

JANUARY

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**YEAR A
WEEKDAYS I**

SUNDAY, JANUARY 1, 2023

(Lec. 18)

- 1) Numbers 6:22-27
- 2) Galatians 4:4-7
- 3) Luke 2:16-21

Gospel related: CCC 486, 525, 527, 2599

**THE OCTAVE DAY
OF THE NATIVITY
OF THE LORD;
SOLEMNITY OF MARY,
THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD**

FOCUS: We honor the holiness of Mary and her rightful place as Mother of God, for this points to the divinity and perfection of her Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

January 1st marks the end of one calendar year and the beginning of another. So, too, the birth of Jesus marks the end of the reign of sin and the beginning of a new era of God's grace. As Paul explains to the Galatians in today's second reading, Jesus was born of a woman just as we were, like us in all things but sin. By adoption, we are children of God and children of our Blessed Mother.

Today's feast, the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God, arises from the settling of a controversy among our early Christian ancestors. There were arguments about the divinity of Christ and the role that Mary plays in the story of salvation.

Nestorius was the patriarch of Constantinople in the 5th century. He taught that Mary was the mother only of Jesus' humanity. Although Scripture says, in the chapter before today's Gospel reading, *nothing will be impossible for God*, Nestorius did not think a mortal could bear the immortal, a human could not bring forth the divine. Nestorius left out the wondrous works of God in his thought process, and how our God can do or achieve anything he desires, solely because he desires that it be so.

If we embrace an image of God who makes all things possible, then these things are true: Mary is the Mother of Jesus, Jesus is God, and therefore as the mother of Jesus, Mary is *the Mother of God*. To deny the holiness of Mary and her rightful place as Mother of God is to downplay the divinity and perfection of her Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Why do we honor Mary? Because Jesus did, and he instructed us to do the same. Jesus honored Mary's wishes at Cana when she requested that he perform his first miracle, turning water into wine. It was there that she spoke her last words recorded in Scripture: *Do whatever he tells you* (cf. John 2:5).

In the Gospel today, we see how Mary and Joseph honored God the Father and God the Son in fulfilling all the duties of their religion in taking Jesus to be circumcised and giving him his name, literally translating as "God helps."

When the shepherds adored and praised God at the Christ Child's manger, Mary pondered these things in her heart, marveling at the favor God had shone in choosing her above all others to be the mother of his son. As we begin this new year and we contemplate our resolutions, let us resolve to imitate Mary our mother in devotion to God the Father and God the Son. In that way, the Lord will bless us and keep us, making his face to shine upon us and giving us peace.

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Monday, January 2, 2023
(Lec. 205)

- 1) 1 John 2:22-28
- 2) John 1:19-28

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY
(OBL MEM
Saints Basil the Great
and Gregory Nazianzen,
Bishops and Doctors
of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 575, 613, 719

FOCUS: Let no voice deny the saving power of God in Christ Jesus.

There's no easing into today's first reading, as John leads with *Who is the liar?* and follows with, the liar is *whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ* – our Savior. This Scripture highlights the difficulties the disciples of the early Church had in spreading the word of the Lord. They had to preach, then reach out again multiple times to the early Christians to remind them of the truth and to counter the anti-Christ – that is, the false teachers purposely trying to lead the new converts astray.

John is encouraging his community to let *what [they] heard from the beginning remain in [them]*, for it is in doing so that they *remain in the Son and in the Father*. In other words, if they keep the Word-of-God-made-flesh within them, they are never separated from him and will be ready for him at his coming. God has shown us truth, and he has given us prophets and evangelists to make that truth known to all.

The Gospel today focuses on the last of the prophets who led the way for Jesus' ministry: John the Baptist. Jesus was essentially unknown at this point, and the priests, Levites, and Pharisees are grilling John the Baptist and trying in vain to trap him. He told them only what he was "not" – the Christ, the prophet (like Moses) or Elijah. His only identifier, *I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'*

John the Baptist and John the disciple of Christ who wrote the letter in the first reading both show the challenges of evangelism: We must persevere in order to get the message of Christ out into the world. The truth is there to be told, to be consumed, and to be kept within us. We are not to be fooled by the false prophets and anti-Christ, but must pray to God for strength in recognizing him and living out his commandments. We have seen the saving power of God – and it for us and for all.

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Tuesday, January 3, 2023

(Lec. 206)

1) 1 John 2:29–3:6

2) John 1:29-34

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

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(Opt. Mem.

The Most Holy Name

of Jesus)

FOCUS: *Beloved, we are God's children now.*

The Christmas season is almost over, trees and decorations are ready to be packed away and forgotten about until the next Christmas season. Yet this fact remains: The Christ child is born, and the perfect gift of *love the Father has bestowed on us* that makes us his children is still here. It is a gift that cannot be shelved and forgotten about – it is a gift that requires action.

Christ born into human flesh unites the divine with humanity, granting us all the opportunity to not only partake in God's grace, but to become co-heirs with Christ to eternal life. This wonderful gift can be shared only if we accept Christ's life and passion, though, which we do in our baptism. We participate in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission in order to bring about the fullness of the kingdom of God. We testify to his presence among us, just as John the Baptist was the first to do so.

In today's Gospel reading, John the Baptist affirms what we now know and hold to be true: that Jesus is the Son of God, upon whom the Spirit came down and remained. Jesus is *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*, whose incarnation was made possible by the Holy Spirit's outpouring upon Mary. And it is through the Holy Spirit that we are led to accept the gift of Christ, to live out his example, and to love others as he loves us. Truly, the Holy Spirit is the gift that keeps on giving!

So don't put away this gift of the Christmas season to stay hidden and collect dust until it's time to parade it around next season. Instead, let us accept this gift and share it every day, that it might grow and be a gift to all we meet – to all the world. It is the one gift perfectly designed and chosen for us, because it tells us exactly who we are: children of God.

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Wednesday, January 4, 2023
(Lec. 207)
1) 1 John 3:7-10
2) John 1:35-42
Gospel related: CCC 608, 719

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY
(OBL MEM
USA: Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton,
Religious)

FOCUS: It is worth telling others about following Christ.

Monumental events in our lives often result in our ability to recall in precise detail where we were, and what we were doing at that moment. Those mental snapshots are vivid, and we recognize that something substantial has happened and that our lives and the lives of those around us have been changed.

In today's Gospel, John adds details that indicate his own experience of being called by Jesus was life-altering. For as much as John refrains from explicitly naming himself in this narrative that he authors, he can't help revealing his presence. John isn't just recounting a story, but is one of the two disciples who are with John the Baptist when John the Baptist identifies Jesus as *the Lamb of God*.

John's life is changed that very day, at *about four in the afternoon*. That was when he started following Jesus, heard him ask *What are you looking for?* and then accepted his invitation to "come and see." He even recounts the specifics of Andrew bringing his brother, Simon Peter, to meet Jesus, and that Jesus gave him a new name: Cephas, which means Peter. These details were important to John; they were essential to his living and re-living the gravity of this occasion.

Whether we were baptized in infancy or initiated into the Church as youths or adults, there have been memorable moments that have brought us to *this* moment. Perhaps they were not unlike John's, and we can recall every detail. Perhaps they have been more subtle, and we can recall how we felt but not much else. Given God's immense grace, there are undoubtedly more of them awaiting us.

John's testimony invites and encourages us to think more deeply and reflectively upon those discrete points in our journey of faith, those times where we encountered Jesus in a particularly profound and meaningful way, and how our life has changed because of him. Like John, we must then share this Good News, for as it was once what brought us to Christ, so it may now bring others.

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Thursday, January 5, 2023
(Lec. 208)
1) 1 John 3:11-21
2) John 1:43-51
Gospel related: CCC 878

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY
(OBL MEM
USA: Saint John Neumann,
Bishop)

FOCUS: *Serve the Lord with gladness.*

Over the centuries, many a philosopher, poet, and songwriter have pondered the meaning of love and its depths. Today the first reading tells us, *the way we came to know love was that he [God, in the person of Jesus the Son] laid down his life for us*. So it is not enough to talk about love and profess it with our lips. We must demonstrate this same love through *our* deeds: deeds of compassion, charity, kindness, and self-sacrifice. *We ought*, in fact, *to lay down our lives for [one another]*.

Love is therefore not just a feeling or an emotion. It is a force of and for good that can overcome false assumptions – yes, something good can in fact come from Nazareth. Acts of love can be as simple as a kind word, a smile, or a polite gesture of yielding to another. Love can be inconvenient or demanding, such as when we take time to tend to someone in distress, or by inquiring about someone's need and doing our best to fulfill it. Love can also be all-consuming self-giving, such as when we care for a dying loved one. Just as Jesus called the Twelve, he also calls us to his awe-inspiring ministry and to follow in his footsteps.

As we ready ourselves to be replenished with the love outpoured at the Eucharistic table, let us open our eyes to opportunities to share God's love with someone. May we use the gifts that God has given us to share his perfect love, that in our serving the Lord with gladness the world may *cry out to God with joy*.

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Friday, January 6, 2023

(Lec. 209)

1) 1 John 5:5-13

2) Mark 1:7-11

or Luke 3:23-28 or

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

Gospel related: CCC 151, 422, 535 CSDC 378

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(Opt. Mem.)

USA: Saint André Bessette,
Religious)

FOCUS: Testify to what you know and believe.

Blood and water are important elements in the Christian tradition. They are reminders of Jesus' death on the cross and the blood he shed; they point to the Last Supper's Eucharistic chalice and the washing of the feet. As Christ began his mission in the waters of baptism, so is our mission begun in the same.

But what good are blood and water and their graced goodness unless we testify to them? This seems to be what John is addressing in our first reading. After all, even God *has testified on behalf of his Son*. How do we testify? *The Spirit is the one who testifies, and the Spirit is truth*.

This is exemplified in today's Gospel. John the Baptist proclaims the coming of one who is incomprehensibly mighty: one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself is the manifestation of God's love, and his very life is a testimony of truth. Yet he will allow John to baptize him with water so that, in this act of humble submission, all will see and comprehend his submission to and acceptance of the Father's mission (cf. CCC #536). The Spirit descends, and the Father's voice thunders. How, then, can we not testify to what we know and believe?

We have the Spirit as the truth within us to help us. All throughout the New Testament we are told of the assistance and testimony of the Spirit. The Lord tells us that he will never leave us alone, that in his ascending to the Father he leaves his advocate behind to dwell within and among us, and the Spirit will give us the words to speak (cf. John 14:16; Acts 16:7; Romans 8:16; Luke 12:12; Matthew 10:20; Mark 13:11).

This is the truth that brings us here – the faith to which we testify with the help of the Spirit and the grace of the sacrament of Christ's body and blood. As the Spirit was given to us after the Resurrection to help us testify, so the Spirit still dwells within us to guide us in our lives beyond these walls.

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Saturday, January 7, 2023

(Lec. 210)

1) 1 John 5:14-21

2) John 2:1-11

Gospel related: CCC 486, 495, 1335, 1613, 2618

CHRISTMAS WEEKDAY

(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Raymond of Penyafort,
Priest)

FOCUS: *Do whatever [Jesus] tells you.*

The beauty of the Catholic liturgical calendar means that our Christmas season does not officially end until tomorrow, on the feast of the Epiphany. As we celebrate this last Christmas weekday, we hear a Gospel that presents another type of “birth narrative” for Jesus, as it both “introduces” him to us as a public figure, and gives us the last scripturally recorded words of Mary, his mother.

At the wedding feast in Cana, Jesus performs his first miracle – at least, as recorded in the Gospel of John. It is unique in that it doesn’t have many of the aspects we have come to expect in Jesus’ miracle stories: there is no animosity with an antagonist; there is no sickness or even death to be healed or overcome; there is no moral lesson to be imparted. Instead, Jesus’ intervention is to assist the honor and hospitality of some family friends – an ordinary couple who ran out of wine during a marriage feast.

In fact, Jesus seems reluctant to use his Godly powers, but his mother, Mary, tells the wait staff, *Do whatever he tells you.* The rest is history. We are told the new wine is of the highest quality, the jars are all full, the party continues, and Jesus’ mission has publicly begun. Through it, John tells us, he *revealed his glory and his disciples began to believe in him.*

The servers listened to Mary, and then they listened to Jesus. We approach Mary in prayer for her intercession and her guidance. Everything she does points to her Son – and the simple advice she gave the servers can help us, as well. She said to *do whatever he tells you.*

SUNDAY, JANUARY 8, 2023

(Lec. 20)

- 1) Isaiah 60:1-6
- 2) Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6
- 3) Matthew 2:1-12

Gospel related: CCC 439, 486, 528, 724

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD - SOLEMNITY

FOCUS: Even at his birth, Jesus shows that he is a completely different type of king.

The familiar biblical Christmas stories that we hear during this holy season contain many unexpected events and characters. They hardly seem fit for a king. It all begins with a young virgin who cannot possibly be with child, yet she indeed conceives and bears the Son of God within her. This child is then born after a difficult journey by his parents to Bethlehem. The birth is subsequently announced – by angels – to the most ordinary of people, doing some of the most labor-intensive and dirty work around: shepherds. Finally, the only “important” people who recognize the newborn as a king are non-Jewish foreigners.

How is it that there are no priests or scribes present to greet the promised king? Surely, they must have been prepared for his arrival. Why isn't he born in a castle surrounded by servants and other royalty? How can anyone believe that this is the birth of a king? If this child is truly the King of the Jews, his beginnings demonstrate that he is not going to be like any other king.

He is called the King of the Jews, but his importance seems to be much larger than simply the nation of Israel. This king is overlooked by the Jewish leaders but proclaimed by the simple shepherds and the Magi. The king is born to a simple virgin but called the Son of God. The king is born in a cave/barn, but the visitors bring lavish gifts. The king is praised by angels but hunted by Herod. This Jesus is going to turn the whole world upside down and it begins even as he is a newborn.

As we examine the characters in this chapter of Jesus' life, it seems that all the wrong people are involved. None of these people would be considered important or worthy to the outside observer. It seems that this king has invited the poor and the outcast to his birthday. How can King Herod be so afraid of a weak baby born into poverty and obscurity?

Do we understand now the message for us? When we come into the presence of the Lord, we can also feel unworthy. It is good for us to remember that even from the beginning Jesus has welcomed the outcast and the overlooked. If we doubt that Jesus loves or invites us, it is encouraging to recall the humble shepherds and the “unclean” Magi who were the first to be summoned. This king is not judging by appearance or status. In Jesus we celebrate a king who is longing to save those who need his mercy. The gifts that he asks us to offer are our love and devotion to him. This king is such a joyful surprise!

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Monday, January 9, 2023
(Lec. 21)

1) Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7
or Acts 10:34-38

2) Matthew 3:13-17

Gospel related: CCC 444, 535, 536, 608, 701, 713, 1223, 1224, 1286

**THE BAPTISM
OF THE LORD
- FEAST**

FOCUS: In baptism, we are joined to Christ's mission.

John the Baptist tries to talk Jesus out of his intended baptism: *I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?* It makes sense that John would be incredulous: He knows his role, which is to prepare the way for the Jesus, the Messiah. Jesus, however, gently insists. Immersed in the waters of baptism, he submits himself to the Father's plan: "The baptism of Jesus is on his part the acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God's suffering servant" (CCC #536).

This exchange marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in Matthew's Gospel. After 30 years in relative obscurity, Jesus embraces the mission that will eventually lead to his death and resurrection. He will preach and teach and his words and actions will be recorded by Matthew and the other evangelists. Born without sin, surely Jesus didn't "need" to be baptized; yet he does so, the Son of God entering into our human experience.

Those of us who are cradle Catholics don't recall our baptism, but those who have been baptized as adults likely remember theirs vividly. During his Angelus message on this feast in January 2022, Pope Francis implored: "Let us not forget the date of our baptism! ... This is a beautiful thing: remembering the date of your baptism because it is our rebirth, the moment in which we became children of God with Jesus!"

Through our baptism we become members of the body of Christ, adopted sons and daughters of God. By baptism we also "share in the priesthood of Christ, in his prophetic and royal mission" (CCC #1268). Like Jesus, through our baptism we are called to turn over our lives to God.

As we prepare to receive the body and blood of Jesus, we invite him to continue to renew and transform us so that, in turning our lives over to God, we live in a way that makes us worthy to be called his beloved son or daughter, *with whom [he is] well pleased.*

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Tuesday, January 10, 2023

(Lec. 306)

1) Hebrews 2:5-12

2) Mark 1:21-28

Gospel related: CCC 438, 1673, 2173

or

(Lec. 305)

1) Hebrews 1:1-6

2) Mark 1:14-20

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

TUESDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus invites us into the communion of the Blessed Trinity.

Authority is a word that can have a negative connotation, as it can be difficult to distinguish who or what is a trustworthy source. Nevertheless, amid these challenges, today's Gospel offers a compelling call.

The people who encountered Jesus' teaching in this synagogue were *astonished*. Then, his authority is recognized by an unlikely source – an unclean spirit. Even the forces of evil proclaim the truth of who Jesus is: the Holy One of God! Finally, Jesus supports his authoritative teaching with action: He commands the unclean spirit, and it obeys.

Elsewhere in the Gospels, the wind and the waters obey his commands. He defeated even death. All things are subject to him. He is the Lord of the Universe, *for whom and through whom all things exist*.

Thankfully, this mighty Lord is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters – to make each of us an intimate member of his holy family. Jesus invites you and me into the communion of the Blessed Trinity.

We have just entered the liturgical season of Ordinary Time, which is a period for us to meditate on the life of Christ, to tell the stories of Jesus' authority, faithfulness, and love throughout his earthly ministry. As we tell these stories, as we reflect on Jesus' teachings and actions, and as we receive his body and blood in the Eucharist, let us give thanks to God for the gift of his Son.

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Wednesday, January 11, 2023
(Lec. 307)
1) Hebrews 2:14-18
2) Mark 1:29-39
Gospel related: CCC 2602

WEDNESDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Jesus has overcome sin and death and is our way to everlasting life.

As the faithful high priest, Jesus expiates our sins. To expiate means “to make amends for” or “to extinguish the guilt incurred by.” Though we still bear the natural consequences of original sin – we still suffer and die – our death no longer means we will be cut off from God. By reconciling us to the Father, Jesus has transformed death into a new beginning. While our death means an end to our mortal life here on earth, we enter into the fullness of life God always intended for us, that is, a life of intimate relationship with him.

Even before his own death, Jesus showed his power over death and the devil by healing illnesses and casting out demons. In today’s Gospel, after having spent a busy day of ministering to the needs of others, Jesus rose *very early before dawn* and went off to pray alone. Jesus’ practice of praying to the Father is a sign of his solidarity with humanity, sympathizing with our weakness (see CCC #2602). Jesus was sent by the Father to advocate for us, and to be the means by which we come to know the Father and place our needs before him. His public ministry was his private prayer in action. He did the Father’s will, showing his power and his love by healing illnesses, exorcising demons, and preaching the Good News that the reign of God was at hand.

Jesus, the Son of God, took on humanity in all of its defects except sin. Even though he was without sin, he bore its consequences. He suffered, as all humans suffer. Yet, in dying for us, he defeated death, robbing it of its power. When we are baptized into the life and death of Christ, the only power of sin that remains is the power we allow it. Through the Church and her sacraments, Jesus has given us the tools we need to overcome sin and death. He is the way to everlasting life.

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Thursday, January 12, 2023
(Lec. 308)

1) Hebrews 3:7-14

2) Mark 1:40-45

Gospel related: CCC 1504, 2616

THURSDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: The living God is revealed in deeds.

Oh, that today we would hear the voice of the *living God!* In our human frailty, sin, and doubt, it is often easy to perceive God as quiet, as absent, as indifferent to our needs and trials.

There is precedent for that: The Old Testament is filled with stories of people who doubted, turned their back on God, even cursed God. The first reading recounts the grumbling of the Israelites against God. The psalms contain songs of praise and lament. Yet time and again, we have been shown that our God is a living, faithful, active God. The ancient Judaic faith testifies to a God living in relationship, indeed in covenant, with his chosen people.

The community for which Mark wrote his Gospel was a young, Gentile-Christian one, likely far from the lands that Jesus walked but subject to the persecution of Christians by the Romans. This Gospel is known for its brevity and its focus on Jesus' *action*. Today's passage comes from Chapter 1, in which Jesus is quickly prepared for public ministry through baptism and his temptation in the desert. He begins preaching in Galilee and calling disciples, and by Verse 21 is working miracles.

The story we just heard of the cleansing of the leper is typical of Mark: He wastes no time portraying the living God, Jesus Christ, who acts on behalf of his people. Not only does Jesus respond to the leper's opening plea, he gives him instructions on how to become part of the community again by showing himself to the priest. Word spreads as to who Jesus is, and people keep *coming to him from everywhere*.

The Lord seeks us out, and responds when we seek him. No matter what struggles we face, may we not lose hope in the living God. We need look no further than the small acts of love that surround us each day, beginning here at the Eucharistic table.

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Friday, January 13, 2023
(Lec. 309)
1) Hebrews 4:1-5, 11
2) Mark 2:1-12

FRIDAY OF
FIRST WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Hilary,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church)

FOCUS: Draw near to Jesus for spiritual healing.

The paralytic man in today's Gospel is fortunate to have such determined companions. Though the group may have felt disheartened by the size of the crowd, they came up with a plan: They lowered the man in through the roof! Imagine the difficulty of doing such a thing. *Finally*, the man must have thought, *finally I will be healed*.

All that, and then he hears: *Child, your sins are forgiven*.

Maybe the man was confused or disappointed. After all, he came for healing, not forgiveness.

Or did he come for both, even if he didn't realize it?

So often, we are searching for one type of healing – physical, emotional, interpersonal – but what we all need first and foremost is spiritual healing. We need the healing that only Jesus Christ can give. Everything else is secondary.

Pope Francis describes the Church as a “field hospital after battle,” saying, “I see clearly that the thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity”(2013).

Jesus did heal the paralytic man, first spiritually and then physically. Surely the man was thankful he was able to draw near to Jesus, and he had to have been grateful for those who helped him do so. Are we not in the same situation? We have been able to draw near to Jesus, and certainly there are people who have helped us do so. Through God's grace, though, we don't have to climb onto a roof to get to Jesus; he waits for us here, at every holy Eucharist, and his Spirit is with us always. With gratitude for this we approach Christ in the Eucharist, trusting that he desires to heal all our wounds.

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Saturday, January 14, 2023
(Lec. 310)

- 1) Hebrews 4:12-16
- 2) Mark 2:13-17

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

Gospel related: CCC 545, 574, 1484, 1503

FOCUS: Let us rejoice that the Lord has come to call sinners.

In today's Gospel story, Jesus is eating with tax collectors and sinners and being called out for it by the scribes and Pharisees. To this Jesus responds that he *did not come to call the righteous but sinners*.

It is always good to know where we stand! We know we are not righteous. We are human beings who sin – human beings in need of the grace and healing that comes through Jesus and his Church. The Lord has called us, and here we are, gathered at his banquet. Though we have sinned, though we have at times rebelled, rejected, and turned away from God's law of love, the Lord does not forsake us. In fact, he seeks us out.

The Lord has invited us to his banquet. At this banquet we experience sacramentally the Lord's extreme love for us. Although we were sinners and continue to sin, he chose to enter human history, take on our human nature, and freely accepted suffering and death on a cross in order to show us his love and reconcile us to the Father. He has chosen to remain present among us, knowing our need for him in this great sacrament that we are here to celebrate and receive. And, in the person of the priest, our Lord is present and ready to offer his mercy and forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation.

Humbled and moved by such undeserved love and mercy, let us rejoice that the Lord has indeed come to call sinners; he has called us to be his followers and to receive the grace he continues to pour forth into our hearts.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 15, 2023

(Lec. 64)

- 1) Isaiah 49:3, 5-6
- 2) 1 Corinthians 1:1-3
- 3) John 1:29-34

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

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *Behold, the Lamb of God.*

It is common practice in the entertainment world to have an opening act before a big event. Lesser-known or up-and-coming celebrities are used to get the crowd in the mood and ready for the moment when the main event comes on stage.

In an imperfectly analogous way, John the Baptist performs this role in the drama of our salvation. His task was to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah, that great moment when God would fulfill his covenant with Israel. From the beginning of John's Gospel, the Baptist plays a central role in revealing Jesus as both the Word of God and the Messiah.

As we encounter John today, he is entering the apex of his mission: *Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*, he says. This is not just someone talking *about* the Messiah, this is a public, well-known figure confirming all that he has been saying up to this point: *He is the one* about whom I have been speaking. John sees with his eyes, and with his spirit, to know this truth. His declaration is meant for all to hear, and heed.

Where does John's authority come from? From his own role as the one who will "open the floor" for the main actor, per God's divine design; but also from what he himself has seen: *I did not know him [Jesus] but the one who sent me ... told me* that "I would see the Spirit come down and remain upon the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit, and this I did see." This foresight, this insight, gives him the authority to proclaim this truth. And without fear he tells all who hear, *now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God.*

Only that which comes from God can be proclaimed as truth, and John had the knowledge from God even before birth – leaping as he did in Elizabeth's womb at the sound of Mary's voice, *Mary the mother of [our] Lord* (cf. Luke 1:43-44). He was destined to be the one who would come on stage first, as it were, gaining the attention not for himself but in order to point to the main act to come.

As John did, so can we. Although we are not on that original stage, we are the ones who continue telling the story and continue pointing to the One whose life, death, and resurrection has transformed the world.

Jesus Christ who is the real story and it is only in a personal, intimate knowledge of Christ, found in the life of an active faith, that we truly experience God's presence. As John the Baptist tells us later: *He must increase, I must decrease* (cf. John 3:30). For John knows he must ultimately leave the stage and allow Jesus to take his rightful place. May our hearts be open to this great act of God's loving presence in our lives.

* * *

Monday, January 16, 2023
(Lec. 311)

1) Hebrews 5:1-10

2) Mark 2:18-22

Gospel related: CCC 796

MONDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: As we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, let us offer him the gift of ourselves.

Not too long ago, we celebrated Jesus' coming into the world as the Son of God, as divinity being incarnated into humanity. Today's readings give us a chance to reflect on what Jesus' incarnation means.

The first reading speaks of Jesus as a high priest. Prior to Jesus, Jewish high priests offered repeated animal sacrifices to God on behalf of themselves and the people. When Jesus came as high priest, he came to offer far more – his very self, down to the last drop of blood on the cross.

In the Gospel, Jesus presents himself as the bridegroom who gives his life and his love for his beloved – for the Church and for each of his followers, including us.

Both images speak of Jesus' complete, faithful, and eternal love for us – a love that's willing to sacrifice even to the point of death. Jesus gives his life for us freely, out of love for us and for God.

Jesus defends his disciples for not fasting when he, the bridegroom, is with them. His presence brings us joy and is a cause for celebration, as at a wedding feast. Yet Jesus is not making discipleship easy. He calls for more than external acts such as fasting – as important as fasting is in the right moments. He wants far more than externals from us: He wants us to give ourselves completely to him, as he has given himself completely for us. Today, as we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, let us offer him the gift of ourselves.

* * *

Tuesday, January 17, 2023
(Lec. 312)
1) Hebrews 6:10-20
2) Mark 2:23-28

TUESDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Anthony,
Abbot)

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

FOCUS: *The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath. That is why the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.*

In today's Gospel, Jesus expresses a truth of what God intends for his creation. That is, we have a relationship with the one who created us, and has given us gifts. These gifts are meant to be enjoyed – and one of those gifts is the sabbath.

Work of any kind on the sabbath was strictly forbidden by Jewish law. The Pharisees, therefore, were quick to criticize the disciples for picking the heads of grain [that is, doing work]. The Pharisees challenge Jesus and he says, *The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath.*

Just as David shared the bread with his hungry companions, Jesus allows the disciples to pick the heads of grain to eat. While it may seem as if Jesus is making a stand against Jewish law, in fact he is demonstrating its deeper meaning, the bigger picture – to keep holy the sabbath.

As the *catechism* instructs us, “Jesus never fails to respect the holiness of this day ... With compassion Christ declares the sabbath for doing good rather than harm, for saving life rather than killing. The sabbath is the day of the Lord of mercies and a day to honor God” (#2173).

Our presence here at Mass today shows that we, too, respect the sabbath as the Lord's day. It is also an opportunity to think about what else we might do today, and if we really *need* to do it ... *today*. Is it a good and necessary thing to pick the heads of grain today? Or might we find that Jesus is leading us on a path that includes a little more rest, and a little more time with him?

Jesus reminds us it's not so much what we do, but why we do it that matters. Our Sunday may be busy, but it's important to take time out for Mass and devote the rest of the day to activities that draw us closer to God and one another.

Jesus is *lord even of the sabbath* – and Lord of our lives.

* * *

Wednesday, January 18, 2023
(Lec. 313)

1) Hebrews 7:1-3, 15-17

2) Mark 3:1-6

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

WEDNESDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Act with mercy and compassion.

In today's Gospel, Jesus spies a man with a withered hand. Such a disability in Jesus' time could keep one from earning a living. With no income and no safety net, his life and the lives of his family members could hang in the balance.

Recognizing this man's situation, Jesus looks to the religious leaders and asks if one can act to save a life on the sabbath. Their silence speaks volumes. Perhaps they've grown blind to this man's need. Maybe they cannot imagine how they could help and not break the sabbath law.

Jesus, angered and grieved by their silence and lack of compassion, heals the man's hand. Their response to this gift of life? They begin to plot his death.

The Jesus we see in the Gospel bears witness to the priest described in the Letter to the Hebrews: a priest forever, of righteousness and peace.

The religious leaders thought they were doing the right thing by upholding the law. But they were blind to the demand to save life, to do good, even on the sabbath. Although it is easy for us to sit in judgment of the Pharisees, perhaps we should contemplate when we have failed to see and respond in imitation of Jesus.

As we approach the Eucharist, let us ask the Lord to heal any hardening of our own hearts, so we can extend his mercy and love to those in need.

* * *

Thursday, January 19, 2023
(Lec. 314)

1) Hebrews 7:25—8:6

2) Mark 3:7-12

Gospel related: CCC 1504

THURSDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Seek healing from the Lord.

Even without the convenience of modern media, word still spread like wildfire in Jesus' day. Today's Gospel paints a picture of the frenzy that accompanied Jesus. Once the sick are healed and the demons cry out in witness to Jesus, suddenly everyone wants to see him. The crowds come to see Jesus and to touch him. Saint Mark's detail of having *a boat ready ... so that they would not crush him* shows how intensely the crowds descend upon Jesus and the disciples.

Our fallen nature means we are vulnerable to sickness, wounding, and ultimately death. We don't know all the reasons why the crowds sought him out – did they want to be healed so they could be his disciples? Did they just hope for relief from their ailments and then a quick return to their usual life? While the crowds running after Jesus may have lacked restraint, they knew they needed healing and knew where to go. They jumped at the chance.

Perhaps we should imitate the crowd. We are Christ's disciples, and we are aware that we need healing in order to be at our best in sharing the Gospel that Christ brought. Sin infects our soul just as an illness infects our body. And we cannot fix the ailments of the soul on our own. Through the sacraments, Jesus himself offers us healing and grace.

To this holy liturgy, we bring our woundedness. We ask forgiveness for our sins. Then, with hearts full of faith, we plead for healing and receive the very greatest gift we can: the Bread of Life. He loves us, he heals us, he remains with us to help us as we go forth.

* * *

Friday, January 20, 2023
(Lec. 315)

- 1) Hebrews 8:6-13
- 2) Mark 3:13-19

FRIDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Fabian,
Pope and Martyr;
Saint Sebastian,
Martyr)

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

FOCUS: The Lord has written his law in our minds and upon our hearts.

Numerous significant events in salvation history have taken place on mountains. In the Old Testament, Noah's ark finally came to rest on the top of Mount Ararat. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac on the top of Mount Moriah. And Moses received the Ten Commandments in an encounter with God on Mount Sinai. The Ten Commandments were written by the finger of God on tablets of stone. While those stone tablets revealed the law of God to his people, knowledge of the law could not give the Hebrew people the power to fulfill the law.

When Jesus appoints the Twelve Apostles, he climbs up a mountain and summons the Apostles to join him there. The Twelve are commissioned by Jesus to preach in his name and cast out demons by his power. Jesus brought forth a new covenant, *a better covenant, enacted on better promises*, and he gives us the grace to live within it. He gives the Church – the body of Christ – the power to follow his example and announce his everlasting covenant to all the nations.

Through the first Apostles, Jesus began an unbroken succession of Apostles that continues in the bishops of the Church today. Just as the Apostles remain with us in today's bishops, the message and power of the new covenant remains with us. The finger of God has truly written his law on our minds and on our hearts. In the new covenant, we are not merely informed of God's law, we are transformed by God's love – and baptized into it through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are chosen by Jesus Christ to live out the will of God and proclaim the Gospel from every mountaintop.

* * *

Saturday, January 21, 2023

(Lec. 316)

1) Hebrews 9:2-3, 11-14

2) Mark 3:20-21

SATURDAY OF
SECOND WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Agnes,
Virgin and Martyr)

FOCUS: Jesus is the Son of God and our salvation.

The central claim of the Gospels is that Jesus is the Son of God become flesh to dwell among us and to save us. This is Good News indeed, but it is also a radical declaration and difficult for many to accept. Mark tells us in today's Gospel that Jesus' own relatives thought *he [was] out of his mind*.

Time and again the Lord offered a pathway for his people and time and again they diverted from it, rebelled against him, and suffered for it. So after prophets, judges, and kings failed to reconcile creation to him, the Father sent the Son to do it. And yes, to some that might seem beyond comprehension, and even a sign that Jesus himself or his believers were possessed by demons (cf. Mark 3:22).

C.S. Lewis puts it this way: If Jesus is not the Son of God, "he would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse" (*Mere Christianity*, 55).

We have been given everything by God, including the gift of faith to see and understand all he has revealed – especially in the most perfect revelation of Jesus Christ his Son. We hear that which was written in the Letter to the Hebrews: *When Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be ... he entered once for all into the sanctuary ... thus obtaining eternal redemption* for us all. And we come here to worship because we do believe in the Good News that Jesus brought and that the Church proclaims.

We have made the choice about which C.S. Lewis speaks, and our hope is in the Lord, the Son of God, who is our salvation.

* * *

SUNDAY, JANUARY 22, 2023

(Lec. 67)

1) Isaiah 8:23—9:3

2) 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17

3) Matthew 4:12-23 or 4:12-17

Gospel related: CCC 878, 1720, 1989

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

New beginnings appear in our lives in many ways and at different times. Not too long ago we began yet another new year. It offered us a time to look back and reflect, as well as a time to look forward and dream of possibilities. Of course, turning the calendar is not the only new beginning we come across in life. Graduations, new jobs, weddings, births, and so many other life events offer us times of not only looking forward but also being mindful of the past.

Today's Gospel passage tells the story surrounding a new beginning in salvation history. It describes the start of Jesus' ministry in Galilee. The first thing Jesus sets out to do is to preach that the kingdom of God is at hand. Although we do not hear the full story of the Gospel in today's passage, we have the privilege of knowing what comes after this. Indeed, what follows is Jesus demonstrating through words and action just what he means when he proclaims that the kingdom of God is at hand. The blind see, sinners are forgiven, the marginalized have a place at the table, and all of us are brought to salvation through Jesus' sacrificial death.

We also have the privilege of knowing what has been before this point. Indeed, there is a very clear call back to the first reading. Isaiah acknowledges the yearning, the need, and the pain of our experience before the Messiah, and yet he also announces that this darkness will not be the final word. Salvation is coming. When we read about the beginning of Jesus' ministry, this new beginning directly connects to the past. It makes the present that much more glorious because it shows that God has kept his promise and the world is not overcome by darkness.

As baptized members of the Church, we can see both sides of this point in salvation history. We live the truth of fulfillment, but we do not forget the past. It shows the magnitude, the power of our salvation which we now enjoy. As we recognize this great gift, we are called to live Jesus' message of repentance. We can benefit from being mindful of how we can turn away from that which separates us from God. We can grow in our understanding of how we are called to live the truth of the kingdom of God.

God is calling us back to him. Our new beginnings are at hand, and we can grow in a deeper commitment to our faith. Indeed, every time we receive the body of Christ, it is a new beginning. May God continue to guide us on this journey.

* * *

Monday, January 23, 2023

(Lec. 317)

1) Hebrews 9:15, 24-28

2) Mark 3:22-30

MONDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(USA: Day of Prayer
for the Legal Protection
of Unborn Children;
USA: Opt. Mem.

Saint Vincent, Deacon and Martyr;
USA: Saint Marianne Cope, Virgin)

Or for the Day of Prayer, any readings from the Mass, "For Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life" (Lectionary for Mass Supplement, 947A-947E), or the Mass "For Justice and Peace" (887-891)

Gospel related: CCC 539, 548, 574, 1864

FOCUS: Let us pray today for unborn children and their future.

The devil knows well how to disguise evil in ways that look good to humans. We are often fooled by this. It is appropriate that today's Gospel touches on the activities of Satan and "a kingdom divided against itself" at the same time as we offer our prayers for the legal protection of unborn children.

The existence of abortion is not new, and the issues involved are many. There is a real need to address the health and welfare of young girls and women. There is a real need to address the responsibility of fathers. There is a real need to help families afford to care for their children with adequate food, shelter, and mental and physical health. There are other real needs, but the answer has to be better than discarding a human life that God has created, at any age – but particularly before they are born.

The devil wants us to take discarding others as the only solution. But it is not. It cannot possibly be. We do not yet know all of what comprises a "right solution," but I pray – and ask you to pray too – for the right solution to be found. In the meantime, let us open our hearts to understand the anguish many girls and women feel as they struggle with difficult pregnancies, with difficult situations that their unborn child will face, and with choices that no one should have to make.

Let us implore our Blessed Mother to help us find ways to truly value all human life, at every stage and age, every circumstance, every difficulty, everywhere.

* * *

Tuesday, January 24, 2023
(Lec. 318)

- 1) Hebrews 10:1-10
- 2) Mark 3:31-35

TUESDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Francis de Sales,
Bishop and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: CCC 500

FOCUS: Doing the will of the Father is to live faithfully as a member of the body of Christ.

In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus posing a challenging statement: *For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.* What does Jesus really mean by doing the will of the Father?

It is of no surprise that the world around us contradicts, and tries to reject, the Gospel message. Rather, Jesus is a sign of contradiction to the world. He is a sign of love that is deeper than our finite human minds can comprehend.

To ask what it means to "do the will of the Father" is to first examine our baptism, where we are first called to live as members of the body of Christ. We become the Father's adopted children, and that is a great gift in itself. However, it does not end there. We are called to do the will of the Father. In doing the will of the Father we are living faithfully as a member of that body, his family; we are drinking from the fount of life that comes through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Our lives must reflect his love and mercy to the world around us.

The will of the Father can be difficult to follow in our lives. Jesus does not promise an easy life without suffering; however, what he does promise is a life filled with grace and true life in him if we follow him with our whole hearts. Following Jesus, loving God above all else, loving our neighbors, bringing the light of Christ into a world so desperately in need – that is doing the will of the Father.

As members of the body of Christ, may we all seek to live faithfully as children of the Father so as to help lead others to the font of mercy.

* * *

Wednesday, January 25, 2023
(Lec. 519)

1) Acts 22:3-16
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

**THE CONVERSION
OF
SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Proclaim the Gospel.

In today's first reading, we hear the story of the conversion of Saint Paul, which we celebrate today. We hear this great saint tell of his encounter with Christ in his own words.

His conversation with the risen Lord culminates in a question: *What shall I do, sir?* And here we should pay attention. Even in this moment of profound encounter, Jesus does not simply explain everything to Saul. Christ instead sends him to the Christian community in Damascus.

Blinded by the light of this encounter, Paul was led by his companions to meet Ananias, *a devout observer of the law*. Ananias heals Paul, teaches him, and challenges him to take the next steps in his relationship with Christ.

This story reminds us that *every* person is called to encounter Christ and share that Good News with others. This passionate enemy of the Church is transformed as he meets the risen Lord, and we, too, can be changed and empowered as we meet Jesus here today.

As we pray for this transformation, let us remember how God empowers and sends Saint Paul. How might God be inviting *us* to be guided by faithful companions? How might Christ be sending *us* to our Christian community? What wise Christian leader might the Holy Spirit be encouraging *us* to seek out for mentorship or council?

Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature, Jesus tells the Eleven in our Gospel. Notice, however, the power Jesus promises to his followers as he sends them. They need not fear any demon, any barrier to communication, any deadly thing, or any illness.

The same Christ sends *us* forth from this Mass today, and so we need not fear any evil, any lack of the right words, or any human weakness. We proclaim the Gospel to all to whom we are sent.

* * *

Thursday, January 26, 2023

(Lec. 320)

- 1) 2 Timothy 1:1-8
or Titus 1:1-5 (Lec. 520)
- 2) Mark 4:21-25

THURSDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saints Timothy and Titus,
Bishops)

FOCUS: The purpose of a lamp is to illuminate, and Jesus lights the way to salvation.

Today's Gospel story about a lamp not being placed under a bushel basket appears in one form or another in all three synoptic Gospels. Mark places it right after the parable of the sower and the seed, which Jesus had interpreted for his disciples. The interpretation sheds light – like that of a lamp – for the disciples, who didn't always understand the nuances in Jesus' teachings. So it's a logical transition to go from a parable in which Jesus enlightens his disciples to a parable about light – or in this case, a lamp.

Mark is appealing to the senses of sight and hearing within today's Gospel. As the lamp not to be hidden under a bushel basket, Jesus is bringing humanity the light of revelation. One doesn't light a lamp and then hide it, as the opening rhetorical question suggests. That defeats its own purpose. But after making his point, Jesus then transitions again, repeating a statement he made in the parable of the sower that *anyone who has ears to hear ought to hear*. In other words, we need to listen carefully to what he has to say, and if we do, he will grant us more insight: *To the one who has, more will be given*.

On the surface, the idea that more is given to the one who already has runs counter-cultural to the Christian message, where we are supposed to divest of worldly things, and the rich are supposed to help the poor. But Jesus' point emphasizes that of the previous parable: just as seed scattered on the path has no way of growing and is wasted, so, too, his word. But the richer the soil – those who are eager to know more about his teachings – the more insight he will grant. The less hidden the lamp, the brighter its light and the more one can see. The more one can see, the more one can seek out the Good News to hear. This Gospel is designed to stimulate us to seek greater understanding. If we do, it will be granted.

* * *

Friday, January 27, 2023
(Lec. 321)
1) Hebrews 10:32-39
2) Mark 4:26-34

FRIDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(Opt. Mem.
Saint Angela Merici,
Virgin)

Gospel related: CCC 546

FOCUS: With hearts full of anticipation, be ready for the time when God will come to reap the harvest.

The early disciples who first read or listened to today's Gospel were much like children anticipating the joy of Christmas. The people of the early Church, particularly those who were Saint Mark's audience, expected Jesus to return in due haste. His second coming was thought to be just around the corner.

The parables in today's Gospel reflect that sense of urgency. The first parable is one that appears only in Mark's Gospel. It likens the kingdom of God to a man who scatters seed, lets it grow on its own, and then harvests the produce when the time is right.

This early community for whom Mark was writing believed Jesus' return was imminent. He would be returning to collect the harvest, that is, each one of them. Every day for them was like the day before Christmas, waiting for their salvation to arrive. To them, the fullness of the kingdom of God would soon be theirs.

We know that Jesus has not yet returned to collect his harvest. We don't know when that time will come. Nonetheless, as the seed that has been scattered, we can prepare ourselves to be ripe in faith for that time when the harvest will be reaped. As we come forward to the Eucharistic table and offer the elements of bread and wine to become the body and blood of Christ, we are preparing for and asking to be included in the harvest when the time comes for his return.

We, too, can be like children anticipating the joy of Christmas – the joy of Christ's coming again. As our psalm says, *Take delight in the Lord, and he will grant you your heart's requests.*

* * *

Saturday, January 28, 2023

(Lec. 322)

1) Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19

2) Mark 4:35-41

SATURDAY OF
THIRD WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint Thomas Aquinas,
Priest and Doctor
of the Church)

FOCUS: *Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.*

No one here truly thinks life will be free from struggles and trials. As much as we might wish it to be so, it is just not possible. That we experience sufferings and concerns is testimony to our humanity, but how we deal with them, through the vision of our faith, speaks volumes about that faith.

Faith is what Jesus addresses in today's Gospel. It is interesting to note that in this story, Jesus did not rebuke the disciples for waking him from his sleep. Instead, he challenged them for their lack of faith. In their fear of the growing storm, they had lost trust in his presence and allowed their desire for survival to undermine what they knew to be true.

Clearly, at this point, the disciples have yet to realize who Jesus truly is. Until now, he has shown himself to be mighty in word and deed by healing the sick, expelling unclean spirits, and preaching repentance and the coming of the kingdom of God. But as yet, his words and actions have not hit home for them.

But here in the midst of the storm, they face and fail their first real test of faith. Unlike Abraham and Sarah, whose defiant and trusting faith is referenced in our first reading, the disciples allow their worries to overtake their trust in Jesus. The final question they ask – *who then is this?* – reveals how much they have yet to learn and understand.

For us, too, this is a salutary lesson. Each of us must ultimately ask who Jesus is and what difference he makes in our lives of faith. By working on our relationship with Christ and seeking that resilient faith and trusting hope, we can find the strength and grace to face the inevitable struggles of life and be secure even in the midst of its storms.

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SUNDAY, JANUARY 29, 2023

(Lec. 70)

1) Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13

2) 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

3) Matthew 5:1-12a

Gospel related: CCC 520, 544, 581, 764, 1716, 1720, 2305, 2330, 2518, 2546, 2763 CSDC 492

**FOURTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

FOCUS: *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.*

Once we see something from a different point of view, we cannot un-see it. It changes our perspective, and we never see the same way again. Consider the astronauts who looked back at the earth from the moon; it amazed them how beautiful, yet how delicate, our planet truly is. Pictures of the “blue marble” hanging in outer space make us feel more united and moved to take better care of the earth and each other. Consider how people from a small town find it so much smaller after seeing a big city. Or how insignificant we feel when we look out at the vastness of the ocean or look down from the top of a mountain.

Several times, Jesus brought his disciples to mountaintops to see things differently. He took Peter, James, and John to the mountaintop and allowed them to see his transfiguration, after which he headed resolutely to Jerusalem, fully aware of the danger awaiting him.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus leads his disciples to the mountaintop and teaches the beatitudes, an entirely different point of view on suffering and discipleship than the worldly perspective. Blessed are those who are poor, meek, and mournful. Blessed are those who are merciful, clean-hearted, and make peace. Blessed are those who are insulted and persecuted. Suffering will not be the end for them, because they will be comforted, they will see God, they will be rewarded in the kingdom of heaven.

After hearing Jesus’ words, the disciples are reassured that following Jesus is worth the cost – that good will have the last word. We, too, can adopt this beatitude point of view and see our suffering and hardship in a different way. Saint Paul tells us that *God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and the weak of the world to shame the strong*. We do not have to be the wisest person, or the strongest person; we do not have to be “something” in the eyes of the world for we are everything in the eyes of the Lord.

The love and grace we receive in the Eucharist is a foretaste of the fullness of joy in Christ we will one day know. Suffering is real and discipleship is not without risk, but through his word and sacrament, we are within sight of the kingdom. We know the beatitudes, and we see the blessings.

* * *

Monday, January 30, 2023
(Lec. 323)
1) Hebrews 11:32-40
2) Mark 5:1-20

MONDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME

FOCUS: Faith gives us the assurance we are never alone in our struggles.

At first glance, today's readings come across as rather brutal. The first reading from Hebrews lists atrocities suffered by the chosen. Mark's Gospel tells the story of a man possessed by unclean spirits who endured abandonment, homelessness, chains, and stoning. It is easy to get caught up in the ill-treatment described and miss the powerful message of redemption in these passages. The big story here is the role of faith. It is faith that can put out fires, conquer kingdoms, and close the mouths of lions. It is faith that can turn weakness to strength and fear to bravery.

As we listen to these readings today, we know we are not possessed by demons or being thrown into a lion's den, but we do, in fact, face 21st-century challenges such as disease, violence, and division.

Faith in our heavenly Father saved the chosen people who had suffered brutalities. The perfection of faith we now know as Jesus cures the afflicted, casts out demons, and replaces despair with hope. That speaks to us today. Our faith is a wonderful gift that we must nourish and embrace. It has the power to move the mountains in our lives. It makes our burdens lighter and leads us to eternal life. It is truly priceless.

* * *

Tuesday, January 31, 2023
(Lec. 324)

- 1) Hebrews 12:1-4
- 2) Mark 5:21-43

TUESDAY OF
FOURTH WEEK
IN ORDINARY TIME
(OBL MEM
Saint John Bosco,
Priest)

Gospel related: CCC 548, 994, 1504, 2616

FOCUS: If we persevere in faith, we will rise with Christ.

The Letter to the Hebrews encourages Christians to persevere in their faith by keeping in mind the suffering that Christ endured for them. The same joy that lay before Christ as he suffered on the cross lies before us. At the finish line of our race is heaven.

In today's Gospel, Jesus relieves the suffering of two women. Both are near death, and one of them even dies while awaiting Jesus' healing. The woman with the flow of blood has been suffering from her condition for 12 years. Her bleeding would have made her ritually impure and therefore unable to participate in worship. She would also have been unable to bear children. She has spent all her money on doctors, who have been unable to cure her. Instead, her illness has worsened. She is out of options, out of resources, and cut off from her community. By healing her affliction, Jesus saves her life, as well as restoring her ability to bear life and reuniting her with her community.

Jairus' daughter is 12 years old, nearing the age of betrothal, when she could marry and have her own children. When Jairus approaches Jesus, his daughter is already at the point of death, yet he asks Jesus to save her. When Jesus restores her life, he also gives her a future in which she can bring new life into the world.

Whatever we have suffered, no matter how long, we can hope in Jesus. Whether or not we are healed like the women in today's Gospel reading, we can hope in the Resurrection. Just as Jairus' daughter arose at the touch of Jesus, may we allow him to take us by the hand and follow where he leads us. If we persevere in faith, we will rise with Christ.

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