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YEAR B
WEEKDAYS II

Monday, July 1, 2024

(Lec.377)

- 1) Amos 2:6-10, 13-16
- 2) Matthew 8:18-22

MONDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
USA: Saint Junípero Serra,
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC 2444**

FOCUS: God must come first.

Is there anything hindering us from following Jesus completely? Is there anything preventing us from making God the number one priority in our lives?

At first glance, Jesus' words to the disciple who said he first needed to bury his father seem abrupt. The man has just shared something very personal, certainly an event worthy of grief and sympathy, and indicated his desire to fulfill his duty as a son. After all, what could be more important than honoring one's parents by giving them a proper burial?

God is. God must be the most important thing – even more important than our own families – if our lives are to be properly ordered. All other good things fall into their proper order after God when we place him first. If this passage is all we ever heard from Jesus, that initial sense of him being abrupt might hold. But we know that in following Christ we are to bring everything to him and place them at his feet. This is actually what the young man has done in telling Jesus his troubles, and so he is partway there. So Jesus invites him all the way into the life of discipleship by telling him to leave his worldly concerns and trust in him. Not because worldly concerns are not important, but because what God asks of us must always come first

This can be difficult, of course! The temptations are real: "I'll get right to what you're asking, God, right after I take care of this other thing." And so God's holy word in the Scriptures is meant to encourage us and give us help, so that when God calls us to do something, we can respond by following him, rather than by saying, "I'll do that *after* ..."

Jesus says the same thing to us that he said to the disciple in today's Gospel: *Follow me*.

Not "follow me later," not "follow me when you've checked off all your to-do list," and not "when it's convenient."

Jesus just says, *Follow me*.

Today, let us pray that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to those things – even good things! – we are putting before Jesus.

Holy Spirit, help us to prioritize God in our lives and trust that everything else will be properly ordered if we first give God our all. Amen.

Tuesday, July 2, 2024
(Lec. 378)

1) Amos 3:1-8;
4:11-12

2) Matthew 8:23-27

Gospel related: **CCC** 2610

TUESDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Let us ask for the gift of trusting faith.

Today's readings provide two examples of two acts of faith. The prophet Amos, whose voice we heard in the first reading, prophesied throughout his tenure about God's judgment – that God would bring justice to the earth. Just as surely as the lion roars when it captures its prey, God will punish Israel for its lack of justice to people who are poor and vulnerable. Those who heard these words, and trusted in the promises of God, believed this with their whole heart. They did so even though at the time of his prophecy, there was little evidence that Israel's leaders would change and become more just. Yet they persevered, we know, because they gave rise to generation after generation who worshipped the Lord and awaited the promised Messiah.

The Gospel passage demonstrates another act of faith. The one the Lord promised in all of Hebrew Scriptures, the Messiah, the anointed one, has come: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus calls his disciples to have faith that they are in God's care, even in the midst of a violent storm. When the waves are coming over the side of the boat, it seems Jesus is saying that we and the disciples have two choices. We can panic and assume the worst, or we can stay calm and deal with the problem while trusting that God is with us.

Let us not be naïve, these acts of faith can be difficult to put into practice. When dictators and terrorists cause innocents to suffer and die, it is hard to see God's hand at work. When natural disasters strike, or we suffer an unexpected illness, it can be hard to stay calm and trust that God is with us. But that is what faith is all about – trusting in God's goodness and love when we do not yet see it. Does faith work? Absolutely! But we have to be willing to give ourselves over completely to the care of God. As we receive Jesus today, let us ask him for the gift of trusting faith.

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Wednesday, July 3, 2024
(Lec. 593)

- 1) Ephesians 2:19-22
- 2) John 20:24-29

Gospel related: **CCC** 448, 644, 645, 659 **CSDC** 491

**SAINT THOMAS,
APOSTLE
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Trust in God who continues to form us in love.

Today we celebrate the feast of Saint Thomas the Apostle. As one of the Twelve, he provided an early foundation for the Church we know today. When many think of him, they call to mind his nickname of Doubting Thomas, since the main story we remember him by is our Gospel passage today where he doubts Jesus' resurrection.

This passage where Thomas struggles to believe is a relatable story of faith. Perhaps many people in Thomas' position would feel the same way. At the beginning of the story, he is grieving the loss of a cherished mentor and friend and struggling to be hopeful. He is struggling with his faith. When he encounters Jesus his faith is transformed, and he believes wholeheartedly. There might be times in our lives when we are struggling to trust in God or struggling to be hopeful. At these times, we can open our hearts to Jesus' presence and pray for the grace to believe and regain hope.

The first reading also describes the ups and downs of a faith journey. We hear that we are no longer strangers, but fellow citizens. God has lifted us up and continues to be with us. We might be a work in progress, but we are still sacred. We are being built by God.

Wherever we may be on our faith journey, whether we feel more like a stranger or more like a citizen of the household of God, we must remember that God is actively at work in our lives. Shortly, we will see God's presence in the Eucharist. May this holy meal strengthen us and open us up to his abundant grace. And may we gratefully and humbly proclaim, as Thomas did, *My Lord and my God!*

Thursday, July 4, 2024
(Lec. 380)

- 1) Amos 7:10-17
- 2) Matthew 9:1-8

THURSDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(USA: Independence Day)

Note: for Independence Day, any readings from the Lectionary for Ritual Masses (vol. IV), the Mass "For the Country or a City," Nos. 882-886, or "For Peace and Justice," nos. 887-891.

FOCUS: Have faith in the healing power of God's mercy.

Many times, when we see or hear a truth we don't like, we are quick to discredit it. Sometimes these truths scare us or make us feel guilty, so we're quick to put up a defense and dispute what's right in front of us. This is exactly what we see the scribes doing in today's Gospel when confronted with the Lord's truth.

When Jesus heals the paralytic, the scribes do not believe it. When they question his actions, Jesus replies, *Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say "Rise and walk"?* Jesus is showing them the true healing power of his forgiveness, but because they do not understand, they discredit him and attribute it to blasphemy. Similarly, in the first reading, Amaziah disputes Amos' sharing of the Lord's prophecy; it scares and confuses him, resulting in insulting and hateful behavior toward Amos and, eventually, his own downfall.

When the Lord shows us the truth, we must not doubt. If we are tempted to test or challenge him, we can pray for the grace to hear and understand. Even if it scares us, we should try to faithfully accept God's plan for us because it will lead us to freedom in him – a freedom from sinful ways and toward a virtuous life. God's plan for us leads us down the road to mercy and forgiveness, but we must be willing to take that road.

As we proclaimed in our responsorial psalm, *The judgments of the Lord are true, and all of them are just.* They are more precious than gold, and sweeter than syrup. And they are ours – freely given to us and meant for our salvation. How could we not accept?

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Friday, July 5, 2024

(Lec. 381)

- 1) Amos 8:4-6, 9-12
- 2) Matthew 9:9-13

FRIDAY OF

13TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Anthony Zaccaria,

Priest;

USA: Saint Elizabeth of Portugal)

Gospel related: **CCC** 581, 589, 2100

FOCUS: The Lord is merciful and just.

In today's readings we are presented with two reactions of God to sinful behavior. In the first reading, the prophet Amos harshly criticizes the business practices of his day. Those who have money and power are not merely looking to turn a profit, but to fix their scales for cheating – taking advantage of the poor and vulnerable from the community. What is worse is that they pause from their wickedness for religious observances and then salivate over the end of the religious period so they can double down in their selfishness. They do not treat each other fairly, and Amos warns them that the Lord has promised to exact justice for their evil ways.

But then we get to the Gospel reading, and Jesus, rather than “exacting justice” on the evil ways of Matthew the tax collector, recruits him! He calls Matthew to not only follow him, but to be one of the Twelve Apostles. Not surprisingly, the Pharisees are livid. “How can you do this? If you were righteous, you wouldn't hang out with sinners.” Jesus, filled with mercy, admits these sinners are sick. He doesn't condone their sin, but he also declares that they need him – they need a physician. He says that God desires mercy more than sacrifice. If only the Pharisees could recognize their own sin.

God's reaction to sin has always been, and always will be, to condemn it. Those who persist in sin will, at the end of time, face God's justice. Alongside these two truths, however, is another one: The Lord is merciful and just. He desires more than anything for us to be with him for eternity, and he has given us the way to him and the means to follow that way. The choice, as always, is ours. Will we recognize our own sin? Or are we interested only in the sins of others? Will we repent and follow Jesus? With his help, we can walk away from our habits of sin. He is calling sinners like us. He is looking for you; he is looking for me. Thanks be to God.

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Saturday, July 6, 2024

(Lec. 382)

- 1) Amos 9:11-15
- 2) Matthew 9:14-17

SATURDAY OF
13TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Maria Goretti,
Virgin and Martyr;
Saturday in honor
of BVM)

FOCUS: God restores peace, he rebuilds, and is the source of our joy.

The prophet Amos was a shepherd in the northern part of Israel. He denounced the hypocrisy and injustices in Israel at the time, especially calling out religious and civic leaders for their lack of faith in the God of the universe. Most of Amos' prophecies spoke of the destruction of the nation Israel and the exile of the people from their land. Today's reading comes at the end of the book, and it is an epilogue to Amos' prophecies. While he warns of the destruction of the nation, he also prophesies that this time of exile will be followed by a time of restoration and peace.

Amos emphasizes that God will rebuild the destroyed city, *the fallen hut of David*. The people will return to the land and be able to plant vineyards and gardens again. This is a message of hope, even as so much around the chosen people signals hopelessness.

In the Gospel passage Jesus, who is the hope promised by God, compares himself to the bridegroom. The guests cannot mourn when the bridegroom is present, and so Jesus' disciples do not fast when in the presence of the Messiah. This Gospel passage alludes to the end times – Scripture hints that heaven is like a wedding feast. While we are on this earth we fast and mourn, but when we join Jesus we will be with the bridegroom in his glory and joy.

The coming of the Lord brings peace, joy, and celebration. Like Amos prophesied, a time of peace and restoration will follow the times of trouble. Christian hope reminds us that one day we will be with Jesus in heaven and will celebrate in the presence of God – our God who restores peace, rebuilds what is broken, and who is the source of all joy.

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SUNDAY, JULY 7, 2024

(Lec. 101)

- 1) Ezekiel 2:2-5
- 2) 2 Corinthians 12:7-10
- 3) Mark 6:1-6a

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

**14TH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: The Lord calls us to be prophets who speak his truth to others, and he gives us the courage we need to do so.

What would it be like to meet a prophet? Anyone who is baptized has not only met a prophet, they *are* a prophet. Indeed, all of us who have been baptized have been incorporated into Christ's ministry of *priest, prophet, and king*.

Let us touch briefly upon each dimension.

What is the task of the priest? The priest's task is to offer sacrifice through which we are reconciled and made holy. Christ fulfills this task perfectly through his sacrifice on the cross. We can share in his priestly ministry through the daily sacrifices we make out of love for others – the daily acts through which we die a little to ourselves so that others may flourish. We can share in Christ's ministry by being a blessing to others, even to those who may annoy or undermine us.

What is the task of the king? A king leads and forms his people to be good citizens of the kingdom. In the Christian context, an ordinary baptized person fulfills this call by leading others toward the kingdom of God – a kingdom that must be firmly rooted in our hearts if we are to lead others in the right direction.

Finally, what is the task of the prophet, the ministry we hear Jesus mention in today's Gospel? The prophet speaks God's truth to people. In the course of salvation history, sometimes that meant prophets called the people out on their infidelity to God – called them to repentance – warning them of the consequences of persisting in their sin. When the people didn't listen and bad things happened, prophets were called to encourage the people to have faith, to trust that God had not forgotten them – to have faith that God would forgive their sins and save them.

Is there someone in our own lives to whom God is calling us to speak his truth? Are we experiencing that tug in our heart that we should speak up about this thing, whatever that thing might be? Perhaps they are words of encouragement, which can be so uplifting to others. Or perhaps we need to speak a hard truth, words we fear will not be well received.

Today's Gospel shows an occasion when Jesus' words were not well received. That sabbath, when he went to the synagogue full of familiar faces, Jesus might have been tempted to remain silent. But he spoke up. And his words were met with puzzled queries and then dismissed by most. But not all dismissed the truth he spoke. There were a few who believed, a few who were saved, a few who were healed.

When the Lord calls us to speak his truth to someone, we might be tempted to remain silent. But the Lord can give us his courage to speak up and can give us the words to do so. As we come forth to receive him in the Eucharist, let us ask for these gifts that we may go and be the prophets he is calling us to be.

Monday, July 8, 2024

(Lec. 383)

- 1) Hosea 2:16,
17c-18, 21-22
- 2) Matthew 9:18-26

MONDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Time and again, God proves himself a faithful and forgiving spouse.

God is faithful, even when we are not. To demonstrate his fidelity to a stiff-necked Israel, God told the prophet Hosea, whom we heard in our first reading today, to marry Gomer, a notoriously unfaithful wife. In wooing Gomer back to himself, Hosea was going to show the chosen people a way back to God. As Gomer sets aside her attraction to the other men who have caught her eye, so, too, Hosea instructed God's people to come back to covenant faithfulness and set aside their worship of false gods. God will make Israel his own forever, espousing them in right and justice, love and mercy.

It was to accomplish the union of God and his people that Jesus took flesh and came to gather the lost sheep of Israel and to preach repentance and redemption to all the nations. In today's Gospel, two miracles occur through the power of Jesus, displaying the love, mercy, and might of God. The hemorrhaging woman is cured simply by touching Jesus' garments. A girl is raised from the dead as Jesus lays hands on her.

The authority and power Jesus has over sickness and death, here and throughout the Gospels, is testament to God's promise to respond to his people's faithfulness and love with mercy and forgiveness. The raising of the synagogue official's daughter is one of three instances of Jesus raising people from the dead during the thousand days of his public ministry. Each of these was a foretelling of Jesus' own resurrection. Each of these is a tangible glimpse into our own eventual resurrection, which is both a promise and a gift, given by God through Jesus to all who believe in him.

Time and again, God proves himself a faithful and forgiving spouse. Like Gomer and all of Israel, the Church and everyone in it is called to love God and others as he has loved us in Christ.

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Tuesday, July 9, 2024

(Lec. 384)

1) Hosea 8:4-7, 11-13

2) Matthew 9:32-38

TUESDAY OF

14TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

Saint Augustine Zhao Rong,

Priest,

and Companions,

Martyrs)

Gospel related: **CCC 2611 CSDC 259**

FOCUS: Following Jesus gives our lives a mission and purpose.

We have only to hear today's first reading to understand life *without* purpose – or with a selfish ambition. Hosea writes of people who have gone their own way and created their own gods, living only for themselves. Many of the Israelites in Hosea's time created false gods that were utterly useless, and grew grain that could not produce flour for their bread. Their works were for their own benefit and were ultimately empty.

By contrast, as members of the Body of Christ, we are called to follow Jesus' life of purpose and mission: a mission to do the will of God, bring about healing in the world, and spread the message of God's love to those around us. We are called to be the laborers for God's harvest.

In the Gospel, Jesus demonstrates the zeal that comes from the mission of doing God's will. We see Jesus casting out demons, healing the sick, and caring deeply for people who were *troubled and abandoned*. But even Jesus can't do it alone. God's work in this world requires all of us to participate as laborers in his field, using whatever gifts God has given us, no matter what our vocation or life situation might be.

As we approach the Communion table, let us contemplate our role as laborers in God's field. How can we reach out with the compassion of Jesus to someone in need – in our families, in our parish, in the neighborhood, or in the wider world? How can we live out the mission and the purpose Jesus passes on to us?

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Wednesday, July 10, 2024

(Lec. 385)

1) Hosea 10:1-3, 7-8, 12

2) Matthew 10:1-7

Gospel related: **CCC** 543

WEDNESDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this proclamation: "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand." In the Gospel, Jesus is calling his Twelve disciples, and as he does so, he gives them authority over every unclean spirit and to cure every disease and illness. He gives them authority in his name.

This same mission is still true for Jesus' disciples today. At our baptism, we are baptized into Christ Jesus as priest, prophet, and king. Just as the disciples were called to go forth and drive out unclean spirits, cure every disease and illness, and proclaim *The Kingdom of heaven is at hand*, so are we sent on this same mission.

Jesus is still healing today. Jesus is still casting out demons today. And the proclamation of the Gospel is still happening today. How? Through us. Through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit that we received at baptism. Yet, how well do we live as part of that common priesthood of believers – praying for one another, fasting, and offering sacrifice? How seriously do we take our role as prophets, proclaiming the Good News of God's kingdom wherever we go? How do we live as kings in this world of abundance – not set above others in rank and wealth, but acknowledging with humility that we are royal children of God, with our eyes set on heaven and having authority (in Christ) over the very things Jesus says in the Gospel?

Living out our baptismal graces means that we are to go out and serve everyone. We are to reach out to the lost sheep – those who are struggling, sick, in need of a friend. We are all poor, sick, and ignorant to some degree, and we are all in need of knowing and believing that Jesus has come to heal, cast out demons, and proclaim the kingdom.

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Thursday, July 11, 2024
(Lec. 386)

- 1) Hosea 11:1-4, 8e-9
- 2) Matthew 10:7-15

THURSDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Benedict,
Abbot)

Gospel related: **CCC** 543, 1509, 2121, 2122, 2443 **CSDC** 184

FOCUS: Like the early disciples, we are to go humbly and simply and share the Good News from our hearts.

Jesus sent his disciples out to teach, preach, heal, raise the dead, and cast out demons. They were to do all this without fanfare or payment. They were to take no money or extra clothes. *Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give*, Jesus said to them.

The miracles they performed would be proof enough for many people that God was working through them. It was a loud and clear message of love – and yet not all would come to embrace it.

As the disciples did, we go out with no guarantee of success. We are to go humbly and simply, and share the Good News from our hearts. We are to do this with our family members, our co-workers, our friends, and others we encounter every day. We share the Gospel through our words and actions, our trust in God, and our commitment to his holy Church.

There will be miracles, but they may seem small. A heart gladdened here, a pain eased there, a sense of forgiveness that banishes sadness. Our calling is not to convert or convince, but to share and inform. God will do the rest.

Most of us will not go to foreign lands or need to beg for our room and board in order to spread the Gospel message. However, we will need to say "yes" to Jesus in order to accept the call to speak in his name, and then engage with others about the good things in life that come from knowing and loving Jesus. It is a challenge, but most worthwhile things in life are.

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Friday, July 12, 2024

(Lec. 387)

1) Hosea 14:2-10

2) Matthew 10:16-23

Gospel related: CCC 161, 728,764, 1821

FRIDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Trust in the Lord's provision and protection.

Hosea is a clear and concise prophet, laying out his message with no question as to its meaning: "Repent and return to God." Return to the God who created all and sustains all. Turn away from sin (our "iniquities") and *return to the Lord*. God promises his love and physical and spiritual gifts to those who ask for forgiveness and return to the straight paths of God's plan for creation. If they do, they will *raise grain* and they *will blossom like the vine*. Likewise, if we make a change and return, God promises that we will bear fruit.

That's easy enough to say and for Hosea to proclaim, isn't it? But it isn't always easy to do.

In fact, in today's Gospel reading from Matthew, we quickly see that Hosea's message while clear and concise, does not translate into an easy life path. *Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves*, Jesus says to his Apostles, *so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves*. This warning does not bode well for someone who is expecting an easy road ahead! His further warnings about trials, scourging, and persecution accentuate this fact.

But there is hope – there is God's promise of love and gifts, even in the midst of these hardships and suffering. Do not worry, the Lord says. *Do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say ... the Spirit of your Father [will be] speaking through you*. God has promised not just to be present with us, but to give us a voice, the very words we need to speak. The Spirit will be upon us; our advocate is ever near. We know we can call upon him to assist us at every moment.

And yet, God's ways can be hard to follow. Mixed messages from our world can challenge us and tempt us to choose ways that fall outside of God's straight path. But we don't have to undergo life alone; God is always there to help. Trust in the Lord's provision and protection.

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Saturday, July 13, 2024

(Lec. 388)

- 1) Isaiah 6:1-8
- 2) Matthew 10:24-33

SATURDAY OF
14TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Henry;
Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC** 14, 305, 363, 765, 1034, 1816, 2145

FOCUS: Jesus encourages us not to be afraid.

Most of us have something of which we are afraid. It could be a fear of heights, a fear of tight spaces, or a fear of public speaking, to name a few. But in living as a disciple, Jesus tells us, we need not fear the things of this world that can harm us because the Lord's care for us is greater than anything else. Faith helps us overcome fear, and we cannot let fear keep us from sharing the Gospel. In using different scenarios, Jesus three times tells his Apostles, and all of us: *Do not be afraid*.

The prophet Isaiah's words today provide a good example of faith and trust in the Lord outweighing fear. Even as Isaiah had a holy fear of the Lord – as in reverence and awe – he was not afraid; he was not frightened. Instead, he becomes aware of his sinfulness and brokenness, but still responds to God's question of, *Whom shall I send?* with *Here I am ... send me*. What a powerful message of dedication and fidelity, especially in the face of the unknown.

The Apostles were told what they would face. Jesus says that the very type of treatment he is getting, they will get – and more. The first example he presents is that he is accused of being Beelzebul. They will receive similar treatment. But he says, *do not be afraid*.

Jesus repeats those words of encouragement again as he urges them twice more to proclaim the Gospel from the housetops, and to do so without worry of being killed. Our fear, he says, should be not of those who can kill the body only, but he who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna.

Jesus says that if we share his Good News – acknowledging him before others – he will acknowledge us before his Father.

We may still have our fear of heights, of public speaking, or of tight spaces, but we do not have to fear being abandoned by God in our life of faith. We need to follow the lead of Isaiah in our first reading, who answered his call to prophecy by raising his hand and saying, "Here I am Lord, send me."

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SUNDAY, JULY 14, 2024

(Lec. 104)

1) Amos 7:12-15

2) Ephesians 1:3-14 or 1:3-10

3) Mark 6:7-13

Gospel related: **CCC** 765, 1506, 1151, 1673

**15TH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: We are blessed *with every spiritual blessing in the heavens*.

At the beginning of the rite of baptism, the person who is about to be given this adoption in Christ is *called by name*. This reflects a truth that runs through all of our theology: We are here today because God has called us, by name, as individuals. God knows each of us and has created us to be a part of his loving plan for goodness.

In today's Gospel, we see the striking aftermath of this kind of a call. The disciples are sent, and they drive out many demons and cure many who are ill. They combat the powers of evil and darkness and bring God's goodness everywhere they go. They also anoint with oil – they offer tangible evidence of God's presence and share God's healing generously.

There is a temptation to relegate this pattern to the past, to assume such effects could only be manifested in the lives of great saints of other times. But God's power has not changed. God's capacity to work mighty deeds has not diminished.

And our calling is no different – we are created to be saints! Like Amos, we may be going about our own work, but God says to us, "Go."

Hearing this call requires us to stop and listen, to be formed in prayer, and to attune our hearts and minds to God's voice. God is calling us at every moment: calling us to relationship with him, calling us to love him and one another while sharing the Gospel, and calling us to a life of holiness in witness to the Gospel message.

Lest we feel overwhelmed by such a mission, let us look to the Letter to the Ephesians.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world.

God has lavished the riches of his grace upon us!

He calls us, and he never leaves us alone in that call. It is a call to be drawn to his side, swept up in his life, carried by his Spirit. Yes, God will ask much of us, but we should not be afraid of that ask. It is an invitation to live fully, richly, and generously. And we know that anything we give to God, any sacrifice we make in response to his invitation, will be returned and poured out on the world transformed by God's perfect love.

No matter where we are today, going about our work like Amos, following Christ like the Twelve Apostles, or somewhere in between, we have been summoned here by God. He has drawn us here to nourish us, to give us nothing less than his whole self so we can answer that call and participate in God's work in the world. As we prepare to receive him in this holy Eucharist, let us listen for Christ's call, and ask for the grace we need to answer courageously, to respond actively, and to transform our world with his love.

Monday, July 15, 2024

(Lec. 389)

- 1) Isaiah 1:10-17
- 2) Matthew 10:34–11:1

MONDAY OF
15TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Bonaventure,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 858, 1506, 2232 **CSDC** 193

FOCUS: Work for justice and righteousness, even in the face of division and strife.

God intends us to be in relationship with him and with one another. This relationship is defined by love, and the commandment *to* love. Isaiah is God's messenger to the people alerting them of how they have failed, and are failing, in their covenantal responsibility. He scolds the people for their empty worship of God, calling them to embrace the Lord's call for justice and righteousness.

As Isaiah delivers God's message, it is evident God desires more than empty rituals and sacrifices. He longs for hearts transformed by a genuine commitment to justice and righteousness. Our faith should lead us to live the works of mercy and to show compassion to those in need; rooted in love, these actions are the proper sacrifices that please the Lord.

After Isaiah, and all the prophets, judges, and kings, Jesus came as the incarnate presence of God's love. Jesus is the entirety of and the fulfillment of all the laws; he is the perfect, final sacrifice offered to God on our behalf. Through him we have the ability to return to God when we stray, and yet his words today may initially seem unsettling.

Jesus speaks of division and the sword, while also preaching on peace and love. He emphasizes the division that can occur when individuals choose to follow him. His message is a call to prioritize our relationship with him above all else, even if it means facing opposition from those who do not understand or accept our faith. This paradox of division and unity in Christ challenges us to reflect on the cost of discipleship while drawing strength from his promises of eternal life and abundant grace.

As Catholics, we are called to live out our faith in the world, working for justice and striving for unity in Christ. Remember that the division Jesus speaks of is not a division of hatred or enmity, but a division born from our unwavering commitment to him. May we embrace this division with love and compassion, always seeking to bring others to the knowledge of God's loving mercy.

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Tuesday, July 16, 2024
(Lec. 390)
1) Isaiah 7:1-9
2) Matthew 11:20-24

TUESDAY OF
15TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Our Lady of Mount Carmel)

Gospel related: **CCC** 678

FOCUS: By trusting in the Lord, we come to walk in his truth and presence.

The protagonist in our first reading, King Ahaz, gets mentioned a few times in Scripture. We hear his name at Christmas when we proclaim Matthew's genealogy of Jesus. And then his role in history is recorded in the prophet Isaiah, 2 Chronicles, and 2 Kings.

King Ahaz is known as the only king not afforded a burial in the tomb of the kings, alongside King David and the others. Among his many failings was his inability to trust in the Lord and his lack of faith in the guidance of the prophet Isaiah. Having succeeded to the throne of Judah (the Southern Kingdom) in 732 B.C., Ahaz immediately found himself drawn into regional political intrigues. By refusing to enter a military coalition with the kingdoms of Israel and Aram and by siding with the Assyrians, Ahaz allowed his own kingdom to be reduced to status of a vassal state of the Assyrian empire. Had he listened to the prophet, trusted in the Lord, and stayed out of the struggle, Ahaz might today be remembered as a man of faith. Instead, he dithered and tried to sit on the fence and so is remembered for his failure.

So, too, with the three cities listed in today's Gospel, places where Jesus preached and showed himself mighty in word and deed. Despite having heard his Gospel of repentance and seen his power to heal and save, their populations refused to change and repent and so incurred Jesus' wrath and condemnation. Like Ahaz, they, too, preferred to rely on their own wisdom and ignore the guidance of the one sent by God.

Part of our human brokenness is our propensity toward self-reliance and inflated self-trust. Despite having also heard the Gospel challenge to repent and the mandate to love God and neighbor, we, too, can find ourselves picking and choosing those parts we find convenient and easy and ignoring the parts that call us to real change. Unlike King Ahaz, however, we have a remedy in Christ. As we hear today's Scripture, let us ask for the grace and courage to change, to hear the call to repent anew, and to embrace this call fully in our lives.

* * *

Wednesday, July 17, 2024
(Lec. 391)

- 1) Isaiah 10:5-7, 13b-16
- 2) Matthew 11:25-27

Gospel related: **CCC** 151, 153, 240, 443, 473, 544, 2603, 2701, 2779, 2785

WEDNESDAY OF
15TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God gives grace to the childlike.

In the Gospels, Jesus often surprises his listeners by turning contemporary values upside down. When Jesus claims that the poor are blessed, that it is better to be hated because of him than to be praised by all, or that it will be hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven, he is shocking the people of his culture. Often in the Lord's preaching he teaches the exact opposite of what the prevailing wisdom of the day declares.

In the short Gospel reading today, Jesus praises his Father, declaring he has hidden the truth *from the wise and the learned* and *revealed them to the childlike*. The people who heard this, especially any scholars or teachers in the crowd, must have wondered where Jesus got such crazy ideas. In this ancient culture, they listened to scholars and ignored children. Jesus gathered mostly uneducated followers, fishermen, and common folk. How could God be revealing himself to such rabble and sinners?

Perhaps because only those without guile and pride – that is, the childlike – were humble enough to be receptive to what God made known. After all the clearest, most visible, most tangible revelation of God's love was in the body of Jesus Christ, the Son who was both human and divine. He was the only one who could show them the Father, and he was the only one through whom they could know the Father. If they couldn't see Jesus for who he was, how could they ever know his Father?

It is when we are most vulnerable and humble, most childlike, that we are most open and receptive to God's revelation of himself: his Word, his Son, his grace, his truth. We are given the gift of faith, and with God's grace we can retain a childlike wonder and awe of it. None of us is rabble, all of us are sinners, and through God's gracious will we each have been chosen as his own.

* * *

Thursday, July 18, 2024

(Lec. 392)

1) Isaiah 26:7-9, 12, 16-19

2) Matthew 11:28-30

THURSDAY OF

15TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.

USA: Saint Camillus de Lellis,

Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 459, 1615, 1658

FOCUS: When we take Jesus' yoke, he takes what we bring to him and helps us carry it.

The same qualities that make us successful in attaining what we desire can, paradoxically, also be detrimental to that success if not balanced with a bit of wisdom and humility. Being single-minded in pursuit of a goal means we complete that marathon, we learn that foreign language, or we achieve that milestone in a project.

When what we are doing is no longer productive, however, and our focus and determination is not getting us where we want to go, we need the insight and advice of others to help us. We need help. We need grace.

Jesus says, *come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest*. This isn't just a platitude he is offering to his listeners in today's Gospel. Those he is speaking to are faithful children of God – his chosen people. They have been striving for countless generations to remain obedient and devoted to God, and Jesus is saying to them, "Look, what you are doing isn't working. You need my help. Let me help you." He offers them, and us, an easier way, a more lighted path, to our greatest good and desire and our ultimate goal: eternal life with God.

It's one thing to hear those words and be mindful of and thankful for them. It is wholly another to accept – really and fully embrace – the grace Jesus offers. *Take my yoke upon you*, he says, *for my yoke is easy, and my burden light*. This is not a barbarous tool, clamping us in to a life of servitude, constraining us so we may be driven and controlled by a master. No, it is a frame of a relationship – one that guarantees a sharing of the weight of burdens and a promise of never being alone to face them. When we take Jesus' yoke, he takes what we bring to him and helps us carry it. He binds us to himself in love, giving us strength and guiding us forward when it is hard to see the way.

* * *

Friday, July 19, 2024

(Lec. 393)

1) Isaiah 38:1-6, 21-22, 7-8

2) Matthew 12:1-8

Gospel related: CCC 581, 582, 586, 590, 2100, 2173

FRIDAY OF
15TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Rest in Christ's love and in our relationship with him.

See, your disciples are doing what is unlawful to do on the sabbath. The Pharisees have managed to test, question, and attempt to insult Jesus all in just these 13 words. The test is their usual approach: find Jesus and see if there is any activity happening around him that violates Jewish law. The question is implied in the declarative statement, "Why are your disciples doing what is unlawful to do on the sabbath?" The intended insult is a little more subtle, at first. Then it is glaringly obvious: *your disciples*. That is, they are saying to Jesus, "*you* are teaching them incorrectly; *you* are leading them astray."

Light cannot bring darkness. Truth cannot yield falseness. And perfect goodness, God – Jesus Christ – cannot lead anyone astray. Sitting here, 2,000 years later, this is almost laughable. How could they even say that? But, of course, they didn't know. Or they refused to know. And so it was easy for them to impugn Jesus and his motives; it was easy for them to misconstrue and misunderstand.

Our own misunderstandings give rise to our testing and questioning of God, do they not? What we do not understand – either willfully or through no fault of our own – about God and his plan for us, can naturally cause us to wonder. We wonder why things happen the way they do, or why what we envision to be "the right thing" is not what occurs.

It's not frivolous to say that the Lord's answer to us might be the same as it was to the Pharisees: *The Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath*. That is, Jesus is telling us that even the sabbath, established by God as a day of rest and worship and central to Jewish life, is subsumed under his authority. Sabbath rest is fulfilled in him, and he is asking us to rest in that – to rest in him, to rest in his love and our relationship with him.

We won't know the answer to every question this side of heaven. But we do know that the Lord in his mercy and perfect goodness loves us and desires every good thing for us. We can trust in him.

* * *

Saturday, July 20, 2024

(Lec. 394)

- 1) Micah 2:1-5
- 2) Matthew 12:14-21

SATURDAY OF
15th WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Apollinaris,
Bishop and Martyr;
Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC 713 CSDC 261**

FOCUS: The Lord is our home. He brings justice, and in his name we have hope.

If we had a choice to live someplace where people were fostering a community imbued with injustice, oppression, and greed, or someplace where people practiced humility, compassion, and obedience to God's will, which would we choose? That's a silly question, right? Clearly, we would choose the latter, where we could relax, find peace, and experience the beauty of kindness and generosity.

We can do it, though it's not a geographical location. It's a spiritual one. It's the kingdom of God, established here on earth but awaiting its fullness in heaven.

Today's readings offer contrast between evil and good that exemplifies what it is like to live in the kingdom, or not. The prophet Micah speaks of the Lord's promise to the wicked of the world – those who cheat, covet, and steal from others: *The fields of my people are measured out, and no one can get them back! Thus you shall have no one to mark out boundaries by lot in the assembly of the Lord.* This is not a place we'd like to live, given its description and the Lord's promise. And yet, this is the reality of the world around us. We *do* live in it. But we do not have to be *of* it.

In the Gospel, the Pharisees *went out and took counsel* so as to put Jesus to death. As if to emphasize the dichotomy, Matthew tells us that Jesus *withdrew* from that space and interacted with many people in need of healing. In a reversal of roles compared to the Pharisees, many people took counsel from *him*.

The crowds who sought out Jesus were seeking that "place" of humility, compassion, and obedience to God's will. They found that place in the person of Jesus Christ. We can, too. We *have*.

* * *

SUNDAY, JULY 21, 2024

(Lec. 107)

- 1) Jeremiah 23:1-6
- 2) Ephesians 2:13-18
- 3) Mark 6:30-34

**16TH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: God hears our yearning and responds with goodness.

Imagine the vibrant and perhaps even chaotic scenes in today's Gospel passage. First, the Apostles are gathering with Jesus and reporting to him *all they had done and taught*. We do not know the full report, but we can guess it included quite a bit of excitement, stories, and perhaps even loud talking over one another. After all, these were committed disciples who were not afraid of conversation, and Jesus' response was to tell them to come away and rest for a while.

Then, while they are trying to take this much-needed break, they arrive at their place of rest and see a vast crowd awaiting them. People who had seen them leave, and others from all the towns, had hastened by foot to arrive at their destination first. We can imagine this crowd of people coming from many different towns was likely not a quiet one.

If it were one of us facing this group just as we arrived at our destination, intending to embark on a much-needed rest, would we feel sorry for *them* or for *ourselves*? Once again, Jesus' selfless and self-sacrificing actions show us the way. He is not upset when he sees the crowd before him. Rather, he is moved by their presence. *When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.*

They were like sheep without a shepherd. In the first reading, we heard the Lord condemning the bad shepherds in the world. They were the ones who did not care for their sheep and let them fall away from the flock. The Lord promises that he will send good shepherds who will care and ensure that no one is lost or will go missing. Jesus is the Good Shepherd that the Father sent, and he is taking care to ensure that no one goes missing, as we see him respond to this crowd.

As we hear the Gospel story today, we might consider all the ways in which God is revealing himself to us, and consider what is our relationship to him. At times we may feel like we are one of the throngs of people pursuing Jesus and his Apostles, with something in our lives that has us yearning for God's healing presence. In his infinite mercy and goodness, he responds – shepherding us, teaching us, leading us home.

Or maybe we are following Jesus as the Apostles did, joining him on a journey toward others in need, whether we see it ahead of time or not. In the moment of encounter, Jesus shows us the way, demonstrating compassion and giving us the grace for our hearts to be moved. In our noticing, God is calling us to a responsive action.

The Good Shepherd walked among us, and the Holy Spirit remains with us to guide and advocate for us. Wherever we see ourselves today, we can all relate to those who followed Jesus relentlessly. We are blessed that, in our yearning, we have the Eucharist, his holy presence offered to us at every celebration of the Mass. Furthermore, the Eucharist reminds us that we are sent to do God's work on earth. May we be attentive to God's calling wherever we may be this day.

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Monday, July 22, 2024

(Lec. 603)

1) Song of Songs 3:1-4b
or 2 Corinthians 5:14-17

2) John 20:1-2, 11-18

Gospel related: CCC 443, 640, 641, 645, 654, 659, 660, 2174, 2795

SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

- FEAST

FOCUS: *My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.*

Today we celebrate the feast of Mary Magdalene. *Go to my brothers*, Jesus tells her once she recognizes him. She is sent to carry the Good News of Christ's resurrection to the Apostles, who would carry this same message of great joy to the whole world.

Mary Magdalene was sent *to [Jesus'] brothers*. These disciples in turn were sent to all corners of the world. Those recipients were then sent to others who shared this Good News with so many others. We are all here because someone – likely many “someones” – was sent to us. We are here because Jesus spoke someone's name in love: someone who held tightly to Christ, as Mary Magdalene did, and heeded his words when he said, “go to him,” “go to her.”

We can trace the apostolic succession of the Church, but the genealogical line of our own personal faith must be traced in our imaginations to capture all those people before us who repented, believed, persevered in faith, and passed it on as a gift. Christ's love for Mary Magdalene and for his disciples comes to us through this line, and we give thanks for all of them, known and unknown.

And now, in our lives of faith every day, *we* are sent. We are to go to those God has placed in our paths and in our lives, so that we might share this treasure with them. We need be attentive to God's voice so that we hear him when he says to go to people or places we may not have considered. Notice where Mary Magdalene is when she hears this call. She is *holding on to Christ*.

In this Eucharist, let us give thanks for those who were sent to us. Through the intercession of Saint Mary Magdalene, let us ask for the strength to share the Gospel generously with those to whom God sends us. And let us hold on to Christ who comes to us and shares his life with us in this sacrament.

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Tuesday, July 23, 2024

(Lec. 396)

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

2) Matthew 12:46-50

TUESDAY OF
16TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Bridget,
Religious)

Gospel related: **CCC** 764, 2233

FOCUS: Those who follow God's will are part of his family and can rely on his faithfulness.

In today's Gospel Jesus says, *whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother*. This is an astonishing statement. Lineage, genealogy, and bloodlines were extremely important to ancient near east culture, and no one would ever deign to consider themselves a sibling or mother of a god. In one sentence, Jesus sweeps away an entire cultural worldview. Not only is there now a particular relationship between humanity and the Divine (i.e., the one true God), but it transcends time and space.

The other important factor to this familial relationship is that it is not passive. It is, *whoever does the will of my Father*. There is no resting on the laurels of one's dad being the Roman procurator, the Assyrian king, or the chief Pharisee. We become part of Jesus' family not by *who we are*, but *who and how we are for others*. The will of the Father is found in his commands, and his commands are to love him and one another. When we do that, we can claim our birthright not just as God's people, but as his adopted sons and daughters.

The prophet Micah prayed to God, asking him to shepherd his people and continue to provide for them, in his compassion. The Lord, who is always faithful, eventually sent his Son – the last prophet, the ultimate high priest, the King of kings – to guide us and draw us back to him. And he gave us the gift of kinship with that Son!

He did this for the people of Israel even after they had been unfaithful time and time again. Truly, the story of ancient Israel is our story too: We fall and God offers clemency. He is faithful even when we are not.

We are God's people. We are Jesus' family. We can be confident that God will shepherd us, will have mercy on us, will pardon sins and have compassion. With his grace we continue to sit in the presence of Jesus, listen to his teachings, and follow the will of the Father. And if (or when) we falter, may we rise, repent, and trust in the compassion of our merciful Lord.

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Wednesday, July 24, 2024
(Lec. 397)

- 1) Jeremiah 1:1, 4-10
- 2) Matthew 13:1-9

WEDNESDAY OF
16TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Sharbel Makhlūf,
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 546, 1724

FOCUS: It takes work to keep the soil of our faith rich and fertile.

Jesus does not explain the parable he tells in today's Gospel until later in the same chapter. As we hear it today, however, we can think about how the word of God has come to be present in our lives, and how receptive we have been to it being sowed.

For some of us, it is possible that the first seeds tossed our way were devoured by birds – or life – before they ever got started. Similarly, for others, the seeds were choked out early on and never sprouted or grew. But if we are here, in church and listening to Scripture, some seeds were sown, eventually, that fell on either really good, rich soil or somewhat rocky or weedy soil that could be improved by a little more attention. God's word is always proceeding forth, and how and when we are properly prepared and disposed to receive it may happen the first time it is sown, or the millionth time.

If our soil is rich, we probably have specific people to thank for that. Our parents, Catholic school or faith formation teachers, good friends, and others who likely passed on their heirloom faith. Practices such as attending Mass, reading the lives of the saints, sharing time with good, faithful people – these are all fertilizers, of sorts, that help us grow in faith. People of faith help create other people of faith.

These other people help us get the soil ready, but then we, personally, have to do the work of cultivating it. Every day is a new day, with opportunities for us to water the soil or let it dry out; to fertilize it or starve it of nutrients. Every day is also a new day to share with and learn from others – the best way to keep the soil rich for growth.

Jesus is reminding us today, through this parable, that we are the gardeners of our own plot of faith. We can keep it growing or we can let it die out. In this effort, everyone has a green thumb. Everyone is able to make his or her soil richer, laying the groundwork for a faith that blooms abundantly.

* * *

Thursday, July 25, 2024
(Lec. 605)

- 1) 2 Corinthians 4:7-15
- 2) Matthew 20:20-28

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

**SAINT JAMES,
APOSTLE
- FEAST**

FOCUS: We are called to serve as Christ serves.

Today's readings speak to us of the role of suffering and service in Christian leadership.

In the first reading, Paul writes that he has been *afflicted in every way* – perplexed, persecuted, and struck down – but not driven to despair, not abandoned, and not destroyed. Paul endures all of this suffering so that the life of Jesus may be manifest in his life. It is through Jesus' suffering and death that he brought life to the world, so Paul suffers to make the message of Jesus' resurrection known. In this way, he is following the directions Jesus gives the Apostles in today's Gospel reading.

Today is the feast of Saint James, and in the Gospel James' mother asks Jesus if her sons can sit at his right and his left in his kingdom. In other words, she is asking Jesus to make James and his brother John his second and third in command. Jesus addresses his reply to the brothers themselves, asking them if they can drink the chalice he will drink. They say that they can, not realizing that the chalice Jesus will drink is the cup of suffering. When the other Apostles are annoyed with James and John, Jesus makes his destiny clear: He has *not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many*.

True greatness comes from laying down one's life for others. To be a great leader is to exercise authority as a service to those under one's control. Whether we are leaders in our families, clubs at school, or committees at work, we are called to follow Christ's example of servant leadership – not to oppress or exploit, but to serve others and to give of ourselves for their sake.

Friday, July 26, 2024

(Lec. 399)

- 1) Jeremiah 3:14-17
- 2) Matthew 13:18-23

FRIDAY OF

16TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(OBL MEM

Saints Joachim and Anne,
Parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary)

Gospel related: **CCC** 29, 1724 **CSDC** 325

FOCUS: As heirs to the new covenant, we are gardeners and landscapers of the spiritual world around us.

The importance of cultivating hearts that are properly prepared and receptive to God's word cannot be overstated. This is something that parents and godparents know well, but this particular duty is not theirs alone. They may be responsible for their children and godchildren, but we are all responsible for ourselves, likely for some others, and certainly for not being an obstacle to anyone else.

Today we celebrate the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Saints Joachim and Anne. Mary, through the providence and grace of God, was conceived without sin and bore no sin throughout her life; her parents modeled an openness to God and his will for them as they lived a devout life. They would have known of Jeremiah's prophecy, and waited in hope for the time when the Lord *would bring [them] to Zion*, and they would no longer think of *the ark of the covenant of the Lord*. In this hope and from their marital union, in fact, would come the *new ark of the covenant*: their child Mary who would one day conceive and bear the Savior of the world.

It is tempting to think of Joachim and Anne being honored simply because of their relationship to Jesus, but they were their own persons – servants of God and one another in unique and important ways. What we know about them comes from apocryphal sources, but the truth is that Mary, the mother of God, was fully human born of human parents, and raised in a home that was faithful to God and open to his Word.

From this rich soil, cultivated over generations, came the Incarnation of that Word. Jesus Christ was the new covenant and an everlasting hope for all generations. As heirs to this new covenant, we are gardeners and landscapers of the spiritual world around us. It is our mission and responsibility not just to spread the Word, but to help, as best we can, prepare others to receive it. May we be blessed with a fruitful harvest for the Lord.

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Saturday, July 27, 2024
(Lec. 400)

- 1) Jeremiah 7:1-11
- 2) Matthew 13:24-30

SATURDAY OF
16TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Saturday in honor
of BVM)

Gospel related: **CCC** 827

FOCUS: God's is patient and merciful.

Today we hear the parable of the wheat and the weeds. And while Jesus will not explain its meaning until a few verses later (and we'll hear that Gospel in a few days), ultimately, this is a parable about patience. God's patience.

Weeds, as we know, can be annoying and should not be among the wheat. No matter how hard we try to care for a crop, garden, plant, or the soil of our spiritual life, weeds seem to pop up. Yet even in our consideration of separating the good growth from the weeds, we have to be patient: patient not to pull up too much of the surrounding soil; patient not to pull up things too soon lest we accidentally remove the good; patient to separate what needs pulling from what needs to remain.

God is even more patient. In a world where good and evil, life and death, wheat and weeds intertwine and prosper alongside each other, the Lord is careful not to make any final judgment between those who follow him and those who do not, until the time of the harvest. Until that judgment time, there is opportunity for repentance. To stay with the parable metaphor, there is no need to weed at all.

If that sounds ridiculous, it's because it is. It's ridiculous by our standards, anyway. But when we speak about the kingdom of heaven, we're talking about God's love and mercy, not our human standards. And with such love and mercy, repentance is always possible until the last breath.

Just as we seek the mercy of God for the weeds within our own hearts, we should show mercy to others who need forgiveness and help. Our actions and words should convey truth so as to inspire the hearts of those around us, that we may be a witness of Christ to them.

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SUNDAY, JULY 28, 2024

(Lec. 110)

- 1) 2 Kings 4:42-44
- 2) Ephesians 4:1-6
- 3) John 6:1-15

Gospel related: **CCC** 439, 549, 559, 1338

17TH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: God provides for our needs and multiplies our offerings.

In today's readings, we hear two stories about miraculous feedings. In the first reading, the prophet Elisha feeds 100 people with only 20 barley loaves and some ears of fresh grain. In the Gospel reading, Jesus feeds 5,000 from only five barley loaves and two fish.

The reference to barley loaves in John's Gospel clearly recalls the story about Elisha. Those present interpret this miracle as a sign that Jesus is *the Prophet, the one who is to come*. They recognize him as the prophet-king, the messiah. And yet, there is something inadequate about their understanding of who Jesus is, so he avoids their efforts to make him their king. Jesus is in line with the prophets, the fulfillment of prophecies about the messiah, yet he is more than a prophet. He is the Son of God, the Word become flesh.

We believe that God is the Creator. He creates the world *ex nihilo*, from nothing. Yet, in both of these stories, an offering is made. God does not feed the crowds from nothing. He takes what is offered and multiplies it.

Each week, when we celebrate the Eucharist, God does the same for us. We bring forth an offering of bread and wine, "fruit of the earth and work of human hands," and they become for us the body and blood of Christ. It is not wheat and grapes that are brought forth, but bread and wine. It is God's creation transformed by our work. Though we may have very little connection to the actual production of the bread and wine that are offered, they represent our work, the sacrifices we make each day to bring the world closer to God's dream for it.

With God, nothing is wasted. Our smallest efforts – our prayers, our works, our sufferings – when united with Christ's sacrifice, can be transformed into Christ's very body and blood. We take what God has given us – our bodies, our lives, our talents and abilities – and use them to transform creation through our work. This is what we bring to the table, hoping that God will transform it – transform us – along with the bread and wine.

If we receive the Eucharist with the proper disposition, we are united not only *to* Christ, but *in* Christ to one another, as one body. This is Paul's message in his Letter to the Ephesians, as he urges them to preserve the unity of the Spirit. As we prepare our hearts to receive the Eucharist today, we offer our gifts to God, so that they may be multiplied and that we may become Christ's body, united in our one faith as a sign of our one Lord, *who is over all and through all and in all*.

Monday, July 29, 2024

(Lec. 401)

1) Jeremiah 13:1-11

(Lec. 607)

2) John 11:19-27

or Luke 10:38-42

Gospel related: **CCC** 439, 993, 994, 1001 **CSDC** 260

MONDAY OF
17TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saints Martha,
Mary and Lazarus)

FOCUS: The Lord will always conquer death; with him, there is only life.

Today the Church celebrates three close friends of Jesus, siblings and saints Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Each sets a different example when it comes to living for the Lord. Martha demonstrates how to love our neighbor, offering hospitality and showing us how to serve. Mary shows us how to listen attentively to the Lord without distraction. Lazarus shows the power of the Lord, in his being raised from the dead.

In the Gospel, these saints call upon Jesus in their time of need. Even though the situation seems hopeless, as Lazarus had been dead for some time, Martha and Mary believe in the saving power of the Lord. Martha says to Jesus, *But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.* To this Jesus responds, *Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and anyone who lives and believes in me will never die.*

We see a similar message of promise in today's first reading. Jeremiah is obedient to the Lord and the Lord praises this obedience. He explains to Jeremiah that the disobedient and the wicked will not share eternal life with him, and demonstrates this with the analogy of the loincloth.

If we are obedient like Jeremiah, we, too, can have new life after death if we believe and trust in the Lord. We must set aside our pride and devote our lives to Christ with unwavering faith and hope. If we serve like Martha, listen like Mary, and hope in the power of life over death shown through Lazarus, then we, too, will need not fear the death he has conquered for us.

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Tuesday, July 30, 2024

(Lec. 402)

1) Jeremiah 14:17-22

2) Matthew 13:36-43

TUESDAY OF

17TH WEEK

IN ORDINARY TIME

(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Peter Chrysologus,
Bishop and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 10

FOCUS: The seed is the word of God, Christ is the sower; all who come to him will live forever.

In the first reading the prophet Jeremiah, recognizing the sins of the people and their ancestors, pleads with the Lord, *remember your covenant with us, and break it not*. This is a humble and contrite heart, and the voice of one who trusts in the justice and mercy of God.

Jeremiah is a model for how we might come to the Lord with honesty and vulnerability, recognizing our sin, and pleading with God to show us his mercy. It is easy to get caught up in the day-to-day concerns of life and not recognize the weight of our sin before God. Of course, we are not prophets like Jeremiah pleading for his people, but there is great spiritual wisdom in being able to recognize our own faults and failings and know we need to rely always on the Lord.

In the Gospel, Jesus explains the parable of the weeds and the wheat. While it may seem simple enough to want to root out the weeds as soon as possible, Jesus reminds us that judgment belongs to him and not to us. He describes the *end of the age* where the wicked will be thrown into the *fiery furnace* and *the righteous will shine like the sun*.

Although it is not always easy to discern good from evil in today's world, we know that our actions and words matter if we are to be a light for others. But discipleship can be challenging! It is important to take the time each day to examine our conscience and ask God for help in recognizing the areas in which we have fallen away from him and are in need of his mercy.

If we are to cultivate the word of God in our lives and be able to go out and be heralds of the Gospel, humility and honesty regarding our gifts and weaknesses, and virtues and vices, goes a long way toward guiding others to be *children of the Kingdom*. The seed is the word of God, Christ is the sower; all who come to him will live forever.

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Wednesday, July 31, 2024

(Lec. 403)

- 1) Jeremiah 15:10, 16-21
- 2) Matthew 13:44-46

WEDNESDAY OF
17TH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Ignatius of Loyola,
Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 546

FOCUS: The riches of this world will rot and fade away, but the kingdom of heaven is ours forever.

When we think of treasure, what comes to mind? Formed by the folk tales and fables of our youth, we may envision a large wooden chest, containing something, or many things. And yet we know, in our hearts, that things of enduring value and great worth – true treasure from God – cannot possibly fit in such a vessel: the people we love; our faith and our hope; our relationships with God and one another; the kingdom of heaven promised to us.

We sacrifice for many of these treasures, both temporal and spiritual. Only in sacrifice for the things that endure does eternal satisfaction arise, however. The riches of this world that we gather will rot and fade away, but the kingdom of heaven is ours forever. It has been bought for us at great cost, and yet is given to us freely.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, whose memorial we celebrate today, was one who came to understand this in a very significant and visceral way. Ignatius was born into a good life and was on a steady upward trajectory when he was severely injured by a cannonball during a military campaign. Held up in bed for months as he was healing, he ended up reading the lives of the saints and the Bible. In his vulnerability, he found an immense spiritual treasure. He turned it into a spiritual practice that continues to impact so many faithful today.

Saint Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* are a disciplined approach to growing in faith and understanding of God. For hundreds of years, this text has helped people grow closer to Jesus through the disciplined approach it presents. His insights can help us discern how God is calling us to use the spiritual treasure we have found in our lives. Or perhaps, if we seem to have misplaced it, he might help us find it again.

As we continue our liturgy, we will celebrate the great treasure of the Eucharist that continues to reveal God's enduring love for us. May we be open to its grace.

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