties) – but yet they have such joy. They have the joy David felt as he danced with abandon, and the joy that is waiting for each of us in the Eucharist.

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Wednesday, January 24, 2024 WEDNESDAY OF

(Lec. 319) THIRD WEEK

1) 2 Samuel 7:4-17 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 4:1-20 (OBL MEM

 Saint Francis de Sales,

 Bishop and Doctor

 of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 546, 2707

FOCUS: *The seed is the word of God, Christ is the sower*.

It's humorous, in a way, that one of the easiest parables to understand is the one the disciples ask Jesus to explain. Jesus basically says, "if you don't understand this, how will you understand anything else?" In other words, you have to understand *these* words, in order to understand *his* word.

The parable of the sower makes us pay attention to how we receive and respond to the word of God. To honestly examine whether we have an open heart to receive it. To ensure that it is rooted in who we are and what we do. To check whether it grows and bears fruit.

We know there are challenges and obstacles that can affect the growth of our faith, or its failure to grow. This was certainly true for Saint Francis de Sales, whom the Church honors today. His faith was in danger of being choked out by his father, who wanted him to have a career in law and politics. He faced discouragement when his evangelistic efforts were met with slammed doors and thrown rocks. He even faced resistance from within the Church when he preached that holiness was just as attainable for lay people as it was for priests and religious. But Saint Francis de Sales kept his eyes on Jesus and eventually became the seed that produced a hundredfold.

The transformative power of the Word is infinite. God sent it forth in his Son, and it came back to him having fulfilled its mission: We ourselves have been planted in the kingdom. We are meant to grow and bear fruit. Nothing is beyond God's generosity or capability, and yet he gives us free will to embrace the gift or take another path.

In the parable of the sower and the seed, Jesus shows that he truly understands the human condition. He knows that sometimes we are so busy with life that it is hard to care about one more thing. But the message in this parable is that God’s word is the first thing we should care about – for nothing else makes sense otherwise.

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Thursday, January 25, 2024 **THE CONVERSION**

(Lec. 519) **OF SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE**

1) Acts 22:3-16 **- FEAST**

 or Acts 9:1-22

2) Mark 16:15-18

Gospel related: **CCC** 161, 183, 434, 670, 699, 888, 977, 1223, 1253, 1256, 1257, 1507, 1673

FOCUS: *Go out to all the world and tell the Good News*.

One of the greatest moments in history is recounted in today’s first reading: Jesus intervenes in Saul’s misguided crusade. A blinding light knocks Saul to the ground as a voice challenges him: *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* Saul – humbled and helpless – asks Jesus, *What shall I do, sir?*

Jesus sends Saul to his disciples in Damascus. The man the disciples once feared is led by hand into their care, to be healed, baptized, and given his mission. His story will continue throughout the New Testament, where the Greek version of his name, Paul, will supplant the Hebrew version of Saul.

Jesus redeems Saul’s passion and zeal, reorienting it toward good and the Gospel. Paul is another example, like Peter, of Jesus’ selection of unlikely heroes: These two are revered as the great Apostles of the Church. Peter denied and abandoned Jesus at the cross; Paul *persecuted thisWay to death*. If faults were all Jesus saw in Peter and Paul, we would not have the Church we have today. The Good News is that Jesus is more merciful than that. He redeems and reorients us all, despite our faults.

In his mercy, Jesus redeems those of us who, like Peter, lack consistency in zeal for our faith, or who, like Paul, become overzealous about our own righteousness to the point of persecuting others. Jesus knows our faults and redeems us anyway. He sends us forth to glorify the Lord with our lives and to announce the Gospel of the Lord.

As we come to the table of the Eucharist, we may ask Jesus for what we need, or trust that he knows. In his mercy we receive what we need. Jesus desires every creature to know and share in the joy of this Good News. Through this liturgy he commissions us as his witnesses. He sends us forth as bright lights shining and voices calling out, reorienting the world to his mercy and love.

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Friday, January 26, 2024 FRIDAY OF

(Lec. 520) THIRD WEEK

1) 2 Timothy 1:1-8 IN ORDINARY TIME

 or Titus 1:1-5 (OBL MEM

(Lec. 321) Saints Timothy and Titus,

2) Mark 4:26-34 Bishops)

Gospel related: **CCC** 546

FOCUS: In the kingdom of God, power is associated not with dominance but with love and self-control.

In today’s first reading, Paul reminds Timothy of the strength available to him because of his sincere faith. Paul writes, *For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control.*

Seldom in our modern culture do we associate power with love or self-control. More often, we see power connected to dominance or control of others, for power allows us to exert ourselves over and above others.

Not so in the kingdom of God. In today’s Gospel, Jesus likens the kingdom to the mustard seed – a seemingly tiny, powerless kernel that gets buried in the ground, where it becomes even more invisible. Yet over time, by the steady grace of God, the seed springs forth and becomes the largest of plants, with branches so vast that *the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade.* This is a counter-cultural power, a power that builds up others with selflessness instead of dominance. Indeed, power in the kingdom of God requires self-control and breeds love.

With this power – God’s power – inside of us, we can cast out all cowardice and shame. Paul tells Timothy to *stir into flame* the gifts God has given him. It’s no wonder that fire is one of the most common images of the Holy Spirit. Are we on fire with the Spirit, using God’s strength to love instead of to control or dominate others?

As we turn now to the Eucharistic feast, we are reminded of the source of our strength and our home in God’s kingdom. With power, love, and self-control, may we build up this kingdom so that all may dwell in its shade.

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Saturday, January 27, 2024 SATURDAY OF

(Lec. 322) THIRD WEEK

1) 2 Samuel 12:1-7a, 10-17 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 4:35-41 (Opt. Mem.

 Saint Angela Merici,

 Virgin;

 Saturday in honor

 of BVM)

FOCUS: The Lord will see us through the storms of our lives.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus calms the storm that threatened the lives of his disciples. Maybe we won’t ever find ourselves aboard a sinking boat, but we all experience storms in our lives, ones that threaten to upend a relationship, our livelihood, or many other things. When such storms arise, particularly when they come upon us suddenly, we can try to stave off the impending disaster. Or we can turn to the Lord. The disciples turned to the Lord in desperation, saying, *Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?*

Jesus cares about what is happening in our lives. He came into the world to show us that he loves us enough to die on the cross for us, and he loves us so much that he remains with us in the Eucharist. Therefore, whether in peaceful or stressful times, call on the Lord each day and thank him for his steadfast presence. And, as the Gospel reveals, Jesus is the one who has the power to bring forth peace out of the chaos that any storms in our lives might cause.

If this is who Jesus is, and if we truly believe this, then when storms arise in our life, we are left with the question Jesus asked his disciples: *Why are you terrified?* Of course, this is easier said than done. A debilitating illness, a job loss, a dwindling bank account, a son or daughter heading down a troubling path, a marriage that seems to be coming apart – all are scary prospects to face. The good news is that we don’t have to face these challenges alone and, even better, the Lord will see us through them.

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**SUNDAY,** **JANUARY 28, 2024 FOURTH SUNDAY**

(Lec. 71) **IN ORDINARY TIME**

1) Deuteronomy 18:15-20

2) 1 Corinthians 7:32-35

3) Mark 1:21-28

Gospel related: **CCC** 438, 1673, 2173

FOCUS: Jesus teaches with *authority*.

When Jesus and the disciples come to Capernaum in today’s Gospel, the people in the synagogue are astonished. His teaching is different from that of the scribes: Jesus taught as one having *authority.* The word *authority* comes from roots implying self-doing or even self-being. One acting with authority acts with his own power.

The rabbis, Pharisees, and scribes would have carefully and consistently explained that their teaching stood on the foundation of the word of God in the prophets. Their teaching had power only to exhort, and only because it pointed beyond themselves back to the very power of God. They had no authority themselves; they were not authors, only teachers pointing back to what God had already said.

But Jesus taught as one having authority – having power of his own. Not only is this different from the teaching of the scribes, but this is also different from the teaching of the prophets themselves. Moses, speaking for God, tells the people in the first reading: *I will raise up for them a prophet … and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him.* The prophets speak the words of God, not their own. Even to prophesy in this way was a great risk. Anyone who dared to speak in the name of the Lord something that God did not command risked death for blasphemy – a penalty imposed by God himself through Moses in today’s first reading.

And so, Jesus teaching with authority is astonishing indeed! Everything changes with Jesus’ entry into human history. When Jesus speaks, God acts. This is a reversal of the action from the era of the prophets. With the prophets, it was God who spoke first, and the prophet then acted on God’s command – often speaking God’s words to the people. But, in Jesus, we have God’s word present in human flesh. And when he teaches, his words themselves have power to act. The command of Jesus to the unclean spirit is no mere exhortation, it is not a request or an appeal to some higher authority. The words of Jesus, *Quiet! Come out of him!* actually cause the spirit to come out.

This is true of all the words of Jesus. In other Gospel passages Jesus says, *I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be* (Jn 14:3); and *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest* (Mt 11:28). These are not empty promises; they have authority. Let us then put our trust in him – in the God who so loves us that he sent his only Son to speak and act on our behalf, on behalf of our salvation. We can then be free of anxieties about things of this world because when Jesus speaks, God acts. This is astonishing indeed.

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Monday, January 29, 2024 MONDAY OF

(Lec. 323) FOURTH WEEK

1) 2 Samuel 15:13-14 IN ORDINARY TIME

 30; 16:5-13

2) Mark 5:1-20

FOCUS: God desires our healing and freedom in him.

How long had the Gerasene man in the Gospel been inflicted with the unclean spirit? It was a sad and tortuous way of life. His crushing infliction is complicated by his being socially isolated. There was no hope for him … until Jesus comes.

Jesus’ mission was to restore communion within fallen creation – to reconcile humanity to the Father and with one another. Today’s story demonstrates the all-encompassing reach of Christ and his power. The unclean spirit recognizes him and is subject to him. The end result is that the man who had been possessed was set free.

Sickness and unclean spirits were certainly prevalent In the ancient world, and to the people of that time, they also symbolized the effects of sin: For example, people believed that a son or daughter who was sick was so because of the sins of the parents. Christ cured people of their physical ailments, but in many ways “what he healed” is not as important as that he had, and has, *the power to heal* – and does so. He came to heal us in our relationships with one another and with the Father – to free us from the death of sin.

Healing comes in many forms, and certainly modern medicine can work wonders for physical, mental, and psychological health. But some wounds are spiritual in nature – who we are in communion with God and the body of Christ. This means we must turn to Jesus, the Divine Physician, for healing.Through the sacrament of reconciliation, Jesus can truly heal us and set us free.

The more we come to know ourselves and our sin – recognizing what is “unclean” within us – and the more we strive for perfect contrition and repentance, the better we are disposed to Christ’s mercy. The more we avail ourselves of that mercy, the more free we become, making room for Christ to act in us rather than being subject to our own sinful nature. Filled with his love, made new in his mercy, and empowered by grace, we will come to be like the healed Gerasene man – one who proclaims the Good News of Jesus’ redeeming love at work in the world.

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Tuesday, January 30, 2024 TUESDAY OF

(Lec. 324) FOURTH WEEK

1) 2 Samuel 18:9-10, 14b, IN ORDINARY TIME

 24-25a, 30–19:3

2) Mark 5:21-43

Gospel related: **CCC** 548, 994, 1504, 2616

FOCUS: *Do not be afraid; just have faith*.

There are some painful scenes in today’s readings. In the first reading, a father mourns the tragic loss of his son. In the Gospel, a father struggles as his young daughter faces death. A woman who has suffered for 12 years without answers comes forward to be healed.

Jesus’ response in the face of these difficult circumstances is powerful. The woman with the years-long hemorrhage does not even talk to Jesus, at first. She just pushes through the crowd to touch his cloak. And despite the crowd, Jesus feels it. She is healed, and after she tells him her story, Jesus tells her it is because of her faith. Moving on from there, he continues to go to the synagogue official’s daughter. Even when everyone tells him it is useless and too late, Jesus tells them to just have faith. And he heals her.

Jesus tells those around them to not be afraid and to just have faith. We all face suffering, and we know how easy it is to succumb to fear in these situations. When things feel overwhelming and we struggle to see a way forward, our vulnerability makes us feel like fear is the only option. It can feel like the unknown is all there is. But Jesus urges us to not get stuck here. Jesus meets us in our pain and tells us to just have faith.

Jesus is here in this Mass – meeting us where we are, and with whatever burdens we carry, in word and sacrament. We have listened to God’s word, and in just a few moments, we will receive him in the Eucharist. May this glorious mystery increase our faith, and help us to endure whatever suffering we might face in our lives.

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Wednesday, January 31, 2024 WEDNESDAY OF

(Lec. 325) FOURTH WEEK

1) 2 Samuel 24:2, 9-17 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 6:1-6 (OBL MEM

 Saint John Bosco,

 Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 500, 699, 2610 **CSDC** 259

FOCUS: We don’t have to be worthy; Jesus is.

*A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house.*

One would think the son of such a mighty and merciful God would receive a warmer reception than the one given to him in Mark’s Gospel. It is Jesus’ first trip home since the beginning of his ministry. The people of Nazareth preferred the idea that Jesus was a poor man who worked with his hands rather than a Son of God who could do all things.

Mark says that they took offense at him. Perhaps they thought, “Who was this local carpenter’s son who thinks he knows more than we do?” We hear in the reading, though, that their lack of faith is not rewarded. Few miracles happen that day. Presumably, Jesus does just as he would later instruct his Apostles: He shakes the dust from his feet and goes on to the next town, where there are others who are more willing to believe that, indeed, something good can come from Nazareth.

Something great came from Nazareth. He performed mighty deeds and spoke with authority and wisdom. He is *our* carpenter; *our* Savior; *our* Lord. And if we ever feel that God can’t or won’t help us or that we are too sinful and therefore unworthy of his love and mercy, we can remember this moment. We don’t have to be worthy. Jesus is. We don’t have to be perfect. God is. We just have to trust and believe.

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**FEBRUARY**

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**YEAR B**

**WEEKDAYS II**

Thursday, February 1, 2024 THURSDAY OF

(Lec. 326) FOURTH WEEK

1) 1 Kings 2:1-4, 10-12 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 6:7-13

Gospel related: **CCC** 765, 1506, 1511, 1673

FOCUS: We are called to share the Gospel with others.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus calls his 12 closest followers and sends them out in pairs to do his holy work. He tells them to be fully present wherever they go. He instructs them to preach repentance and to drive out demons. They even anoint with oil those who are sick.

Anointing is something that we only directly experience in our sacramental faith life. But it is deeply significant for us, symbolizing prayers for healing, wisdom, and consecration.

The act of being anointed by holy oil draws us outside of the simple symbols it involves. For one, taking part in a ritual unites us in some way with all of those who have also experienced the ritual. The oil that is used is specially consecrated once a year by our local bishop, bringing a special significance to our Church. When the priest or deacon does the anointing ritual as part of baptism, he is anointing us as priest, prophet, and king. The grace of the sacrament is a powerful reminder of God’s presence in our lives, and God’s call for us.

Today, we follow in the example of the Twelve who were first sent forth by Jesus. Through our baptism, we have been anointed. And we, too, are sent out. May the Eucharist of which we partake today give us strength to push past our boundaries and preach the Gospel to those we encounter.

Friday, February 2, 2024 **THE PRESENTATION**

(Lec. 524) **OF THE LORD**

1) Malachi 3:1-4 **- FEAST**

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

FOCUS: God is not safe. God is good!

In his series *The Chronicles of Narnia*, author C.S. Lewis offers an allegory of the Christian story. Early in this classic tale, the characters discuss the Christ-figure, a powerful lion named Aslan. The children, who have not yet met Aslan, ask if this lion is *safe*. Of course not, those who know him reply. He is not safe, he is *good*.

Lewis highlights that God is not a cuddly stuffed animal, magically working to keep us free from suffering. He generally promises precisely the opposite. But he is powerfully present, strengthening and leading us through all evil.

Today’s readings also remind us that God is not “safe,” as it were. He sends a messenger – whom we know to be the Son – who is *like the refiner’s fire*, who purifies his sons and daughters *like gold or like silver*.

God sees the gold and the silver in us, and he works to draw us through fire to purity and glory. He does not settle for a temporary good for us, such as worldly comfort.

Today’s feast draws our attention to the redemptive suffering found in Christ and in our own trials. We learn that this suffering, painful and at times cause for despair, can be withstood and overcome in hope. We do not suffer alone; what we suffer has meaning.

Mary and Joseph do not choose the “safety” of staying home with their new baby; they choose the goodness of following God’s law by presenting him to the Lord in the temple. In so doing, they receive blessings from and provide encouragement to Simeon and Anna. Yet Mary is also told, *youyourself a sword will pierce*. Parenting the Messiah will not be safe. But salvation and light and glory will be poured out in this heart-piercing vocation.

Indeed, we are all promised the help of our *merciful and faithful high priest,* Jesus Christ. *Because he himself was tested through what he suffered*, the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, *he is able to help those who are being tested.* Jesus, the light of revelation, the salvation of God’s people, promises to be with us.

Like Aslan, Christ is not safe, and he does not invite us to comfort. But he is good. We gather around this Eucharistic table to be strengthened for the fires through which we are called. Christ meets us here, offering us his strength in the intimacy of this sacrament. May Christ, in this Mass, lift all who seek to follow him, not to safety and comfort, but to everlasting goodness.

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Saturday, February 3, 2024 SATURDAY OF

(Lec. 328) FOURTH WEEK

1) 1 Kings 3:4-13 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 6:30-34 (Opt. Mem.

 Saint Blaise,

 Bishop and Martyr;

 Saint Ansgar,

 Bishop;

 Saturday in honor of BVM)

FOCUS: We all need guidance for the mission to which God entrusts us.

It’s easy to see how Solomon could feel overwhelmed in the first reading. As a young man, he’s entrusted with the leadership of *a people so vast that it cannot be numbered or counted.* He already shows great care and concern for this vast people by asking God for the wisdom and discernment he needs to lead them well. Similarly, the Apostles need the guidance of Jesus when they return from what was most likely an exhausting experience of mission work. Jesus knows they need rest and leads them to a deserted place.

Like Solomon and the Apostles, we need understanding hearts; we need guidance and discernment day after day as we live as God has called us. Whether we’re parents, doctors, teachers, priests, or students, we will at times find ourselves in difficult and confusing situations as we strive to live our vocation. Often on our busiest days, when we can feel overwhelmed by our responsibilities, we need God’s guidance most of all.

Jesus’ guidance to his Apostles can help us in those situations: *Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.* Perhaps we can’t find a truly deserted place in our physical space, but we can spend some time in quiet prayer – even for a few minutes early in the day – to open our hearts to Jesus and ask for his help. Jesus is always ready to offer guidance on how to respond in a difficult situation if we take the time to listen.

Lord, grant us an understanding heart, and guide us in all we do.

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**SUNDAY****, FEBRUARY 4, 2024 FIFTH SUNDAY**

(Lec. 74) **IN ORDINARY TIME**

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

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

3) Mark 1:29-39

Gospel related: **CCC** 2602

FOCUS: Jesus offers us his healing grace.

Today’s Gospel picks up from last Sunday’s Gospel where Jesus went to the village of Capernaum, taught in the synagogue, and then commanded an unclean spirit to depart from a man. Now we hear that Jesus has gone to his friends’ home, where he performs another extraordinary feat, namely, curing Simon’s mother-in-law of her fever. After sharing a meal prepared by her, Jesus spends the night curing many other sick people, and driving out more demons. The next day, he can barely get a moment to pray in peace and silence before Simon arrives to warn him that everyone is looking for him. The word has gotten out that Jesus can do marvelous things.

In today’s fast-paced world, perhaps we are able to empathize with Jesus’ hectic schedule. As someone new to Capernaum, it would help to have a person like Simon to guide him around. We know, though, that it is Jesus who will guide Simon, and all of us, on the path to the heavenly kingdom. Despite the forks in the road we may encounter, or the many obstacles that might block our path, we know that when we put our lives in Jesus’ hands, he will show us God’s mercy and compassion.

There may be times in our own lives when we feel like Job, who in our first reading bemoaned that life is *a drudgery*. He makes his life sound like onethat is without hope – full of misery and too many restless nights. If life is full of peaks and valleys, then Job is most certainly experiencing the depths of the valley. Poor Job, though, should take heart from the psalm that we sang, in which we *praise the Lord, who heals the brokenhearted*. God created each of us, knows each of us by name, and continues to bless each of our lives. That very same God would not allow any of us to remain in despair. As the psalmist proclaims, the Lord binds up the wounds of the brokenhearted, and sustains the lowly.

When we face valleys in our lives, we can take solace in the Lord who lifts us up. Jesus was sent to give witness that God does indeed care for each of us. As he ascended into heaven, Jesus promised that he would send his Spirit to be with us as a Comforter and a Sustainer. That Holy Spirit inspires our lives with God’s goodness. As we come forward to the altar of the Lord in a few moments, let us take a moment to pause and give thanks to God for lifting us up out of whatever troubles us, and for offering us the Bread of Life that fills us with his grace.

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Monday, February 5, 2024 MONDAY OF

(Lec. 329) FIFTH WEEK

1) 1 Kings 8:1-7, 9-13 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 6:53-56 (OBL MEM

 Saint Agatha,

 Virgin and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 1504

FOCUS: The glory of the Lord abides forever.

It was quite a gathering and feast, a spectacle of pageantry and ceremony – the bringing of the ark of the Lord’s covenant from the city of David to Jerusalem. Sacrifices too numerous to count; beautiful artistry sheltering the ark.This place of majesty was soon filled with the majesty of God: The Lord’s glory filled the temple of the Lord, and Solomon professed that the Lord would abide there forever.

History tells us that the temple was destroyed (twice) and the ark of the covenant removed and never to be found. God’s “forever dwelling place” was not destroyed, however, because it did not reside in those earthly vessels, but in the body of his Son, and in the grace that surrounds and abides in us.

The Lord dwells with us not as something kept apart from us, as if untouchable, but as a Spirit within us and as one who has marked us as his own in our baptism. He is incarnational–meant to be seen, heard, held, and touched. In our Gospel reading, we see that Jesus’ ministry was filled with its own kind of public display, but instead of lavish material processions, we have processions of the sick coming to Jesus for healing. The power of God’s love was such that the sick had only to touch *the tassel on his cloak,* or better translated, the fringe on Jesus’ prayer shawl, to be healed.

God’s healing power is present in Jesus, and we receive his real and substantial presence in the Eucharist: We “touch his cloak and tassel” in our own way, just as those who surrounded him did. And since we are baptized into Jesus, his healing power is also present in us. Let us remember to bring the healing presence of God that we enjoy at this altar with us out into the world each day, in every encounter, and so heal the world, one encounter at a time.

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Tuesday, February 6, 2024 TUESDAY OF

(Lec. 330) FIFTH WEEK

1) 1 Kings 8:22-23, 27-30 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 7:1-13 (OBL MEM

 Saint Paul Miki and Companions,

 Martyrs)

Gospel related: **CCC** 581, 2196, 2218, 2247

FOCUS: God gives us the grace to walk the talk, and to honor him in word and deed.

Today’s interaction between the Pharisees and Jesus is a bit unusual in that the Pharisees’ question is not explicitly a religious/legal one, but one of tradition. They ask not why Jesus and his disciples do not follow the law of God, but *thetradition of the elders*. The problem Jesus has with this question is the Pharisees’ placing of “religious” rules above God’s word.

*Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites*, Jesus said to them. “… *In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts.” You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition*.

The irony is not lost on the Gospel writer, Mark, and may it not be lost on us, that the Pharisees are accusing *the Son of God*of not keeping *human* traditions and precepts.

Quoting Isaiah, Jesus says, *This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me*. As with most of Jesus’ exhortations regarding religious hypocrisy, it’s a fundamental matter of “the walk not matching the talk.”

Whatever blinds the Pharisees – pride, conceit, obstinacy, hard-heartedness … the possibilities are endless! – is also capable of blinding us. We, too, can be tempted into thinking the Son of God should act as we wish him to.

We have a remedy in Christ himself, however. We have the great gift of having seen Jesus with the eyes of faith, and coming to understand he is our Lord and Savior. It’s why we are here today, participating in this act of public, communal worship of the Son of God. He who took on human nature but did not concern himself with human traditions, has made his dwelling place among us. He alone gives us the grace to walk the talk, and to honor him in word and deed.

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Wednesday, February 7, 2024 WEDNESDAY OF

(Lec. 331) FIFTH WEEK

1) 1 Kings 10:1-10 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 7:14-23

Gospel related: **CCC** 574, 582, 1764

FOCUS: When we experience the healing power of Jesus, we are more inclined to think and act as he would.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus poses a challenge to the crowd and his disciples. In Jewish culture, there are certain foods that are deemed clean and unclean. It could be presumed that if someone ate an unclean food, they in fact would be unclean. Seems logical, right?

Jesus comes to shed new light on this Jewish custom. He says, *do you not realize that everything that goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters not the heart but the stomach…? But what comes out of the man, that is what defiles him. From within the man, from his heart, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery …*

In other words, Jesus is saying:*From the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks* (Cf., Luke 6:45). When we speak, when we act, when we think, we are operating from what is in our hearts. The more distantour relationship with God, the more our thoughts, words, and actions are not of God. However, when we are more in communion with God, the more our thoughts, words, and actions speak of his mercy and love.

Often when we act, speak, and think contrary to the Gospel message, it is due to wounds we have in our hearts. Perhaps today we can reflect on what is going on in our hearts and invite Jesus to heal areas of hardness, bitterness, or unforgiveness. When light shines on these darkened areas of our hearts, it is an opening for Jesus to extend his healing upon them. Don’t we all desire to be healed? For when we experience the healing power of Jesus, we are more inclined to think and act as he would.

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Thursday, February 8, 2024 THURSDAY OF

(Lec. 332) FIFTH WEEK

1) 1 Kings 11:4-13 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 7:24-30 (Opt. Mem.

 Saint Jerome Emiliani;

 Saint Josephine Bakhita,

 Virgin)

Gospel related: **CCC** 2616

FOCUS: Seeking the Lord, finding him, and abiding with him are gifts of faith.

What an amazing contrast we have in our readings today. Solomon was a wise and powerful king. He had received such blessings from God, especially through his father David. He would be remembered as one of the greatest kings in all of history. Unfortunately, he is also remembered as one of the greatest examples of a man who squandered away many of the gifts he had been given. Through his many marriages to non-believers, he had been compromised and led away from the wisdom that so defined his younger life. Solomon began with such promise but ended in disgrace and sacrilege.

The Syrophoenician woman in theGospel had a very different story, indeed. She was not from the lineage of Abraham, but was a pagan raised with false gods. She would have been considered unclean and an enemy to the Jewish people. Somehow, she comes to hear about Jesus and has faith that he can save her demon-possessed daughter. When Jesus says toher, *Let the children be fed first. For it is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs*, he is signifying that he has come to preach the kingdom to the Jews first. She, in turn, humbly asks for the “scraps” that the children are not eating. Moved by her humility and faith, Jesus heals her daughter.

It's truly amazing how someone walking so close to God can end up so far away, and another who seems so lost can find her way to salvation. This is a good reminder that we need to be careful about forming judgments about those who may have dark beginnings to their story. They may just find their way to the light. It is also a warning to not assume that if we were faithful at one time that we will be faithful always. In both cases, we need the Lord. Seeking him, finding him, and abiding with him are gifts of faith. Pray in thanksgiving for these gifts, and for the grace to grow in them for all time.

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Friday, February 9, 2024 FRIDAY OF

(Lec. 333) FIFTH WEEK

1) 1 Kings 11:29-32; 12:19 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 7:31-37

Gospel related: **CCC** 1151, 1504

FOCUS: God is the source of both division and healing.

It is easy to think of God as the source of unity and healing. But what about division, destruction, and chaos? We often see these things as bad and painful. How could God be their source? Yet today’s readings remind us that God can be the source of division as well as the source of healing. In the first reading, Ahijah prophesies that God is going to divide the united Kingdom of Israel into two kingdoms. God is doing this because he wants to disrupt the idolatry and injustice that has developed during Solomon’s reign as king. The division will be painful, but Israel’s sinful ways must be interrupted so that something new and better can emerge.

In a similar way, true peace – whether between individuals or nations –cannot exist if we ignore injustice and sin. Sin must be confronted and corrected even if this causes conflict and chaos.It is not easy to confront sin, but it becomes more possible when we know this is a necessary step in God’s healing process.

The Gospel reminds us that God is indeed a healer. God desires that we and our community be healthy and whole. Jesus’ healing of the deaf man with the speech impediment is a sign of this truth. As we approach Jesus in the Eucharist today, let us ask him to show us where we need to be healed. And let us also ask him to give us the courage to confront whatever gets in the way of that healing.

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Saturday, February 10, 2024 SATURDAY OF

(Lec. 334) FIFTH WEEK

1) 1 Kings 12:26-32; IN ORDINARY TIME

 13:33-34 (OBL MEM

2) Mark 8:1-10 Saint Scholastica,

 Virgin)

Gospel related: **CCC** 1329

FOCUS: God is the Great Giver.

Generosity is one of the hallmarks of God. Think of examples of beauty in this world: the Northern Lights, a super bloom of flowers on a mountainside; holding a new baby in our arms.Think of unmerited and immensely welcome gifts: a call for a job, just when we were struggling to make ends meet, oran affirmation from someone we admire that we are living our vocation well.

God will not intervene to solve every problem in our lives, but there will always be something for which to be grateful if we look for it. God is the Great Giver.

Today's Gospel, where the Lord multiplies the loaves and fishes to feed 4,000 people, illustrates the lavishness with which God gives to us. There is nothing we can do to deserve such graciousness, but there are a number of things we can do to respond to the gifts God gives.

One appropriate response is gratitude. When we acknowledge what God does for us, it is a way of honoring the gift and the giver. Thanking God is a simple way of honoring him.

Another good response is to imitate him and give generously to others. We learn how to give by imitating others. Since there is no one who gives more, why not imitate the best?

And finally, a proper response to God's generosity is to take good care of what he has given us. That includes taking care of our health, protecting our earthly home, and looking out for others. These are all ways we show our gratitude.

Our response will not affect whether or not God continues to be our greatest benefactor. It is part of his nature, so he will never stop giving. Nevertheless, our positive response helps *us* to be better, since it makes us more like him. This is not a bad ambition for anyone.

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**SUNDAY,** **FEBRUARY 11, 2024 SIXTH SUNDAY**

(Lec. 77) **IN ORDINARY TIME**

1) Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46

2) 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1

3) Mark 1:40-45

Gospel related: **CCC** 1504, 2616

FOCUS: In healing the leper, Jesus went to the periphery, as we are called to do.

Each year on Holy Thursday, Pope Francis has opted to wash feet not necessarily within the confines of Saint Peter’s Basilica, but in prisons, care facilities, or refugee centers. It is here, at the “peripheries,” where Pope Francis follows Jesus’ lead.

The first reading provides context to help us understand Jesus’ interaction with the leper in today’s Gospel. In addition to declaring himself “unclean,” the leper, according to the Levitical law, *shall dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp.*While this law protected others from contracting the disease, it also stigmatized and ostracized the sick for something that they had little or no control over. Lepers were outsiders in every sense of the word.

Amid this context, Jesus went to the peripheries, both literally and figuratively. At this point in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus has been traveling around Galilee, proclaiming the message of the kingdom of God. It is a harsh environment; the land around is vast and dry; the sun shines hot and bright. It can be uncomfortable for even the healthiest of people. It is no wonder, then, that Jesus is moved with compassion upon seeing the leper. The leper thirsts for physical health but, even more so, for companionship and love.

While we commonly see the miracle of this story as Jesus healing leprosy, just as extraordinary is the man’s willingness to approach Jesus, to risk even more censure, punishment, or even his life, to receive the love and healing touch of the Lord. This was possible, of course, because Jesus made himself available.

We may not have the ability to heal in a physical way as Jesus did, but we can allow our hearts to be overcome with compassion for others. We can follow Jesus to the people on the outskirts of society and make ourselves available to those experiencing poverty; those who are sick, mentally ill, or disabled; those who are homebound or in nursing homes. With the aid of God’s grace, we can love them and perhaps even offer a gentle touch or embrace. These acts are mini-miracles, healing the hearts of those who, like the leper, may have been stigmatized or ostracized.

Grace and prayer certainly are needed for this work, for it is natural to fear such journeys to the periphery. Only through union with Christ do we desire to help shoulder the burdens of others – trading our safety, health, or comfort for compassion and sacrificial love of others.

As we turn to the sacrament to come, we remember Pope Francis’ teaching that the Eucharist does not end with our reception of holy Communion. The Eucharist must be brought outside the doors of the church through our very lives – the body of Christ in action. If we are going to embody Jesus in our world today, we must go where he went, to the peripheries.

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Monday, February 12, 2024 MONDAY OF

(Lec. 335) SIXTH WEEK

1) James 1:1-11 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 8:11-13

FOCUS: Thanks be to God for the gift, and joy, of faith.

The scene in today’s Gospel really grabs the imagination. We can picture a group of men, loud, argumentative, almost bullying in their demands for a sign from heaven. Crowding Jesus, getting in his space, and metaphorically poking, poking, poking! And Jesus, physically weary from all his travels, seemingly frustrated by the constant barrage. *He sighed from the depth of his spirit and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign?*” We don’t know if he looked to the heavens and threw his hands in the air, and uttered these words with an exasperated tone, but it would be right and just if he did!

If this story does nothing else, it shows that we humans can be a perseverant sort. And while James’ letter to his community describes how perseverance can be deployed badly, stemming from doubt, it is also a great gift:*Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters,* James says*, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance*.

Joy in relation to trials and perseverance. What a lovely thought, actually. To have such faith worthy of testing, and to be entrusted with the knowledge gained from trials overcome and refining fires tamped down. And to know that, if we lack wisdom in the midst of it, we can *ask God who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly*, and we will be given it.

The Pharisees were not seeking wisdom. Nor did they have faith. There was no joy in their perseverance, only annoyance, and – in the end – being left behind on the shore. And so Jesus would give no sign to that generation. Why bother? They couldn’t understand everything they had already seen; they couldn’t *see* him at all.

We *do* seek wisdom, we desire joy, we grow in perseverance, and we need no further sign. Christ himself is all in all, the eternal Word of God dwelling among us and opening wide the doors to the kingdom. We see him, we receive him, we proclaim him. He does not leave us behind on the shore.

Thanks be to God for the gift, and joy, of faith.

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Tuesday, February 13, 2024 TUESDAY OF

(Lec. 336) SIXTH WEEK

1) James 1:12-18 IN ORDINARY TIME

2) Mark 8:14-21

Gospel related: **CCC** 1329

FOCUS: Jesus challenges us to rely on him in times of need.

Imagine showing up at a potluck and having forgotten the dish we promised to bring. A panicked thought may come to mind: Will there be enough to eat? Of course there is. There is usually more than enough and everyone goes away satisfied.

The disciples in today’s Gospel probably felt something akin to that feeling of panic when it appears there is not enough. Out in the middle of the sea, there’s no place to pick up additional bread. What are they to do?

Jesus is in the boat with them. He reminds them that after feeding the 5,000, there were 12 baskets of leftovers. After feeding the 4,000, there were seven. The disciples think it is about food; Jesus is reinforcing that it is about what God is providing for them, which is far more than bread.

In the first reading, James writes that the Father, in his infinite generosity, desires to give his people good gifts, to provide for them in their time of need. Jesus, his Son, is the manifestation of God’s greatest gift.

Jesus’ desire to give us what we need extends far beyond a physical meal. He desires to feed our spiritual hunger as well. To receive that good gift requires us to turn away from our own personal desires and turn toward him.

Tomorrow is Ash Wednesday and a good opportunity to pay special attention to how and when we turn to Jesus. As we approach the table of the Lord, let us ask Jesus for the grace to set aside what we desire and seek the good gift he and the Father desire to give us.

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Wednesday, February 14, 2024 **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, 764, 1063, 1430, 1434, 1693, 1753, 1969, 2447, 2608, 2655, 2691, 2763, 2792

FOCUS: Lent provides an opportunity to imitate Christ by turning our lives and hearts back toward God, our Creator.

For many in our world, the very idea of fasting can seem irrational and valueless – why go without that which you like or require? And yet together with prayer and almsgiving, fasting has beenan integral part of the Church’s Lenten experience from the earliest days.

In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI described fasting as “therapy for the soul to heal all that prevents us from conformity to the will of God, a way to mortify our egoism, to grow in intimacy with the Lord and to open our hearts to love of God and neighbor” (Message for Lent). For the person of faith fasting is therefore a fulfillment of the first and greatest commandment – a compendium of the entire Gospel.

Pope Benedict went on to say that by denying ourselves material food we nurture an interior disposition to listen to Christ and be fed by his saving word. Through fasting and praying, we allow Christ to satisfy the deepest human hunger – the hunger and thirst for God.

But fasting also has a communal aspect to it that is helpful to reflect on as we begin the Lenten season. By opening our eyes to the needs of others, fasting enables us to grow in the spirit of the Good Samaritan who comes to the help of his suffering brother. By freely embracing an act of self-denial for the sake of another, we make a statement that one in need is not a stranger, but a neighbor, entitled to our help and generosity.

Today, as we begin 40 days of purification, prayer, and sharing, we seek to strip away that which is superfluous to our lives, to make room for something better – a deeper relationship with Christ, one that is meant to flow into all the nooks and crannies of our daily lives, not just during Lent but for all our days. Saint Paul says, *Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation*.

Today, as we are marked with ashes, we join Christ in the desert to do battle against all that might separate us from God’s mercy. Today we reach out for that mercy as we begin again.

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Thursday, February 15, 2024 THURSDAY AFTER

(Lec. 220) ASH WEDNESDAY

1) Deuteronomy 30:15-20

2) Luke 9:22-25

Gospel related: **CCC** 1435

FOCUS: The cross is the way to eternal life.

During their time in the desert, Moses sets before the people a choice between life and death. To follow the Lord’s commandments means an abundance of life in the land promised to their ancestors. To go astray means brutal death in the desert. Life with God is a life of prosperity, while life without God is no life at all.

Jesus’ message to his disciples has a similar, serious tone. After telling them that he must suffer, be rejected, die, and be raised, Jesus turns to everyone else and lays out conditions for following him. They must deny themselves and take up their own crosses daily. He tells them that those who wish to save their own lives will lose them, but those who lose their lives for his sake will be saved.

If the land across the Jordan is an image of heaven, then while we live on earth, we are in the desert with the Israelites. If we follow God’s laws and remain close to him, we will enter eternal life. If we turn away our hearts, and fail to listen, we will perish.

Lent is a time to examine what distracts us from our call to pick up our crosses each day and follow Jesus. It reminds us that the way of Jesus is the way of suffering, death, and rejection by the world. But at the end of the journey is resurrection. We are faced with a life-or-death decision. Will we choose ways that lead to death? Or will we die to ourselves so that we might have abundant life with God?

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Friday, February 16, 2024 FRIDAY AFTER

(Lec. 221) ASH WEDNESDAY

1) Isaiah 58:1-9a

2) Matthew 9:14-15

FOCUS: *A heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn*.

The obvious theme of our readings today is fasting. It is one of the disciplines we embrace during this holy season of Lent. Why do we fast? How does going hungry, going without, help us in our spiritual lives?

It is a principle of humanity that if we deprive ourselves of some physical pleasures, it helps us to focus on greater spiritual realities. Fasting at its most basic level is a way to turn our attention to our souls instead of our bodies.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus reveals another reason why we fast: because we long to be in the presence of the One whom we were created to love. There will be no fasting in heaven since we will be united fully with Jesus. The Apostles did not fast as long as Jesus was dwelling among them. Once the Lord returned to heaven, the Church has fasted, longing for his return.

The prophet Isaiah explains how to fast well: to use the resources and energy we gain through our fast to do good works and to help the poor. If our fasting makes us grumpy and irritable, that is not the fasting that pleases the Lord. Our fasting should lead us to love those difficult to love. It should inspire us to justice and works of mercy. Fasting is not only about spiritual growth; it is also about the way we treat others.

May our Lenten fasting lead us to greater love of God and love of neighbor. That is the fasting Jesus expects.

\* \* \*

Saturday, February 17, 2024 SATURDAY AFTER

(Lec. 222) ASH WEDNESDAY

1) Isaiah 58:9b-14 (Opt. Mem.

2) Luke 5:27-32 The Seven Holy Founders

 of the Servite Order)

Gospel related: **CCC** 588

FOCUS: The Lord will honor a just and compassionate people.

The words of the Lord in this last section of the book of the prophet Isaiah return to a common theme: a prophetic call for Israel to be aware of its sin, and to recognize that pious and mindless attention to ritual does not satisfy the Lord.

The Lord is telling them that if they would just pay attention to what he says, taking care of each other, seeing to one another’s needs, and freeing them from all forms of oppression, their obedience will naturally and necessarily result in divine favor upon them. They will be the *repairer of the breach* [between God and his people] and *restorer of ruined homesteads* [as their ruins will be rebuilt and the city of Jerusalem reestablished].

This prophetic call to the people of Judah, and to all of us, is one that has no “return to sender” date. Even today we are called to corporal and spiritual works of mercy so that the kingdom of God may come to fulfillment.

Lent is a particular time to pay heed to this call, and to consider the disorder – what is not rightly aligned according to God’s divine plan – in our lives and the world. We spend this Lenten season walking with Jesus through his mission of restoration: giving sight to the blind, healing the sick, making the lame walk, and, as in today’s Gospel, calling not the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. He is our Divine Physician, attending to the spiritual sickness of sin, and empowering us to have faith and follow him.

To do as Jesus did, to restore and repair – to bring “order” into what is “dis-ordered ” – means that we need to go into those places that are not basking in God’s light. Perhaps this means to venture into those parts of our world that are outside of our comfort zones. When we go out to the world, however, we do not do so alone. Remember that in Advent, we name Jesus as Emmanuel, “God with us.” God is always with us. And he says to us as he said to Levi, *follow me*.

Strengthened by the Eucharist that we soon will receive, may our outreach to those who need God’s love and mercy help them find delight in the Lord.

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**SUNDAY,** **FEBRUARY 18, 2024 FIRST SUNDAY**

(Lec. 23) **OF LENT**

1) Genesis 9:8-15

2) 1 Peter 3:18-22

3) Mark 1:12-15

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 538, 541, 1423, 1427 **CSDC** 49, 175

FOCUS: *The kingdom of God is at hand*.

The readings for this First Sunday of Lent are full of contrasts and paradoxes. God makes a covenant with Noah, establishing the rainbow as a sign of his fidelity to a promise of blessing – just on the heels of a horrific flood. The contrast of life and death is complemented by the paradox that the rainbow can appear precisely, and only, because there first was rain.

Peter discusses the obedient suffering of Jesus which brings life, where Adam’s disobedience brought death. This is a paradox of “dying to self” and “mortal death” actually leading to new and eternal life. In the Gospel the Holy Spirit, the breath of life, drives Jesus into the barren desert to face temptation.

Finally, Jesus begins his preaching, telling people to repent and believe in the Gospel. To repent means to feel regret and sorrow; to change, and “turn away from.” “Gospel” is a word meaning “good news.” To “repent and believe in the Gospel,” then, contrasts the feeling of sorrow and turning from with believing in and turning toward the Good News. The paradox here, as above, is that one must experience a sort of death in order to receive life.

As the Lenten season begins, these contrasts and paradoxes point to the inflection points in our own lives. We have been saved by the waters of baptism: washed free from sin and death and promised the eternal reward of life in the kingdom with our Savior. Yet we remain sinners. When we search our own hearts and examine our lives we know we have given way in the face of temptation, choosing disobedience and bringing pain and suffering to ourselves and our communities. As Christians, this is precisely the contrast of the Lenten season. There is indeed cause for joy and hope! There is indeed cause for regret and sorrow. And the paradox is that one must embrace the sufferingin order to experience the joy.

For 40 days – a number harkening to the time of rain which caused the flood, the years Israel spent wandering in the wilderness, and the days Jesus faces the temptations of Satan – we, too, journey into the desert. We take up fasting, prayer, and almsgiving with humble hearts that recognize our sinfulness. We simplify our liturgy and refrain from certain celebrations, songs, and acclamations of praise. We take stock of our sins and we seek forgiveness.

But we do not walk without hope. We repent, yes, but we also believe in the Gospel! We are fundamentally a people of hope – a people chosen by God and redeemed by the resurrection of our Savior. We are an Easter people who walk in the first light of dawn with the sure knowledge that death has lost its sting and hell has no victory.

And still we know that the light of day has not yet cast out all darkness. The kingdom of God is already at hand, but it is not yet fulfilled. Let us pray for its coming. Repent, and believe in the Gospel.

Monday, February 19, 2024 MONDAY OF

(Lec. 224) FIRST WEEK

1) Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18 OF LENT

2) Matthew 25:31-46

Gospel related: **CCC** 331, 544, 598, 671, 678, 679, 1033, 1034, 1038, 1373, 1397, 1503, 1825, 1932, 2443, 2447, 2449, 2463, 2831 **CSDC** 57, 58, 183, 265, 403

FOCUS: Seek the Lord hidden in the lowly.

Sometimes Jesus’ words sound very nice until we really sit with them for a while. Then they begin to feel … uncomfortable.

*Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* Are those words we will hear one day? Will the Son of Man gather us to himself when he comes in his glory?

*For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me*. Will these words be said of us? Can these words be said of us, now?

It's amazing how specific these examples are. Consistent with God’s design for the world, they echo all the prophets, kings, and judges sent by God to call his people to create and live in a just and compassionate society. A society that cares for widows and orphans, and the poor. One that sees the divine image in every human being – and follows the commandments prescribing how to love God and one another.

Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmalz has a powerful series of religious art that beautifully complements today’s Scriptures. One sculpture, entitled “Homeless Jesus,” is one of several depicting our Lord hidden as a stranger, a beggar, a prisoner, a sick man. Only the wounds visible in his hands and feet reveal his identity – and you have to get close enough to the sculpture to see them.

And therein lies the rub: We have to get close (enough) to people to see them and serve them. Let’s ask the Lord to place these people in our path. How easy it is to walk past someone without noticing them. But there are hungry who need to be fed, thirsty who need drink, strangers who need welcoming, and so much more. Let’s ask the Holy Spirit to help us see Jesus in everyone. God will surely hear this prayer and answer. As our hearts are conformed ever more to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we will be able to see others the way God sees them – as beloved children of the Father.

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Tuesday, February 20, 2024 TUESDAY OF

(Lec. 225) FIRST WEEK

1) Isaiah 55:10-11 OF LENT

2) Matthew 6:7-15

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

FOCUS: Trust in God and God’s timing.

Today’s readings invite us to trust in God and God’s timing. This may sound obvious in theory, but it can be difficult in real life. We live in a culture of immediacy, and whatever we think we want, we want it right now! This is especially true in a society with high-speed internet connections, overnight shipping, and streaming media. Why can’t God deliver what we want in the timeframe in which we want it?

Thankfully, God is God. God promises true peace and happiness, and these spiritual realities take time to grow and mature within us. That is why God’s word is compared to the rain and snow nurturing growing plants. It doesn’t rain once and then – poof! – fully grown plants magically appear. Nature has a rhythm, a cycle that must be respected. The spiritual growth and change nurtured by God’s word also have rhythms and cycles. No one becomes a saint overnight.

Of course, we must ask for the right things. If we ask for the wrong things, what does it matter whether we get them overnight or 10 years from now? In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us what the right things are. Notice that he doesn’t teach the disciples to pray for intelligence, wealth, or success. Instead, he teaches them to ask for God’s kingdom to be present on earth – a kingdom where all people are loved and their dignity respected. He teaches them to ask only for what they need today – daily bread – trusting he will provide for the future. And he teaches them to ask for healthy relationships – relationships marked by humility and forgiveness. When we pray the Lord’s Prayer today, let it be a prayer of trust in God, and of trust in God’s timing.

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Wednesday, February 21, 2024 WEDNESDAY OF

(Lec. 226) FIRST WEEK

1) Jonah 3:1-10 OF LENT

2) Luke 11:29-32 (Opt. Mem.

 Saint Peter Damian,

 Bishop and Doctor

 of the Church)

FOCUS: Jonah was a credible sign because of his repentance, having received God’s mercy first-hand.

In today’s first reading we meet Jonah, fresh out of the whale and setting foot in Nineveh for the first time. In the two chapters prior, Jonah had run away from the Lord and his call to deliver a message of repentance to Nineveh. In fact, Jonah headed in the opposite direction of Nineveh, boarding a boat for Tarshish.

Jonah’s rebellion resulted in him being flung from the boat and swallowed by a whale. And there, in the belly of the fish, Jonah could not keep running. He stopped and prayed, re-tuning his heart – a forgiven heart – to the Lord.

With the smell of fish on his clothes and, more importantly, his own repentance and forgiveness fresh on his mind, Jonah delivers the Lord’s message to Nineveh. Jonah is a credible sign to the Ninevites not because he is the perfect prophet, but because he has experienced the Lord’s mercy first-hand. Jonah trusts that forgiveness is possible, and that second chances are real with his God. True repentance – evident in the Ninevites’ prayer, fasting, and turning from evil – always results in new life.

This is the point we find Jesus making in the Gospel. He is God’s love incarnate – the sign of our redemption. *There is something greater than Jonah here*, manifested in his presence. Repenting and turning to him results not only in new life, but also in eternal life.

This Lenten season is our chance to evaluate our sin and re-tune our hearts to God. As Jesus says, we need no sign other than Jonah, who sets the example of repentance and calls us to do the same. As Jonah demonstrated, running from God and hiding in our sin leads only to darkness, symbolized by the belly of a whale. The light of Christ has come to the world, eager to shatter all darkness and bring second chances, even to sinners such as us. Then, like Jonah, we, too, can be credible witnesses – illuminated signs of God’s mercy and love for the world.

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**Thursday, February 22, 2024** **THE CHAIR OF**

(Lec. 535) **SAINT PETER THE APOSTLE**

1) 1 Peter 5:1-4 **- FEAST**

2) Matthew 16:13-19

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

FOCUS: The Church is how we build God’s kingdom on earth.

*Who do you say that I am?* Jesus asks of his disciples. Peter speaks up and proclaims, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*.

Jesus responds to this declaration in a way that affirms just how important, and powerful, Peter’s words are. He calls him blessed and appoints him as the shepherd of his people, his body on earth, the Church: *And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*.

Because Peter recognized Jesus as the Messiah and dared to proclaim it, he is the foundation of the Church. He was the very first Vicar of Christ. In other words, Peter was the first one with the claim to stand in the place of Jesus Christ and possess his authority in, and as head of, the Church.

The Church of which we are a part traces its roots back to this very moment in the Gospel. On this Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, we acknowledge Peter’s acceptance of the gift Jesus gave him, and his laying down of the building blocks of a Church that has had 263 different successors to Peter sit in that chair, in the stead of (*vicarius*/vicar) Christ. Under their leadership and through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Church has grown and multiplied and worked on building the kingdom of God. The Church is where our faith begins and where it can grow. The Church is how we build God’s kingdom on earth.

As we continue with our Mass, let us remember that what we celebrate here today traces its roots back to a very pivotal moment in the Gospel. May our sharing of the body and blood of Christ strengthen our Church for continued service in the mission of Christ.

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Friday, February 23, 2024 FRIDAY OF

(Lec. 228) FIRST WEEK

1) Ezekiel 18:21-28 OF LENT

2) Matthew 5:20-26 (Opt. Mem.

 Saint Polycarp,

 Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 678, 764, 1034, 1424, 2054, 2257, 2262, 2302, 2608, 2763, 2792, 2841, 2845

FOCUS: May God have mercy on us and give us the grace to live justly.

Ours is a God of mercy. Ours is a God of justice. We hold in tension these attributes of God – both are essential to who God is. The readings today are Good News insofar as they emphasize these important aspects of God’s relationship to us. To lose one of them at the expense of the other would be to miss the Good News of our salvation.

Justice can be defined simply as “right relationship.” If this were a world with a god who was merciful but not just, we would find it to be one without consequences: actions lose their meaning and relationships ultimately don’t matter. The orphan, widow, disenfranchised, and refugee would all have been forcibly removed from relationships proper to a community. Their plights would demand restoration. Instead of this dystopia, Jesus comes to proclaim the Good News of the kingdom precisely to them. In his mercy, God turns in love to those who have been forgotten and demands justice on their behalf.

On the other hand, If this were a world that had a god who was just without being merciful, despair would reign in the hearts of those hopelessly indebted and irredeemable in the face of their past. The Christian life is a demanding one that requires us to strive always for virtue. The bar Jesus calls his disciples (and so each of us) to meet is high! He says to not even remain angry with your brother, and that if anyone has anything against you, be reconciled or risk being thrown into prison. God does not ask us to do this on our own, however, because his grace makes this possible. Our God is merciful.

This is Good News! God does not turn a blind eye to sin, but in his mercy he demands our repentance. He does so for our own sake and for the sake of the whole world. May God have mercy on us and give us the grace to live justly.

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Saturday, February 24, 2024 SATURDAY OF

(Lec. 229) FIRST WEEK

1) Deuteronomy 26:16-19 OF LENT

2) Matthew 5:43-48

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

FOCUS: Love your neighbor, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you.

When trying to get one from one point to another, physically or spiritually, it’s helpful to have a map, or a set of directions. In addition, one must identify the priorities of decision-making: go here, then there; do this, then that.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus gives us a series of ascending steps to holiness. Each step is a little harder, a little more radical, and ultimately more fulfilling. “Love your neighbor.” Then, “love your enemy.” Finally, *pray for those who persecute you*.

Here and in all the Gospel messages, love is not a feeling or “simply” an emotion. It is an act of the will. It is to consistently will and choose the good of the other. This includes even those we do not like, or perhaps rightfully need to avoid because they are a threat. And the highest good is salvation, and eternal life in Christ.

That human injustice and violence exist, and that emotions can color our viewpoint and understanding, makes the command to love an enemy seem impossible for us. It is! But it is not impossible for God, and with his help, we can do as he commands.

To love an enemy is not necessarily to like him, nor is it to enable him, or condone his actions. It is simply to choose the good for him, and pray for his salvation. Praying for one we have hated – or greatly disliked – is an incredibly freeing experience. It relieves us of the obligation to continue expending energy toward hate, rather than love. It provides intercession for that person, who may in fact have no one else to pray for him or her. What an incredible act of mercy that is.

Let’s reflect on the concept of mercy, not just for our enemy, but for ourselves. In praying for another, we reflect the mercy that has been granted us, when we (human beings), too, have been an enemy of God (Cf. Rom 5:10-21). How can we expect to receive it if we cannot give it away?

Love your neighbor, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you. The Lord is simply asking us to be like him. And that’s a very good thing.

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**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2024 SECOND SUNDAY**

(Lec. 26)  **OF LENT**

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

FOCUS: God invites us to listen more closely to his beloved Son.

*This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.*

We all know we should listen to Christ. We have all been told we should do as God commands. There is a prayer that begins, “Father, I abandon myself into your hands. Do with me what you will …” While most of us would affirm this sentiment on some level, if we take a moment to really sit with the idea of abandoning ourselves into God’s hands, of letting go of what we want and asking God to do what only he wills… well, some of us might begin to squirm.

And then we have the story of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham didn’t squirm. God wanted Abraham to see how he would provide for him – God wanted Abraham to know that he could trust every command given by him, because he would always act, would always provide, would always love him.

Abraham trusts in God’s goodness. This goodness is highlighted in our second reading from the Letter to the Romans. We are reminded that God, *who did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for us all*, will give us everything we need along with his Son. This is the depth of God’s love for us. God, who gave us his beloved Son, commands us: *This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.*

Our God did not hold back anything, not even his beloved Son, to lead us to the goodness he desires for us. In the Transfiguration, he shows us the glory that awaits us when we live and love in service of him.

And this God is present here today. In this sacred season, God is inviting us to listen more closely to his beloved Son who invites us to take and eat, to receive the gift of his body, poured out for us in this Eucharist. This is the love that leads us through our Lenten journey and through our lives. May we, in this sacrament, grow in trust and learn to follow Christ’s voice in all we do.

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Monday, February 26, 2024 MONDAY OF

(Lec. 230) SECOND WEEK

1) Daniel 9:4b-10 OF LENT

2) Luke 6:36-38

Gospel related: **CCC** 1458, 2842

FOCUS: Our merciful God enables us to be merciful.

Daniel’s prayer of both praise and lament is surely one of the most emotionally moving ones in the Bible. It has a twin emphasis: the steadfast love of God and the constant rebellion by his people in the face of that love. He begins his prayer by praising his *great and awesome God* – one who has kept his covenant and shown mercy even though the people did not deserve it. Daniel confesses the sins of his people and says they are *shamefaced*.

Repentance is always a necessary first step. With this in mind, let us turn to Jesus’ instructions in today’s Gospel: We are to do more than recognize God’s love, accept it, and repent of our lack of love. We are to seek to emulate God in his mercy, generosity of spirit, and forgiveness, and then we will be truly in a place to receive the overflowing gifts God is always trying to send us.

*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.* But how is that possible? Is that not arrogant? No, it is rather the ultimate humility, because in it we recognize that it is the way God made us, in his image and likeness*,* and because we must first recognize that it is God himself through our partaking in Christ’s very body who enables us to be so. We must only desire it, ask for it, and humbly approach Christ always, as we do now at this holy altar.

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Tuesday, February 27, 2024 TUESDAY OF

(Lec. 231) SECOND WEEK

1) Isaiah 1:10, 16-20 OF LENT

2) Matthew 23:1-12 (Opt. Mem.

 Saint Gregory of Narek,

 Abbot and Doctor

 of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 526, 2367

FOCUS: Joy comes from following the Lord with our whole heart, mind, and soul.

Today’s Gospel reminds us of the importance of words and actions. We can often tell a person’s character by how they behave – by what deeds they do or refrain from doing. We know that people may say one thing, but act in an opposite manner. Or we may do various actions just for the recognition that comes with it. How we are meant to live as Christians is at the very heart of Jesus’ message today.

Jesus is speaking to the crowds and his disciples encouraging them to follow all that their religious leaders and elders say, in that they teach fully and fairly the Scriptures and law. But they are not to follow their example. Jesus encourages the crowd and his disciples to follow *his* word and example instead – to truly live according to the Word that he speaks. Jesus practices what he preaches and preaches what he practices. This is the very standard by which he calls each of us to live.

The world may try to convince us that we are our own master, but Jesus reminds us that he is our true master. We are to follow his words and examples with humility and love.

Perhaps today, we can all reflect on whether or not our words and actions are properly and rightly synchronized. Let us pay attention to whether we practice what we preach and preach what we practice in light of Jesus Christ. Do we live in the light of our master who is the truth and life? Or do we act and speak in a manner that makes us our own master? Jesus desires our full happiness and joy, and that comes from following him with our whole heart, mind, and soul.

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Wednesday, February 28, 2024 WEDNESDAY OF

(Lec. 232) SECOND WEEK

1) Jeremiah 18:18-20 OF LENT

2) Matthew 20:17-28

Gospel related: **CCC** 440, 572, 601, 605, 622, 786, 2235 **CSDC** 193, 379

FOCUS: Serving others is one of the best ways to serve the Lord and grow closer to him.

Sometimes we get so caught up in our current concerns and thoughts that we miss something even more important for our future. We miss the proverbial forest for the trees.

Today's Gospel lesson is one that marches us right into the depths of the forest when we are reminded that we are not the center of the universe. In fact, we may not even be the most important people in the room. As imperfect human beings, the Apostles were guilty of that prideful thinking. As such, they missed what Jesus was telling them about his coming suffering, death, and resurrection.

Similar to many times in the Gospels, the Apostles' shortcomings opened the door for Jesus to teach them – and us – an important lesson. In this instance, he had more than one lesson to teach, but the big one was that all who follow him must be servants to others.

The glory Jesus' followers receive is mostly heavenly glory, not earthly accolades. If this works for us, Jesus wants us in his camp. If this sounds too much like a losing proposition, then perhaps we need to examine it again, because we will never receive a better offer than this. As we grow in our ability to serve, we also grow in our closeness to God.

What a great message for these early days of the Lenten season. Let us look humbly and honestly into our own hearts and see where we could be serving others better – where we could put more of our energy into the work of God's kingdom. No one needs to do this alone. We serve one another, and, in the process, grow in our closeness to the Lord.

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Thursday, February 29, 2024 THURSDAY OF

(Lec. 233) SECOND WEEK

1) Jeremiah 17:5-10 OF LENT

2) Luke 16:19-31

Gospel related: **CCC** 336, 633, 1021, 1859, 2831

FOCUS: Jesus challenges us to be faithfully consistent in how we pray and live.

In the midst of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, we pray together the Lord’s Prayer. One of the petitions within it is for the Lord to give *us* this day *our* daily bread. Even when we pray on our own, we pray for *us* and for *our.* Thus, we pray that *all* will have what they need, not merely that *we* receive what *we* need.

In today’s Gospel we hear the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the poor man. In his earthly life, the rich man ignored Lazarus and his needs, not once sharing his leftovers with his brother lying outside the door to his house.

In death, Lazarus rests in the bosom of Abraham and the rich man is in torment. Yet, even from his place of torment, he implores the Lord to send Lazarus to him to *serve him.* Even in death, the rich man cannot see beyond his own immediate needs to the needs of Lazarus.

The Lord has harsh words for this man of great wealth and calls him out for not living in accordance with the command to love God and neighbor.

In this season of Lent, there is a lesson for us. We talk often about the practices of Lent, such as prayer and almsgiving, as if they are unrelated to one another. However, in telling this parable, Jesus is reminding us that these practices go hand-in-hand. As the *catechism* states, “We pray as we live, because we live as we pray. If we do not want to act habitually according to the Spirit of Christ, neither can we pray habitually in his name” (CCC 2725). Two good questions to ask ourselves in this season are: Do I remember to pray for those whom I help through almsgiving or works of mercy? Do I extend some concrete help in addition to remembering those in need in my prayers?

As we prepare to come to Jesus in the Eucharist, let us ask him to show us how to better live as we pray, and pray as we live.

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**MARCH**

[**1**](#M1)[**2**](#M2)[**3**](#M3)[**4**](#M4)[**5**](#M5)[**6**](#M6)[**7**](#M7)[**8**](#M8)[**9**](#M9)[**10**](#M10)[**11**](#M11)[**12**](#M12)[**13**](#M13)[**14**](#M14)[**15**](#M15)[**16**](#M16)[**17**](#M17)[**18**](#M18)[**19**](#M19)[**20**](#M20)[**21**](#M21)[**22**](#M22)[**23**](#M23)[**24**](#M24)[**25**](#M25)[**26**](#M26)[**27**](#M27)[**28**](#M28)[**29**](#M29)[**30**](#M30)[**31**](#M31)

**YEAR B**

**WEEKDAYS II**

Friday, March 1, 2024 FRIDAY OF

(Lec. 234) SECOND WEEK

1) Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13a, OF LENT

 17b-28a

2) Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46

Gospel related: **CCC** 445, 755, 756

FOCUS: Jesus is the cornerstone of the Church, and our lives.

If we are creating something, or building something, and we want it to be good, or be strong, then we need the correct materials. Bakers know the disaster that awaits when choosing incorrectly between baking soda and baking powder. Builders know the structural failure that awaits when a cornerstone cannot be laid perfectly square and aligned to the remainder of the building.

We set aside, we reject, the things that do not meet our needs. And since the temple was undergoing a decades-long renovation when Jesus spoke to the Pharisees in today’s Gospel, his quoting of Scripture (Ps 118:22-23) would have resonated with them: *The stone that the builders rejectedhas become the cornerstone,* he said, and the Pharisees and the chief priests *knew that he was speaking about them.* They were angry and reacted to that, and it was only the presence of the crowds who surrounded Jesus, who believed him to be a prophet, that prevented them from arresting Jesus right there.

Why did the parable and the implication that they had rejected a cornerstone make them so angry? Part of the answer has to be that the Pharisees understood Jesus to be claiming to be the Messiah (as that is what Psalm 118 points to). But we today can see how the truth of his claim is even deeper and more accurate than the Pharisees knew.

In some cultures, and in ancient days, the cornerstone would have sacrificial offerings placed upon it in dedication to the gods for the sake of harmony and prosperity. Some cornerstones also included a bit of history, perhaps relics and artifacts of the community so that the building would be blessed. Jesus contained within himself all of human history; and he was the ultimate, perfect, and eternal sacrifice to God. He thereby created the conditions for harmony, prosperity, and blessing for the spiritual temple, the new Church.

He is the cornerstone of the Church. And we trust this cornerstone to have been laid with perfect care, because it was done so by the perfect builder. It will not crumble, it will not fail. And it is strong enough to support us wherever we are, for God himself is the foundation of the world in which we live.

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Saturday, March 2, 2024 SATURDAY OF

(Lec. 235) SECOND WEEK

1) Micah 7:14-15, 18-20 OF LENT

2) Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Gospel related: **CCC** 545, 589, 1423, 1439, 1443, 1468, 1700, 1846, 2795, 2839

FOCUS: *The Lord is kind and merciful*.

What does today’s parable, which is often referred to as “the prodigal son,” tell us about God’s mercy and how it can help us during Lent? The word *prodigal* can have two meanings – to be wasteful or to be extravagant. Clearly, the son is wasteful, but the father is extravagant. Both meanings are evident in the parable.

The younger son *squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation*. That’s an epitaph none of us would want. And thankfully, it’s not the end of the younger son’s story. Jesus notes that he eventually*[comes] to his senses*. Here in this moment, the son returns to the person he was born to be before he derailed his life. By coming to his senses,he can return home, recognizing the pain he had caused his father and seeking to make amends. Now, his need for reconciliation and healing is greater than his need to have his own way.

Yet the most shocking part of the parable must be the father’s response and his extravagant forgiveness. Instead of words of judgment, he responds to the return of his wayward son with a loving and accepting hug – with forgiveness. Obviously, this response was more than the son could ever have hoped for or expected, but then our expectations of God can often surprise us even if they are limited by our own faults and life experiences.

In many ways, this parable is a wonderful image for the sacrament of reconciliation. Like the son, we choose through our words and actions to go off to the distant land of separation from God – the land of selfishness, pride, and excess. Like the father, God will not stop us. But when we have decided we have had enough of that land, just like the fatherGod is waiting for our return, to receive us back, watching out for us with expectation. God does not give up on us. The whole history of salvation testifies to this fact,which is why the sacrament of reconciliation can be for us our moment of return.

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**SUNDAY, M****ARCH 3, 2024 THIRD SUNDAY**

(Lec. 29) **OF LENT**

1) Exodus 20:1-17

 or 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17

2) 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

3) John 2:13-25

Gospel related: **CCC** 473, 575, 583, 584, 586, 994

FOCUS: In the sacraments, the Lord fills us with his grace to help us love him with our whole hearts.

As we continue our journey through Lent, today’s reading from Exodus enumerates the commandments God’s people were to live by as part of the covenant relationship God established with them at Mount Sinai. The first three commandments shape our relationship with God, and the remaining seven shape our relationship with one another. Jesus summarized these with the great commandment: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. If we live this dual commandment of loving God and neighbor, we will fulfill the 10Commandments.

Let’s focus on the very first commandment: *You shall not have other gods besides me.* Sounds easy enough. We don’t go to some other church to worship the god of rain or the god of fertility as the pagans did back in the day. We only worship God as revealed in sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition.

And yet, is it really true that we do not have other gods besides the Lord God? Because if it is true, then he is the one we seek to please first; whose commandments we seek to obey; the one to whom we turn first for guidance and help; the one around whom we organize our lives; the one who comes first in our hearts.

Each of us loves God. But maybe there are times when he doesn’t *really, always*come first. The daily distractions of our lives can end up receiving all our attention. We may lack energy, and might be running low on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and so rather than pray, we watch a show or spend time on social media. Rather than share our faith with a family member, well, we’ll find pretty much anything else to do instead. God, and the things of God, seem to take a back seat at times in our lives. Thank goodness we never take a back seat for him!

That is part of the reason giving something up for the six weeks of Lent is so affirming and challenging. The Lord is always attending to, caring for, and loving us. We take this time to participate in prayerful, spiritual practices that they might help us remember to whom we belong, and to whom we ought to give our “first fruits.”

Fortunately, the Lord is ready to help us. Every time we receive him in the Eucharist, every time we encounter him in the sacrament of reconciliation, the Lord fills us with his grace, cleansing our hearts and strengthening them to resist the temptation of all those attachments and desires that keep us from loving God wholeheartedly. That same zeal we heard Jesus display in the Gospel story as he cleansed the temple he also has for us – for seeing us get rid of all that inner clutter that keeps us from truly and fully loving him. All we need to do is ask; all we need to do is come to him.

Monday, March 4, 2024 MONDAY OF

(Lec. 237) THIRD WEEK

1) 2 Kings 5:1-15ab OF LENT

2) Luke 4:24-30 (Opt. Mem.

 Saint Casimir)

FOCUS: God’s love and mercy are unbounded.

The Lord shows his abundant and unbounded mercy through some interesting people in today’s first reading. Naaman, the highly esteemed military commander, has everything going for him except for one, big thing: He has leprosy. The king of Israel is a rebellious and disobedient king (we know, because the Lord has sent a prophet, Elisha, to call him and Israel back to repentance and away from destruction and sin). We also have the prophet Elisha, who will cure Naaman of his leprosy.

Finally, and standing out from all of them, is a girl. She is described as *a little girl* who had been *captured in a raid on the land of Israel* and had become *the servant of Naaman’s wife*. This means she was living in the house of a Gentile, an enemy of Israel. That makes what transpires in this story even more remarkable.

Even though she is a servant girl in a foreign land, she is aware of the existence of Elisha*,* the prophet, and knows he can cure Naaman:*If only my master would present himself to the prophet in Samaria, she said to her mistress, he would cure him of his leprosy.*

Her proclamation reveals a love for Naaman – a desire for his good – that comes from God. To love is “to will the good of another” (CCC 1766). This young girl, unnamed, unfree, and uncounted in society, knows the great commandments of God, including, Y*ou shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord* (Lev 19:18). She is unconcerned that this man is not of her people; she is undaunted to share what she knows; and she is unafraid to follow God’s commandment.

In this milieu of God’s compassionate love, whereby he has sent the prophet Elisha to redeem his people, the place where his mercy takes hold in this story is in the body of a hostile pagan, not a faithful Israelite. In today’s Gospel, Jesus says *to the people in the synagogue at Nazareth … there were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet,yet not one of them was cleansed but only Naaman the Syrian.* False sacrifices and pious ritual did not cleanse those who were already of the Lord, but the love of God shared by a little girl brought new life and mercy to one who now claimed the Lord for his own.

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Tuesday, March 5, 2024 TUESDAY OF

(Lec. 238) THIRD WEEK

1) Daniel 3:25, 34-43 OF LENT

2) Matthew 18:21-35

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

FOCUS: *Good and upright is the Lord; thus he shows sinners the way.*

The season of Lent is an opportunity to actively consider the concept of forgiveness –the great mercy of God and the ways we are called to imitate this mercy in our own lives.

In today’s Gospel, for example, Jesus tells a parable comparing the kingdom of heaven to a king who wants to settle his accounts. A debtor is brought before him who owes an amount so large it would be impossible to repay. He begs for more time, and the king forgives his loan completely. Though he no longer owes the king anything, he immediately seeks out another servant who owes him a much smaller amount. He begins choking him, demanding repayment. When the other servant begs for more time, he refuses and has him thrown in jail.

This behavior is patently absurd. How could he demand repayment for a debt so small, when his immeasurably larger debt has already been forgiven? And yet the moral of the story is that this is exactly how we act when we refuse to forgive one another. At the end of the parable, the master sentences the unmerciful servant to unending torture. Jesus warns that his heavenly Father will do the same to us, unless we forgive each other from the heart. Hard-heartedness has eternal consequences.

Just like the servant in the parable, our entire debt has been forgiven by God. Jesus took on the sins of the whole world when he died on the cross for us. Relative to this, any offense done to us is minor. Therefore, let us remember that God’s mercy has no limits. No sin is so large that it cannot be forgiven by God. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we must learn to forgive one another as God has forgiven us.

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Wednesday, March 6, 2024 WEDNESDAY OF

(Lec. 239) THIRD WEEK

1) Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9 OF LENT

2) Matthew 5:17-19

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

FOCUS: As followers of Jesus, we are set apart by observing God’s commandments, thus bearing witness to our faith.

For many of us growing up, there was a fear of standing out, especially during those dreaded middle-school years. We wanted to dress like the other kids at school, use the same vernacular, and of course play the same sports or activities. Blending in was key to adolescent survival.

Not so for the ancient Israelites. One of the main purposes of the law was to set the Israelites apart from everyone else, as it also revealed the holy character of the eternal God. The law regulated almost every area of life, from diet to cleanliness to personal interactions. No law was trivial, for each stipulation differentiated the Israelites, allowing them to witness their faith in the one true God to others.

As Moses instructs the Israelites in today’s first reading, *Observe [the statutes and decrees] carefully, for thus will you give evidence of your wisdom and intelligence to the nations, who will hear of all these statutes and say, “This great nation is truly a wise and intelligent people.”*

This was not about vanity – being set apart for the sake of being set apart and admired. The witness they gave and what other nations saw was in praise of the Most High God. God who had brought them out of slavery to the Promised Land, and who had set apart and cherished his people that they might flourish in covenantal bond with him.

Yet they wandered, turned away from his promises, disobeyed his commands, and offered unworthy sacrifices.

What the law, weakened by the flesh, was powerless to do (Cf., Rom 8:3), Christ did in taking on flesh and enlivening us with his Spirit. Only *in* him and *through* him – not by our own merits or acts of righteousness – are we able to “obey and teach these commandments.” Jesus is, as he tells us in the Gospel, the fulfillment of the law.

The commandments of God bring us life, and by following them we provide a powerful witness to the Gospel. Jesus entered human history as the manifestation of God’s perfect love, gathering all the commandments into one in himself. Baptized into his life, we, as his disciples, are set apart – not blending in but standing out.

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Thursday, March 7, 2024 THURSDAY OF

(Lec. 240) THIRD WEEK

1) Jeremiah 7:23-28 OF LENT

2) Luke 11:14-23 (Opt. Mem.

 Saints Perpetua and Felicity,

 Martyrs)

Gospel related: **CCC** 385, 700

FOCUS: Listen to God’s voice.

In today’s Gospel passage, Jesus drives a demon out of a man who had been not able to speak because of it. He is healed by Jesus and gains his voice. We heard the story, but what is interesting in its telling is that it spends far more time on the crowd’s reaction to Jesus’ miracle than the miracle itself. Some dare to accuse Jesus of doing the devil’s work. Others ask him for further signs.

The focus on the great miracle that has happened has shifted away from the healing. It is the prophecy of Jeremiah from our first reading, fulfilled: They hear but they do not really listen. They did not pay heed, and*walked in the hardness of their evil hearts*. Why were they so confused at this sign of God’s healing love? What made them consider the prince of demons as the source of something beautifuland life-giving?

Each of us has our own answer to those questions because, like those in the crowds surrounding Jesus, we, too, fall prey to distractions, sin, and blindness. We are – at times – the ones of whom Jeremiah prophesied: *This is the nation that does not listen to the voice of the Lord, its God, or take correction. Faithfulness has disappeared; the word itself is banished from their speech*. We doubt, we challenge the Lord to show us something, we question his ways.

But still we come to the Lord. We come to him in prayer, in worship, and in liturgy. And he in his generous and loving mercy awaits us and welcomes us – ornery or pious, angry or grateful. We come and we are reminded: The Word of God came to us and became like us so that we may become like him. We will celebrate together the sacrament that is the Eucharist, his Word made flesh. Let us listen to his voice, and pay heed to his comforting assurance: *The Kingdom of God has come upon [us]*. We are the Lord’s, and we are safe in his arms.

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Friday, March 8, 2024 FRIDAY OF

(Lec. 241) THIRD WEEK

1) Hosea 14:2-10 OF LENT

2) Mark 12:28-34 (Opt. Mem.

 Saint John of God,

 Religious)

Gospel related: **CCC** 129, 202, 228, 575, 2196 **CSDC** 40, 112

FOCUS: God’s mercy offers healing, refreshment, and freedom.

*Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these*.

The commandment to love others is clear, uncompromising, and irrevocable. To love is to step into something radical and life-changing. The One who loved us first and who is love itself has demonstrated that to us from the beginning of time. In today’s first reading from the prophet Hosea, we get a glimpse of what the love of God looked like for the people of Israel.

Hosea is calling out to the people of Israel with a message of repentance. “Turn back to the Lord,” he says. Repent for all you have done, approach the Lord with fearlessness and confidence that he will welcome you.

For God said: *I will heal their defection … I will love them freely … I will be like the dew for Israel.* This message is one of healing, freedom, and refreshment.

Returning to God is about healing and reconciliation, not about punishment or fear. God promises to love the people freely, to be like dew for them. Dew – the most gentle way of providing water and life. God extends this same healing and freedom to us. The people of Israel were called back to God, and so are we.

As God’s love for his people is healing and gentle, so we are called to love with gentleness. We, too, can seek healing in our relationships and offer forgiveness to those who have harmed us. In doing so, we can experience the freedom of God’s healing love and share that healing with others. As we turn to the Eucharist, we lift up all those areas of our lives in need of healing and pray that God’s gentle mercy will transform our lives into ones of freedom.

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Saturday, March 9, 2024 SATURDAY OF

(Lec. 242) THIRD WEEK

1) Hosea 6:1-6 OF LENT

2) Luke 18:9-14 (Opt. Mem.

 Saint Frances of Rome,

 Religious)

Gospel related: **CCC** 588, 2559, 2613, 2631, 2667, 2839

FOCUS: *Come, let us return to the Lord … he will heal us*.

The prophet Hosea preached against the growing idolatry among the Jewish people in the Northern Kingdom of Israel some seven centuries before the birth of Jesus. We heard him in our first reading, extolling all, *Come, let us return to the Lord*. He assures the people that the same God who has punished them will also forgive them.

The people to whom Hosea was preaching were simply going through the motions of their faith and their fulfillment of responsibilities toward the law. They offered incense and sacrifice at all the required times, but these were empty gestures. Too many were breaking the first commandment by offering sacrifice and worship to lesser gods in other temples at the same time. The Lord spoke through Hosea saying, *It is love that I desire, not sacrifice*.

Those to whom Hosea spoke were not unlike the Pharisee in today’s parable. He had no love for God or his fellow human beings because he was too in love with himself. Even his prayer reeked of arrogance and pride.

For Jesus, the least of all is the greatest of all. Even though the tax collector was hated by the people in the town because they were all in his debt, his prayer is heard because it is honest and true, without embellishment. He admits sin and turns to God for mercy.

At times, we find ourselves wanting a pat on the back from God and others because of how much good we do or how much we pray. No matter how good we think ourselves to be, God is always greater. Likewise, no matter how sinful we feel, God is always more merciful. Wherever we are, let us heed Hosea’s invitation: *Come, let us return to the Lord … he will heal us*.

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**SUNDAY,** **MARCH 10, 2024 FOURTH SUNDAY**

(Lec. 32) **OF LENT**

1) 2 Chronicles 36:14-16,19-23

2) Ephesians 2:4-10

3) John 3:14-21

Gospel related: **CCC** 219, 444, 454, 458, 678, 679, 706, 2130 **CSDC** 3, 64

FOCUS: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.*

Many of us are committed to certain Lenten practices this holy season. Perhaps we are working to add more or certain types of prayer into our faith life. Perhaps we have given something up. Whatever they are, each could be categorized as a certain type of gift. We are giving God our time or giving up something out of love for him. Any good Lenten practice is, in some way, a giving of ourselves, our desires, our effort, to God.

It is but a small gesture of love in return for the love we have been given. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son*, *so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life*. Let us be clear. God does not “need” anything from us, but he wants us. He created us, he loves us, and he desires to be in relationship with us for eternity.

And so our Church asks us to offer these gifts of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to him. Why?

One reason is that these gifts are acts of love. They are acts of relationship. Just as a child gives a parent a thousand gifts – wilted dandelions, scraps of paper, or bits of nature found outside – it is not the gift that matters, but the love with which is it given. The parent does not need that half a seashell, but oh, the love that it contains! These gifts are beautiful and good, not for any utilitarian value, but because of the way they bind us together in relationship.

Another reason we are asked to offer these gifts is this: Anything we give to God rebounds back to us, transformed by his perfect goodness. Anything we give to God is poured back out on earth, filled with his glory. Therefore, our small spiritual sacrifices can be poured back out on us and others for the sanctification of the world.

One final reason we offer our humble gifts to God is simply gratitude. We recognize that all is gift. As the Letter to the Ephesians reminds us, God has poured out *the immeasurable riches of his grace*. It *is not from you; it is the gift of God.* And so, in gratitude, we offer back what was given to us. We recognize the source of all these good things, the source of strength who helps us reject any bad things we are giving up, and we joyfully draw near to the giver of all these good gifts in the spiritual practices we take up in this season.

As we approach the most precious of all of these gifts in this Eucharist, may we be strengthened for our Lenten journey. May we be filled with the gratitude and the love which can strengthen us in our Lenten practices. And may we be drawn closer to God who loved us so much that he gave us his only Son.

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Monday, March 11, 2024 MONDAY OF

(Lec. 244) FOURTH WEEK

1) Isaiah 65:17-21 OF LENT

2) John 4:43-54

FOCUS: Ask God for the big things, as well as the small.

Today's Gospel story of a royal official asking Jesus to cure his son, who is some distance away, is a remarkable occurrence. Jesus was already viewed by the religious and civil officials as a troublemaker. They feared he might lead an uprising against either the religious leaders or against the Romans.

Thus it was a somewhat dangerous act by the official, as well. Should Jesus heal his son, it would make Jesus even more famous and beloved, which also would make him more powerful. In spite of the potential backlash, the official made the request, and Jesus granted it.

Jesus did not require the official to renounce Rome, nor did he require that the request be made public. In other words, there were no conditions imposed on the one seeking the miracle. All that was needed was faith, and the Roman official had it and acted upon it.

Asking Jesus for what we need is therefore not only something he wants, but that which we are instructed to do when he teaches us how to pray (Cf., Luke 11:1-4): “Give us this day our daily bread” is not just about food, or physical nourishment, but spiritual life and the necessities for flourishing as a disciple in the kingdom.

There is something even more significant and poignant about asking for help on behalf of someone else. It is not us wishing for them to be as we wish them to be, but earnestly and honestly lifting up their true needs before the Lord – interceding in prayer for them.

Into this space, God enters. God’s care and healing are still present today. God loves us and wants to show that love in many ways. Look for the ways God is clearly working in your life, and answering prayers. Ask God for the big things, as well as the small. Share your stories with others and even if the answer is not what you expected, rejoice anyway. Rejoice because you know that God loves you and is by your side through every difficulty.

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Tuesday, March 12, 2024 TUESDAY OF

(Lec. 245) FOURTH WEEK

1) Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12 OF LENT

2) John 5:1-16

Gospel related: **CCC** 575, 583, 594

FOCUS: Jesus is the source of life.

Water is necessary for life. In Ezekiel’s vision of the new Israel, he sees a stream flowing from the temple that will restore fertility to a land that was once arid. What starts as a trickle grows into a river with the power to make saltwater fresh. The trees along this river will grow fruit every month, and their leaves will provide medicine. Every sort of living creature shall multiply wherever the river flows. The river represents a return to Eden. And the temple is its source.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus travels to the temple to celebrate a Jewish holy day. While in Jerusalem, he visits a pool where many have gathered in hopes of being healed. Jesus singles out a man who has been ill for 38 years and asks him if he wants to be well. After the man explains that he has not been able to make it into the pool by himself, Jesus says to him, *Rise, take up your mat, and walk.* And immediately, the man does as Jesus says. Jesus does not take him to the pool to be healed, but heals him with his words.

Jesus is himself the bountiful, flowing, healing water of Ezekiel’s prophecy. He is the living water from whom, if we drink, we shall receive eternal life. While he does not say this to the man here, he has already begun speaking of it.

In the chapter of John’s Gospel just prior to today’s passage, Jesus told the Samaritan woman that he could give her *living water* (Jn 4:10). He tells her, *the water I shall give will become … a spring of water welling up to eternal life* for the one who drinks it (Jn 4:14). Later, Jesus will state in public: *Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink* (Jn 7:37).

We see in today’s readings that Jesus is the source of life. As necessary as water is for biological life, so God is necessary for the life of the soul. Jesus offers himself as our true food and drink each time we receive the Eucharist, sustaining us on our journey toward eternal life. May we open our hearts to receive this healing refreshment.

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Wednesday, March 13, 2024 WEDNESDAY OF

(Lec. 246) FOURTH WEEK

1) Isaiah 49:8-15 OF LENT

2) John 5:17-30

Gospel related: **CCC** 574, 589, 594, 612, 635, 679, 859, 994, 998, 1038, 1063, 1470, 2824 **CSDC** 259

FOCUS: In Christ Jesus we have found the source of salvation and life.

Today’s Gospel passage reminds us of a basic truth of faith – that the work of redemption is essentially God’s work, entrusted to his Son, who then invites us to participate in it. In addition to being the judge of all humanity, Christ is also the source of grace and the conduit of mercy for all to draw from.

One of the great struggles of the life of faith is overcoming the false idea that we must work for salvation. Over and over again, people fall for the belief that they must correct their lives and overcome their faults and failings before presenting themselves to the Lord. If that were true and the burden of the work of salvation falls upon the individual, then why would we need a Savior – why did Christ die for our sins?

This Gospel puts this false notion to rest. Yes, we are commanded to change our lives, to repent and confess our sins and to respond to God’s grace, but we are to do so in the sure and certain hope that God is indeed gracious and merciful, and that in him alone can we find forgiveness and life. The promise of that mercy should, in the words of the psalm, lift up all who are bowed down.

This Gospel is a source of encouragement as we continue our Lenten journey. Jesus tells us that the mission of redemption comes from the very heart of the Father – it is God’s will that we be saved. And, as the prophet Isaiah says: Like a mother who will not forget her child, God will never forget us; he will never turn his back on us, no matter how broken we are. All God asks of us is a contrite heart and a hope-filled spirit, and in Jesus he will do the rest. Through him we can put behind us our past faults, and look forward to the promise of life eternal.

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Thursday, March 14, 2024 THURSDAY OF

(Lec. 247) FOURTH WEEK

1) Exodus 32:7-14 OF LENT

2) John 5:31-47

Gospel related: **CCC** 548, 582, 702, 719

FOCUS: Through and in Christ we witness to God’s immense love.

Who is a reliable witness? Who is not? How do we know?

In the first reading Moses, a prophet chosen by God and rejected temporarily as God’s spokesman by those following him, challenges God’s intention to consume his people with his wrath. Moses argues with God. “If you destroy these people, that will be your legacy among the Egyptians,” Moses essentially says to God. “Is that the story you want told of you, one of destruction and breach of promise?” And God relents.

God’s leading of his people out of Egypt and slavery, to flourish in the Promised Land and be his people as he was their God, is the story that was under way. Moses was a witness to this. As human history continued, the covenantal bond grew and the law arose as a way of regulating the behaviors of all who were in relationship with God. Other nations witnessed the way the nation of Israel was set apart, and made for the glory of the one, true God.

Jesus himself came to bear witness, literally in human flesh, to the love of God, and the legacy and enduring nature of God’s promises. He spoke of the importance of witnessing and of the evidence by which we can judge the truth of it. John the Baptist, he says, was a reliable witness, and he (Jesus) himself is even more so. He says the works people have seen him do testify to the goodness of God and his desire to give them real life, both now and after the death of their bodies. Jesus asks, “Where is the love of God in you if you do not see this evidence and believe what you see?”

Jesus told us he is the way, the truth, and the life. He is truth himself and whatever he testifies to, and we witness from him, is perfect truth, goodness, and beauty. So today, let us humbly come to this table with a prayer to have both our eyes and our hearts opened so we may, by our actions, be reliable witnesses to God’s immense love.

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Friday, March 15, 2024 FRIDAY OF

(Lec. 248) FOURTH WEEK

1) Wisdom 2:1a, 12-22 OF LENT

2) John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Gospel related: **CCC** 583

FOCUS: Our hope is in the Lord who protects us.

Today’s Gospel has a deep sense of foreboding and trouble surrounding Jesus. He is doing what he can to avoid those who are out to persecute him. He knows he faces powerful enemies, and so he tries to be secretive to not confront them.

When he *is* confronted by them, however, he does not retreat from his mission. He anchors down, professing that he has been sent by the Father: *Yet I did not come on my own, but the one who sent me, whom you do not know, is true. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me*. And even when they do try to detain him, he slips from their midst successfully. In the face of great adversity, the Father is with him.

We might consider what our reactions are when we face great tumult in our lives. It is natural to want to avoid difficult situations or run away, but we might think of what it would take to respond as Jesus does with conviction and faith. We must trust that the Lord is always with us, especially in times of great adversity. Jesus has revealed to us how much God loves us and wants to protect us.

As we continue with our celebration of the Eucharist, let us give thanks for our merciful and generous God. May our physical and spiritual practices this Lent bring us to a greater understanding of his love and protection of us. And may we work to share this great gift of the Lord’s compassion with others.

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Saturday, March 16, 2024 SATURDAY OF

(Lec. 249) FOURTH WEEK

1) Jeremiah 11:18-20 OF LENT

2) John 7:40-53

Gospel related: **CCC** 574, 575, 588, 595

FOCUS: The Lord is always present to guide our ways.

Jeremiah, like Moses, was never crazy about the idea of being a prophet. And why would he be? Hard proclamations to human beings about their bad behavior are rarely received, then or now, with open minds and hearts. But Jeremiah became a courageous prophet, and for his troubles was mocked, humiliated, and even lowered into a cistern filled with mud (Cf., Jer 38:6). And yet, with some occasional and at times even understandable misgivings, he continued to rely on God to judge the situation justly and act for the good of all, difficult though that may have been to watch the results.

How could a prophet of God be treated so poorly? The simple answer is because we sin. Our free will allows us to disobey the Lord, and to act with pride and self-satisfaction when humility and sacrifice are called for. The Gospel passage gives us a particular insight into this as the crowd reacts to Jesus’ teaching on the last day of the feast of Tabernacles. This was a day when water was brought from a special pool and poured on the altar of the temple to celebrate the Exodus from Egypt. Jesus had used this joyful celebration (in the verses just prior to today’s passage) to explain that *he* is living water, the liberation sent from God, the fulfillment of God’s history of gracious actions for them*.*

Why didn’t everyone believe him? Some did, we read, but others relied only on their own literalistic religious ideas, such as, *theChrist will not come from Galilee, will he?* They harden their hearts so they will not have to see God’s surprising goodness acting not only in their cherished traditions but, more importantly, in their very midst.

We will recognize this hardening of hearts, this rigidity that does not want to see even *good* change, for it is still in our midst, and sometimes, in our own hearts. The only solution is to allow God to guide our judgments in every moment. Let us come to this altar today, continuing our Lenten repentance, asking to be broken open to see justly God’s actions in our midst.

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**SUNDAY, M****ARCH 17, 2024 FIFTH SUNDAY**

(Lec. 35) **OF LENT**

1) Jeremiah 31:31-34

2) Hebrews 5:7-9

3) John 12:20-33

Gospel related: **CCC** 363, 434, 542, 550, 607, 662, 786, 1428, 2731, 2795, 2853 **CSDC** 570

FOCUS: The Lord asks us to serve him, even through trials or suffering.

In the first reading, the prophet Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant the Lord will establish with his people. And why was the Lord establishing a new covenant, we might ask: What happened to the old one? As Jeremiah describes and as we see throughout the Old Testament, the recurring problem was disobedience. The Israelites failed, time and again, to obey the Lord’s commandments, rebelling against the Lord, choosing instead to follow the ways of their neighbors, or to live as they chose.

So the Lord God established a new covenant, one that was established in the blood of Christ, through his sacrifice on the cross. As we hear Jesus say in today’s Gospel, this is why he came into the world. *Now is the time of judgment on this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself*. Here he is foretelling not just his death, but the kind of death he would undergo. His mission is not just one of suffering, however, but that he might be raised into new life, and through him, through his resurrection, all might be offered salvation, eternal life.

The path Jesus followed that led to his passion, death, and resurrection was born in obedience to the Father. Jesus’ words: *Yet what should I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’?* call to mind his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, *not what I will but what you will* (Mk 14:36b). His words epitomize that obedience, that willingness to do the Father’s will even when it is hard, even when it involves great suffering. It is this obedience that the author of Hebrews highlights as the key to Jesus’ sacrifice and the imitation of this obedience, the key to our salvation.

But obedience is a difficult pill for us to swallow, especially when that obedience involves accepting suffering. No one wants to suffer. No one wants to see their loved ones suffer. But none of us will leave this earth without experiencing suffering. Sometimes we suffer as a consequence of our sin – the times we disobey God and his laws or times when we act imprudently. Other times, we suffer because of the sin of other people. Yet other times, we suffer because we live in a fallen world which includes illness and death of loved ones and calamities such as natural disasters. And some of us will suffer much more than others.

But this suffering doesn’t have to be pointless or meaningless. God has the power to use it for his purpose – to bring about goodness and life through it, as he did with Christ’s suffering. What he asks of us is that we remain obedient, that we not rebel and turn away from him. And to help us do so, Christ nourishes us with his own body and blood, with his very self, that we might grow in his likeness, grow in obedience to God, and remain with him forever.

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Monday, March 18, 2024 MONDAY OF

(Lec. 251) FIFTH WEEK

1) Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, OF LENT

 19-30, 33-62 (Opt. Mem.

 or 13:41c-62 Saint Cyril of Jerusalem,

2) John 8:1-11 Bishop and Doctor

 of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 583

FOCUS: Jesus is just and merciful.

It’s not all that hard to imagine the tone of the scribes and Pharisees in today’s Gospel. It’s reminiscent of a schoolyard bully who runs to the teacher with a story that conveniently leaves out his part of the drama; or a courtroom lawyer in a police procedural drama who approaches a witness with a smirk, only to realize in the exchange that he does not, in fact, have the whole story.

The scribes and Pharisees bring forth to Jesus a woman *caught in the very act of committing adultery*. The Pharisees did this to try to get a response out of Jesus so they could have some charge to bring against him. They wanted to bring a charge against him by pointing out someone else’s sin.

How often can we fall into the role of the Pharisee in pointing out someone else’s sin for condemnation without examining our own hearts? This is at the heart of what Jesus is illustrating here. Immediately after the Pharisees say, *teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery*, Jesus bends down and begins to write on the ground with his finger. He responds to their questioning with silence and eventually stands up and gives a piercing response: *Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her*. None of them threw stones because they knew they were not without sin.

We cannot throw stones either, although each one of us could probably point out a time in our life where we have wanted Jesus to condemn someone because of their sin without examining our own hearts. It is really an act of pride and judgment on our part when we point fingers at other people’s sin without acknowledging that we, too, are sinners.

Jesus is just and merciful. He does not come to condemn, but to convict for repentance and a change of heart. Perhaps today, we can ask Jesus to convict us of the areas in which we sin and give us the grace for repentance and a true change of heart where we need it.

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**Tuesday****, March 19, 2024 SAINT JOSEPH,**

(Lec. 543) **SPOUSE OF THE**

1) 2 Samuel 7:4-5a, **BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**

 12-14a, 16 **- SOLEMNITY**

2) Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22

3) Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a

 or Luke 2:41-51a

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 430, 437, 452, 486, 497, 503, 517, 531, 534, 583, 1507, 1846, 2196, 2599, 2666, 2812 **CSDC** 259, 378

FOCUS: Through Joseph, God fulfilled his promise to David.

Today, we celebrate Joseph’s role as the husband of Mary, the adoptive father of Jesus, the humble servant of God, the protector of the Holy Family, and the patron of the universal Church. This is a bit of a mouthful! And these are great and important honors. They are all the more indicative of God’s beautiful, salvific plan when we consider the following: Joseph is mentioned in only 45 verses in the New Testament – by name only in Matthew and Luke, when they tell the story of Jesus’ birth, and twice in passing in John (1:45 and 6:42). Mark and the other New Testament books never mention him, and he is never quoted.

This isn’t just information for fun, or a wiki fact page. We have no idea whether there may have been other mentions or quotes from him in texts that were lost to time. In a sense, all of that is irrelevant. In another sense, it is essential: God works through Joseph to complete his redemptive actions for humanity.

The first reading give us a glimpse of how this will come to be, as the Lord instructs Nathan to tell David that his house and his kingdom shall remain before God forever. The Jewish expectation of a messiah who is a son of David arises from this prophecy. It will be fulfilled by Jesus’ birth.

In outlining *how the birth of Jesus Christ came about,* Matthew shows the linear, multigenerational connection between David, the second king of Israel who was responsible for uniting the kingdom of Israel, and Jesus Christ: the final, greatest king of Israel, in fact, of the universe.

This connection is important not just for showing us who we are as the Lord’s own, but that God is faithful to his promises. Many, many people have disobeyed, many circumstances and acts of rebellion and disobedience have occurred, but the Lord has never wavered in his love for us and his desire to be fully reunited to us.

So Joseph, a humble carpenter, was the one chosen, the one present at that time in human history, to be the adoptive father of the Son of God. He was a man of integrity and compassion, as seen in his actions in today’s Gospel. He was also a man of humility and obedience, and unquestioning loyalty to the Lord. Joseph, a son of David, adopts Jesus as his own son, thus fulfilling the promise that the messiah will belong to the family of David.

Abraham was promised to be the father of all nations. David was promised to be the king of an eternal kingdom. Despite “all the sins and infidelities of David and his successors, this tradition culminates in Jesus Christ,” the son of David, God’s anointed one (*CSDC* 378). Jesus is the king of the eternal kingdom of God. He is the Messiah who saves us from our sins.

Like Abraham before him, Joseph trusted the promises made to him by the Lord through the message of an angel.His faith is an example for all of us. And because of his role in the life of Christ, the Church holds him up especially as a light for men: fathers, brothers, godfathers, guardians. May that light shine among us, reflecting the goodness God gives us, and show us the path when darkness surrounds us.

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Wednesday, March 20, 2024 WEDNESDAY OF

(Lec. 253) FIFTH WEEK

1) Daniel 3:14-20, 91-92, 95 OF LENT

2) John 8:31-42

Gospel related: **CCC** 89, 549, 588, 601, 613, 1741, 2466

FOCUS: The truth can sometimes be difficult to hear.

Today's first reading is so remarkable that all of us should ponder it and realize how awesome God is. He not only saves the three men from the *white-hot furnace*, he dispatches a messenger to be in there with them: *Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who sent his angel to deliver the servants who trusted in him.*

This seems to be the way our generous God acts. For while we walked in the fires of death – due to sin – he dispatched a messenger – he sent his own Son – to walk among us. In the same way that he didn’t just quench the fire around the three men, God didn’t simply “reboot” creation from outside of it. He entered into it, body, blood, soul and divinity, to walk among us so as to save us. Unlike King Nebuchadnezzar, however, many did not – and still do not – see God clearly among us.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus is speaking with people who seem open to his message. They are interested, but not convinced. When Jesus offers to set his listeners free by giving them the truth about God and his love for them, they argue that they have never been enslaved by anyone. The flames are so bright they cannot see clearly into the furnace; their enslavement to sin is so robust they do not even recognize the notion of freedom incarnate before them.

Have we ever experienced anything like this? Been so lost, blinded, or misguided that we have missed what is right in front of us? Are we so entrenched in our ways that we refuse or are unable to consider a new interpretation of an old idea? It is easy to miss the point of something we do not want to hear.

As we move through the last days of Lent, let us open our hearts and minds to hear the truth Jesus is telling us. Let us hear his words of love and salvation. Let us see our Savior among us, walking beside us in fire, desert, and storm. And give thanks to God.

\* \* \*

Thursday, March 21, 2024 THURSDAY OF

(Lec. 254) FIFTH WEEK

1) Genesis 17:3-9 OF LENT

2) John 8:51-59

Gospel related: **CCC** 473, 574, 590

FOCUS: *Whoever keeps my word will never see death*.

Traditionally referred to as “Our Father in Faith,” Abraham appears in both of today’s readings. The first reading from Genesis recalls how God chose the elderly Abram and made with him a new covenant, promising to make him the father of a great nation. To seal this relationship, God gave him a new name – Abraham – and promised to give him the land of Canaan as a perpetual possession. In return, Abraham and his descendants were to keep the covenant and to worship the one true God. It is this covenant that became the foundation of the Jewish faith.

Yet as we know, the Chosen People often strayed from the covenant, and time and again the Lord had to intervene and remind them of their obligations and even to renew the covenant. Again and again, he would send prophets to heal the rift and restore Israel to right relationship with its God. Later, when Moses was chosen to lead the people out of slavery, the Lord revealed himself using the title I AM.

As Christians we believe that the final renewal of this covenant came in the person and mystery of Christ. This time, instead of sending another prophet, the Lord sent his only Son. Revealing his true identity to the Jewish people, Jesus used the same title: *I AM*. Not understanding or recognizing who he is, the Jews accuse him of blasphemy and attempt to stone him.

In using this title, Jesus not only reveals his divine identity but also the faithfulness of God, a faithfulness that has been evident from the time of Abraham to our day. The same God who first called Abram out of the Land of Ur, who chose Moses to lead his people and anointed David king, is now with us through his Son, and the same steadfast and caring presence is offered to us as we journey through this Lenten season and through life. For we are certain that God indeed remembers his covenant, and whoever keeps that covenant will never see death.

\* \* \*

Friday, March 22, 2024 FRIDAY OF

(Lec. 255) FIFTH WEEK

1) Jeremiah 20:10-13 OF LENT

2) John 10:31-42

Gospel related: **CCC** 437, 444, 548, 574, 582, 589, 591, 594, 1562

FOCUS: God’s good works are all around us.

As we approach Holy Week, we see the mounting tension between Jesus and the Jewish authorities in John’s Gospel. Jesus expresses in no uncertain terms that he is the Son of God sent by the Father to do his works. Jesus is either who he says he is, the presence of God among us, or he is a blasphemer, a man making himself God’s equal. Jesus escapes arrest in this passage, but because the Sanhedrin could not see in Jesus the fulfillment of God’s promises, he will be put to death as a blasphemer (see *CCC* 591).

The prophet Jeremiah suffered a similar fate. In today’s first reading, we hear that even his friends have turned against him and seek to trap him. In spite of this, Jeremiah trusts that God is on his side *like a mighty champion*. Having entrusted his case to the Lord, he sings the Lord’s praises, as if the victory were already won.

Today’s readings invite us to examine whose side we are on. Are we a friend of God or do we oppose God’s word? Do we believe that Jesus is who he says he is? Because the people of Israel did not heed Jeremiah’s word and repent, Jerusalem fell, and its people were sent into exile. Hundreds of years later, the Jewish authorities did not heed the prophecy of John the Baptist. They could not see Jesus’ works for what they were – signs that Jesus was truly God’s Son.

God’s good works are all around us, we need only open our eyes to see and our hearts to believe. In this season of repentance, may we remember that resurrection is coming. May we sing praise to God, who has already won the victory for us.

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Saturday, March 23, 2024 SATURDAY OF

(Lec. 256) FIFTH WEEK

1) Ezekiel 37:21-28 OF LENT

2) John 11:45-56 (Opt. Mem.

 Saint Turibius of Mogrovejo,

 Bishop)

Gospel related: **CCC** 58, 60, 548, 596, 706, 2793

FOCUS: The Lord has not forgotten his people. He has gathered them from all sides.

Division and separation are never good things, unless we’re doing math problems or flying formation aircraft. Today’s Scriptures speak to us of reconciliation and reunification. The prophet Ezekiel offers hope to the people of Israel who have been forced out of their homelands. They have been scattered into foreign countries and separated from their loved ones. The Lord will bring them together, never again to be divided. He will cleanse them from sin and they will live on the land that has been promised to them. He will make a covenant of peace with them. Most important, the Lord says: *My dwelling shall be with them*.

The hope that Ezekiel offered and the covenant the Lord promised are found in Jesus of Nazareth. He is the dwelling of God among us. In our Gospel today, however, no one in the Sanhedrin believes that. They see him as a threat to the current status quo of uneasy peace with the Romans. If he causes trouble, the Romans will crack down on the “religious problem” and they will lose money, land, and power. Only Caiaphas speaks truth, as he prophesies that Jesus will die for the nation, so as *to gather into one the dispersed children of God*.

We enter Holy Week in a world that still suffers division, scattered peoples, and transgressions of every kind. But for the people of God, who are in the world but not of it, this is a time to give thanks for the gift of the Savior who fulfilled the promise of God. We are reconciled to the Father. He has gathered us from the distant lands and united us in Christ. And we live in the hope that one day we will live with him in the eternal sanctuary of heaven.

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**SUNDAY****, MARCH 24, 2021 PALM SUNDAY**

(Lec. 37) **OF THE**

1) Mark 11:1-10 **PASSION OF THE LORD**

 or John 12:12-16

(Lec. 38)

1) Isaiah 50:4-7

2) Philippians 2:6-11

3) Mark 14:1–15:47

 or 15:1-39

Gospel related: **CCC** 443, 444, 473, 474, 585, 597, 603, 1009, 1328, 1335, 1339, 1403, 2605, 2701, 2849 **CSDC** 183

FOCUS: We are united with Jesus, who shows us what it means to sacrifice for love.

Today we cover more ground with Jesus than on any other Sunday. We begin with Jesus at Bethpage, preparing for his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Once in the city, Jesus joins the disciples in the Upper Room for the Last Supper. Later, he awaits his fate in Gethsemane. After his arrest, he is taken to the high priest, then to the governor. Finally he is scourged at the praetorium, crucified at Golgotha, and buried in the tomb.

On this circuitous journey from Bethpage to Golgotha, so much changes, and so much is lost. Jesus goes from hailed hero to crucified criminal. He loses his status, his friends, and his dignity. His disciples face losses as well; they lose their courage, their leader, their sense of security. Jesus predicted his passion more than once, but never in specific terms. Neither the disciples nor Jesus himself knew exactly what it would take from them.

On our journey with Jesus through life, we, too, experience changes and loss. We often make sacrifices out of love for children and grandchildren, our parents, and other relations. We give to, and do for, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and fellow parishioners. And we all experience loss living on this earth, some more than others.

Jesus is with us in our loss, and he knows what it means to sacrifice for love. He emptied himself, becoming human to be with us, to love us, and to show us how to love like him. He surrendered his hero status and humbled himself out of love, even to the point of accepting death as a crucified criminal.

In the face of loss, we can be like the disciples or we can join in love with Jesus. At the Last Supper, the disciples denied that they would betray Jesus, or that their faith would be shaken. Still, they could not stay awake with him in Gethsemane, and they fled as soon as he was arrested, leaving the women alone at the cross and burial.

Unlike the disciples, Jesus does not flee. The sorrow and distress he exhibits in Gethsemane are real. He prays that his cup should pass, but ultimately he accepts God’s will. He surrenders to his fate and all he is to lose. He does so out of obedience to his Father, and out of love for us.

Jesus’ passion is our passion too. We journey together through loss – never alone, but always united with him. In this Eucharist we recall the Last Supper and how he shares himself with us out of love. Gathered as one with him through this sacrament, we face together whatever losses may be.

Monday, March 25, 2024 MONDAY OF

(Lec. 257) HOLY WEEK

1) Isaiah 42:1-7

2) John 12:1-11

Gospel related: **CCC** 2449 **CSDC**183

FOCUS: Serve one another in humility and love.

Isaiah prophesies the arrival of a servant of the Lord, his chosen one with whom he is pleased. It depicts the radical humility of the servant, *[bringing] forth justice to the nations, not crying out, not shouting*, who does not break a bruised reed or quench a wick that is failing. He will lead everyone in opening their eyes to the truth of God’s way of justice, which is compassion. It is a humbling vision for all of us.

This humility was embodied as foretold, in the divine person of the Son, Jesus. Jesus was indeed God’s chosen servant on earth; God gave him his Spirit and was well-pleased with him. We, too, by virtue of our baptism, share in the life and mission of the Church.

What does that mean for our daily lives? It means learning to put the needs of others before our own. It means helping to build up the body of Christ with our words and actions. Mary’s actions in today’s Gospel are some of the first toward this end. She anointed Jesus’ feet with *a liter of costly perfumed oil,* and then *dried them with her hair.*

In so doing, she imitates the humility she has seen in Jesus. It takes a vulnerable, servant’s heart to care for another’s feet. Her choice of expensive oil, and the amount of it, expresses at least a nascent understanding of Jesus’ importance to the world, and the homage due a king. It even lends an intimate, human moment of foreshadowing of Jesus’ death. She is caring for him in a tender moment of friendship, and in her own way is sharing in the life and the mission of the Church-not-yet-begun.

God has given us gifts and abilities, and he expects us to discern, accept, and share these gifts with others. Perhaps we are in a position to be a servant to another, or to allow another to serve us should we need it.

Let us ask the Lord to send us his grace to fortify us in this important work.

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Tuesday, March 26, 2024 TUESDAY OF

(Lec. 258) HOLY WEEK

1) Isaiah 49:1-6

2) John 13:21-33, 36-38

FOCUS: We all fall into sin, but the mercy of Jesus can draw us back to him.

This week, we are journeying with Jesus through his final days before his passion, death, and resurrection. In today’s Gospel, we join Jesus at the Last Supper. He is reclining at table with his disciples, and is *deeply troubled*. Jesus knows what is about to happen, that his time is at hand. Judas will betray him and not repent; Peter would deny him and repent.

Toward the end of the Gospel, Jesus asks Peter a question that all of us might do well to ponder: *Will you lay down your life for me?* Following Jesus is a joy, and a challenge. It is a commitment that involves sacrifice and, at times, hard work. Temptations, falls, sin, brokenness, woundedness will always be present. There are times when we will deny Jesus. There will be times where we will turn our backs to him. There will be times when we leave the cross on the ground and refuse to pick it up and follow him. The question that follows is, will we repent, turn back to him, and take the next step with him?

Judas betrayed Jesus and did not repent. He did not pick up his cross and follow Jesus. He did not seek a relationship with him again. Peter denied him and repented. Peter recognized his shortcomings and his sin and came back to the Lord with a repentant heart.

What do we do when we fail and sin against Jesus? Our choices include true repentance in our hearts, or indifference. The former leads to reconciliation and new life, and the latter directs us on a path upon which we do not want to linger! The Lord looks upon us with mercy, as he did Peter. We can call on him for help to return to him and to light our way.

Wednesday, March 27, 2024 WEDNESDAY OF

(Lec. 259) HOLY WEEK

1) Isaiah 50:4-9a

2) Matthew 26:14-25

Gospel related: **CCC** 610, 1339

FOCUS: In surrendering himself to death, Jesus secured for us the gift of life.

In many cultures and nations, today is often referred to as Black Wednesday or Spy Wednesday, the latter referring to today’s Gospel passage when Judas offered to betray Jesus to his enemies for 30 pieces of silver. From that moment on, the Gospel tells us Judas looked for an opportunity to hand him over.

In all of the experiences of Jesus’ passion and death, by far the worst must have been that sense of betrayal, and the growing isolation from those around him. This must have been particularly true as Jeus experienced denial and desertion by the Apostles. Only John, the youngest of the Twelve, remained faithful; even Peter, the one he had chosen as a future leader, would be incapable of standing by him.

Today’s Gospel articulates that growing sense of isolation and betrayal. Despite the fact that he had chosen Judas, shared with him the mysteries of the kingdom, and allowed him to witness the power of God’s word and presence, Jesus knew that he would betray him. But Jesus does not allow this to deter him; he is steadfast in doing the Father’s will.

As we stand on the cusp of the Triduum, we see this betrayal and Christ’s response: The humility Jesus showed and the sacrifice that Jesus made were for us. We have our lives to give him in return, knowing we, too, face the same temptations and experience the same failures as those who surrounded him. When have we preferred the silver of this passing world to the promise of life in Christ?

As we enter into this sacred time, we do so knowing the whole story of Christ’s faithful love and his willingness to die for our sins – allowing us to celebrate even in the darkness of these Gospel events. Once again we are reminded of God’s steadfast love and mercy – his desire to enter willingly into the pain and suffering of human experience and to bring to it his goodness and light.

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Thursday, March 28, 2024 THURSDAY OF

(Lec. 39) HOLY WEEK

1) Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14 (Mass of the

2) 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 Lord’s Supper)

3) John 13:1-15

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

FOCUS: We are called to be Eucharistic people.

Lent is over, and we now enter into the solemn passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is good for us to be in this holy place to give thanks to God.

Tonight we remember that Jesus offers himself to us through the gift of the Eucharist. It is his thanksgiving to the Father, and Jesus invites us to share in that thanksgiving through our participation in the Eucharist. It is not a passive act, for we are called to emulate Jesus by sharing in his life, death, and resurrection. It may not always be easy to continue Jesus’ mission, but it is full of blessings that culminate in our heavenly reward.

In the celebration of the Eucharist, we remember the sacrifice of Jesus, who took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. He said to them, *This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me*. Baptized into his life and death, and formed as his own body (the Church) here on earth, we, too, are taken, blessed, broken, and given to share Christ in the world.

In the same way that Jesus traveled from village to village during his ministry, we cannot just keep to ourselves. We are social beings called to enter intorelationship with one another, entering into one another’s lives. We experience conversion and transformation through one another, helping each other draw closer to God.

Jesus goes out to all the world to share his Good News, and he commands us to do the same. As he humbled himself, bowing down to wash the feet of his disciples, we humble ourselves in service to all who are in need of God’s mercy.

When Jesus returned to the Father, the Holy Spirit was sent to be our Advocate. God did not leave us bereft and alone, but gave us his Spirit so that through the Spirit, all might come to know the Son and the Father. At our baptism and confirmation, we are sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Each of us has been uniquely created by God and imbued with wondrous gifts. We learn how to use those gifts, and share them with the world, to give glory to the Lord.

Jesus is the Eucharist, but when we completed our initiation into his way of life, we accepted that we would also become a Eucharistic people – taken and chosen, blessed, broken, and given. Jesus gave his life for the world. In thanksgiving to God the Father, we, too, must give our lives so that the world may come to know the God of Life.

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Friday, March 29, 2024 FRIDAY OF

(Lec. 40) THE PASSION

1) Isaiah 52:13–53:12 OF THE LORD

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

3) John 18:1–19:42

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

FOCUS: We rejoice in Jesus Christ, our unexpected Lord.

Those who had long awaited the Messiah expected a military person, someone who would fight the Romans, forcing them to leave Israel, and then lead them into prominence as a righteous nation above all nations. The Messiah would be a warrior-king, endowed with wisdom and excelling in leadership. He would be blessed and highly favored. Everyone would know it was he.

Except they didn’t. The Messiah arrived, unexpectedly as it were, in a cave in a small town. An infant, born of a woman and yet, the Son of God. The Word of God in human flesh. Scripture after Scripture foretold his coming, and even Gentiles came from afar to celebrate his birth, the newborn king. Still, there were expectations for the Messiah ... and these weren’t it. The infant would grow into a wise and erudite young boy, a teacher from an early age. His public ministry began with fishermen, not soldiers. He sought out the poor, not those who could finance his mission. And very few recognized who he was, because he was “unexpected.”

This concept of an unexpected Messiah, or perhaps more accurately, a Messiah who is not-as-was-expected, runs throughout today’s Scriptures. In the first reading, Isaiah prophesies the coming of the Lord’s servant. It is descriptive and blunt. The servant did not seem like much growing up, the song says. He was not rich or physically attractive or charismatic as an adult. Then, the song continues, we noticed something about him: He was always interceding for others, paying no heed to his own health or safety. And he suffered at the hands of humans for that, and violently. But he never gave up his mission to intercede, to care, to love in the unexpected ways and places that God does.

Our Gospel writer also articulates that this unexpected man, who did unexpected things, was indeed the one all had hoped God would someday send. He was no earthly king and he was no temple priest. His family had no influence. But salvation history is full of God doing things in ways we would not expect, so perhaps we might wonder why this would be different?

The Messiah, Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, set off on his mission of reconciling all of humanity to the Father. To preach and proclaim the Good News of salvation; to heal, comfort, and challenge. He sought to intercede where he could, to love whomever he could, and call to repentance all who did not follow the commandments of God.

This was a mission that would fly in the face of religious authorities and could only end badly. And it did. The religious elders and leaders sought to silence or even kill him. The Roman authorities *would* torture and kill him for it, and even some of his closest friends would pretend not to know him.

We should not let the story of our Messiah become so familiar that we no longer experience or comprehend how gracious and generous God is, and how he meets our every need without playing to, although often exceeding, our expectations. This Christ Child would indeed be a King – King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. He is the most high priest, whose eternal sacrifice has redeemed the world.

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Saturday, March 30, 2024 **HOLY SATURDAY**

(Lec. 41) **EASTER VIGIL**

1) Genesis 1:1—2:2 or 1:1, 26-31a

2) Genesis 22:1-18 or 22:1-2,9a, 10-13, 15-18

3) Exodus 14:15—15:1

4) Isaiah 54:5-14

5) Isaiah 55:1-11

6) Baruch 3:9-15, 32–4:4

7) Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28

**New Testament Readings**

8) Romans 6:3-11

9) Mark 16:1-7

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 641, 652, 2174

FOCUS: Jesus is risen, alleluia, alleluia!

*Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.*

On this most holy night, we rejoice at Christ’s resurrection from the dead. Christ breaks the prison bars of death, sets captives free, and reconciles us with the Father. Tonight is a night of rejoicing. It is a night of hope. It is a night of coming to truly realize that Jesus Christ is who he says he is, and he will do what he says he will do. He rose from the dead as he promised. He gives us new life.

The Resurrection is both an event in human history, and an event not subject to time. The Logos, the Word of God, the second person of the Trinity, became Incarnate to rescue us from the bondage of sin and death. Jesus himself became sin who knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). He took on all the sin of the past, present, and future, and destroyed it so that it no longer has dominion over us, or holds us captive. He truly set us free from Satan. And, in being raised from the dead, he has conquered death. By virtue of our baptism, we are grafted onto Christ and so we, too, witness to the Resurrection. We encounter the risen Christ in the Eucharist, and at an appointed time we will be raised with him to everlasting life.

Imagine we are journeying to the tomb with Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James, and Salome that Easter morning. What would our thoughts have been? Would we have been eager to see if what he said would actually be true? Or would we have been doubting? We can all go through moments of doubt, or even wondering if God will fulfill his promises. Today’s Gospel reminds us that God does fulfill his promises, and that he will never abandon us.

Jesus continuously provides moments of rising to new life in our lives. He is continuously setting us free from sin through the sacrament of reconciliation, reigniting our strength with reception of the holy Eucharist, and speaking to us through his word.

As we begin this holy Easter season, let us ask for the grace to fall more in love with the resurrected Jesus in the Eucharist. Let us ask him to continuously reveal himself to us, that every time we receive him, we recognize that we are tasting a bit of heaven.

Christ the Lord is risen! Alleluia, alleluia!

**SUNDAY****, MARCH 31, 2024 EASTER SUNDAY**

(Lec. 42) **OF THE**

1) Acts 10:34a, 37-43 **RESURRECTION**

2) Colossians 3:1-4 **OF THE LORD**

 or 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8

3) John 20:1-9

 or Mark 16:1-7 (Lec. 41)

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

FOCUS: This Easter, we can *see and believe,* saying yes to the celebration of this sacred mystery.

Saint Peter begins his address by telling his listeners: *You know what has happened all over Judea*. We, too, know the story of Jesus being raised from the dead. And because we have heard it many times, we may be somewhat unmoved by what we are here to celebrate:

A man who was put to death *by hanging him on a tree* was *raised on the third day.* The disciples *ate and drank* with a man who *rose from the dead*.

This is truly amazing.

Here it might be helpful to step back to the part of the story we hear in John’s Gospel wherein Mary of Magdala, Peter, and the beloved disciple encounter the empty tomb.

These friends of Jesus had heard him talk about his death. Jesus had told them that he would rise after three days. Like us, they had heard. But *they did not yet understand.*

If our hearts are not moved by the story of the Resurrection, it could be that we, like these friends of Jesus, do not yet understand.

We may not understand how the death of someone 2,000 years ago has any bearing on our lives now. We may not understand that the love our hearts long for is stronger than death. We may not understand that the Resurrection means that nothing can separate us from God’s presence and help. There is so much we may not yet understand.

And yet, like the beloved disciple, today we can *see and believe.* We can say yes to being moved, yes to the celebration of something we don’t completely understand.

How do we go about saying “yes”?

First, these questions cannot be understood in a single day or in isolation. Perhaps we need to *seek the wisdom of others*. This could mean looking at our parish resources or reaching out to a family member, neighbor, or member of the clergy. It could look like setting up a regular time with a friend to talk and pray over questions together. When we take a concrete step to move from simple wondering into active seeking with the help of others, the living Christ will bring his light to our search.

Second, in the particularly graced moments when the Eucharist is consecrated and given in Communion, we can *talk to Jesus*. He is alive. He is here. Let us ask Jesus what he wants to give us that is new in this Easter season. Ask him to help us understand the mysteries we are wrestling with this morning. Bring our needs, our hurts, our questions, and our joys to the living Christ.

Today we celebrate in a particular way that the risen Christ is truly present. Not even death could keep him from us. So mighty is his love that he transformed the evil of the cross into a blessing through which he can eternally unite us to God. He is here. He is risen! Alleluia!

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