



Understanding the Daily Gospels

by Father Conley Bertrand

Nihil obstat: Reverend Jason Vidrine, M.A., Theology

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Monday of the 1st Week of Advent Mt 8:5-11

The Centurion was a Roman military officer who was in command of one hundred men. He was a good man who loved the Jewish nation and had built the synagogue in Capernaum (Lk 7:51). This Centurion was a Gentile. Jesus usually limited his ministry to the Jews. But Jesus listened when he appealed to him. “Lord”, he said, “my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully”. Jesus was impressed with this man’s faith and the sincerity with which he approached him. And Jesus felt so much compassion for suffering people. So he immediately said to the Centurion, “I will come and cure him”. But the officer did not feel worthy to have Jesus enter his house. For Jews did not associate with Gentiles. To enter a Gentile’s house would cause ritual uncleanness. He believed that if Jesus would only say the word his servant would be healed. He went on to explain his belief in obedience. When he ordered his soldiers to go on a mission they obeyed him, or to fulfill a command, they followed his orders. That is why he believed that Jesus could simply speak a word of command and his servant would be healed.

These words, so expressive of humility and faith, will be part of the new missal translation. We will repeat these words before receiving Holy Communion: “Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my [soul] will be healed”.

Jesus was amazed at the faith of the Centurion. He was so impressed, he made the comment, “...in no one in Israel have I found such faith”. The gift of faith was not limited to the Jews. It overflowed to the Gentiles as well, and in this case, even more abundantly. Jesus went on to state that the Gentiles would come from the East and the West to enter the Kingdom of God and recline with the patriarchs to partake of the heavenly banquet. They will come to have faith in Jesus as Messiah before the Jews.

Tuesday of the 1st Week of Advent Lk 10:21-24

The seventy-two disciples returned from their mission with great excitement. Their proclamation of the gospel, the good news that the kingdom was at hand, was paralyzing the demons. They experienced the power of the word and their ability to subject the demons to themselves. They reported to Jesus the success of their mission.

It was at this moment we see in this gospel Jesus rejoicing in the Holy Spirit. He immediately referred the glory of the moment to the Father. He was full of praise for him as he began to speak spontaneously to him in an audible voice—similar to the way we do at our Come, Lord Jesus! meetings. Our prayer style in our meetings is modeled on the way Jesus prayed. Chapter seventeen of John’s gospel is an extended example of how Jesus prayed and how we children of God ought to pray when we are together. In the disciples’ returning from their mission and reporting to Jesus we are reminded of our reporting on how we witnessed our faith and practiced evangelization.

Jesus’ joy in the Father is that these simple disciples are now being revealed the mysteries of the kingdom. What they are actually experiencing is the life-giving effects of the spiritual reality of the kingdom as they share it with others. Again this is the kind of experience we enjoy at our Come, Lord Jesus! gatherings.

The proud leaders of the people, the chief priests, the scribes and Pharisees are too self-centered and closed to Jesus’ message to experience that exciting and life-giving spiritual reality of the kingdom of God.

Jesus possesses the divine plentitude of the Father. He and the Father share it equally. Only the divine Father knows fully the Son—because he is divine. Only he grasps entirely the infinite depths of the Father. And it is his joy to reveal him to his lowly, unsophisticated disciples. In

great joy Jesus turns to his disciples and tells them how blessed they are to see what they are seeing as the long-awaited kingdom for centuries is now being revealed through them. What they are now privileged to experience was desired by prophets and kings—to no avail.

Wednesday of the 1st Week of Advent Mt 15: 29-37

Jesus went by the Sea of Galilee, climbed a nearby mountain and sat down there. Great crowds came to him. They brought with them the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute and many others to be healed. They placed them at his feet and he cured them. His healing power demonstrates the presence of the Kingdom of God overcoming evil in various forms as it spreads out through Christ and his actions and words. The people are amazed to see the deformed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind able to see. They gave praise to God at the sight.

The people remained there with Jesus for three days. They just found so much comfort being near Jesus and hearing his consoling and enlightening words. It was difficult for them to leave his presence. By this time they had run out of food and Jesus noticed it. To send them away in this condition might cause them to collapse. The disciples wondered where they could find enough bread in that deserted place to feed such a crowd. They had only seven loaves and a few fish in their possession.

Jesus then ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. Jesus prayed grace before feeding the people, that is, he thanked God for the food. He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples for distribution to the crowd. They apparently also gave them the fish as part of their meal. They all ate until they were satisfied. Then they picked up the leftovers—seven baskets full. This shows the superabundance of spiritual nourishment that Jesus provides for us in the Kingdom of God. He anticipates through this miracle the spiritual food he will provide for us in the Bread of Life, the

Holy Eucharist. Here too there is always plenty left over to feed those who are spiritually hungry.

We have Jesus' glorious Presence in the Tabernacle always there for us to visit. Each day we have the privilege of visiting him as well as receiving him as the Bread of Life. He becomes divine nourishment for our hungry souls. How fortunate we are, even more than those who saw him before he was glorified.

Thursday of the 1st Week of Advent Mt 7: 21, 24-27

Flattering words are ineffective. They are empty and do not win God's favor. They are insincere and uttered out of selfish motives. They are disconnected from real life with God. He does not know strangers. He gets to know us when we sincerely try to do his will. By doing his will we become intimately united to him. We become his friends and come to live in communion with him. We become his dear children whom he readily hears. He knows us on a personal basis. Then we enter into his kingdom of grace and love. We are in a divine atmosphere. We live in God's presence.

Listening to God's word and assimilating it strengthens us to do God's will. For that word reveals "the very righteousness of God" (Rom 1:17).

That grace prompts spirit assertiveness and builds a strong character. That word is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom 1: 16). Habitually carrying out God's word will produce a spirit-dominant person. Such a person practices self-mastery, and controls the sinful tendencies of the flesh. Such a one remains faithful to God.

Jesus describes this kind of person as one who builds his house on rock. The trials of life are like storms lashing out against it, but it remains unshaken and solidly set and undisturbed. It is possible, however, to listen to God's word in a

superficial way. The hearer does not take it in and assimilate its contents. He has his mind made up on what he wants to do. He wills to do something that is contrary to God's will. He does not benefit from the righteousness and the power that is contained in that word (Rom 1: 16-17). He allows the flesh to rule his life. He lives for its pleasures. His character is thus weakened and unable to withstand trial. He collapses under the pressure of the difficult challenges that he has to face in life.

Friday of the 1st Week of Advent Mt 9: 27-31

Somehow two blind men found out that Jesus was passing by. Perhaps it was the crowd that made them aware that Jesus was passing by. But they began to follow him. How could they follow him when they were blind? Perhaps they had very limited vision and followed him in a groping way.

Faith has the power to see in the dark. Their faith made them sense the divine presence in Jesus. It is their faith that urged them forward toward him. Maybe they stumbled toward him. These two pathetic men latched on to Jesus and would not let him out of their faith radar screen. Their faith detected the supreme importance of its object. Even if Jesus was moving away from them as he was entering into the house (probably Peter's home) they would not let him out of their faith sight. Their hope was reaching out to him. They had the firm expectation of receiving their sight from him. We must be like these men in our determination to follow Jesus. There's so much that we do not see. We need to beg for spiritual insight.

They expressed their faith in Jesus as Messiah. As they were trying to keep up with him, they cried out, "Son of David, have pity on us!" The Messiah was the promised son of David. They expressed their belief in Jesus in that way. They came to the house where Jesus was and entered it. Since faith is the only means we have of contacting the

divinity in Jesus, he asked them whether they believed that he could restore their sight. "Yes!" was their answer. Then Jesus touched their eyes in response with his healing touch, and said, "Let it be done for you according to your faith". And to show us the healing power of faith when we contact him in the Eucharist, their eyes were immediately opened. Jesus then warned them sternly not to tell anyone. He did not want to cause feverish excitement about his being the Messiah so he could continue his spiritual work. But they could not help themselves and went around telling everybody about him and how he had restored their sight.

Saturday of the 1st Week of Advent Mt 9: 35-10:1, 6-8

Jesus took his proclamation of the nearness of the kingdom very seriously. He went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues. As a young man of about thirty years (Lk 3:23), with the stamina and strength of a carpenter, he had the physical build to accompany his zeal. He went about proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. All spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth (Lk 4:22). They were astonished at his teaching because he spoke with authority (Lk 4:32). Moreover, power came out of him so that he cured every disease and illness. No wonder large crowds gathered together to hear him. It was a privilege for the holy women to follow and minister to him in his apostolic mission (Mk 15:41). Everyone wanted to be near and hear him. He was so full of the life-giving Spirit.

His heart was so full of love for the people. He was moved with pity for them. He sensed how troubled they were and abandoned by those who were supposed to be their shepherds. He felt that they were like sheep without a shepherd. He realized that he could not reach and minister to these people on his own. He needed to multiply himself many times. So he told his disciples that they needed to pray for God to inspire and send others to enlighten and minister to the people.

He compared the work of the disciples to that of a farmer whose task it was to take in a huge crop of wheat. Many more laborers were needed to complete the task. But the spiritual ministry of the Apostolate is so specialized; prayer was needed so God would move graced persons to such a high calling.

Therefore Jesus appointed twelve special disciples to assist him. He gave them the authority to expel unclean spirits and to cure sickness and disease of every kind. Such miraculous cures would be obvious signs that the Kingdom of God was arriving. Jesus instructed these disciples to seek out the chosen people who had fallen away. Only later would he send them to the Gentiles. They were to announce the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Its power for good could be seen as they cured the sick, raised the dead, cleansed lepers and drove out demons. They were to minister to the people free of charge, just as they had received these saving powers without cost.

Monday of the 2nd Week of Advent Lk 5:17-26

We see the importance of teaching in Jesus' life. He very frequently engages in this important task. Conversion begins with enlightenment. On this occasion many teachers of the law had gathered together to observe Jesus. The divine power in him moved him to heal. Some men were bringing a paralyzed man on a stretcher, hoping that Jesus would heal him. But the crowd prevented them from reaching Jesus. Yet these good men were determined to bring their friend into Jesus' presence. They believed that Jesus could help him. So they tried climbing the outside steps leading to the roof. In their desperation to help their friend reach Jesus, they proceeded to open the roof in the area where Jesus was. Then they lowered the stretcher right in front of Jesus. He was impressed how strong their faith was. Jesus then proceeded to forgive the man's sins. Sin is the root cause of all our ills. But the scribes and Pharisees were extremely disturbed that Jesus

would dare to presume to forgive the paralyzed man's sins. They considered such an attempt to forgive sins sheer blasphemy. They believed that he was insulting God by attempting to forgive sins which only God can do. It is easy for us to understand because of our knowledge that God truly became human in Jesus. But they did not know this. So Jesus, knowing their thoughts, tried to show these men that he had that kind of power. It is easy to say, "your sins are forgiven". But are they really forgiven? It may be just as easy to say, "Rise and walk". But does he really have the power to heal the man and really make him walk? To demonstrate to his critics that he really has the power to forgive sins, Jesus commanded the paralyzed man to pick up his stretcher and go home. To everyone's surprise, the man stood up immediately in front of them, picked up his mat, and went home, praising and giving thanks to God as he went. How amazed everyone was! They also began to praise and thank God. They were so struck with awe at that preposterous miracle which took place before their very eyes. Thus, Jesus showed he had the power to forgive sins. St. Matthew's Gospel tells us that the people glorified God for giving such authority to human beings (Mt 9:8). This is the belief of the early church stemming from Jesus' words on Easter Sunday night: "Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them" (Jn 20:23).

Tuesday of the 2nd Week of Advent Mt 18: 12-14

Ninety nine sheep are valuable—the Shepherd's whole livelihood. And yet he would leave all of these to go out and seek the lost one. These ninety nine are safe. The shepherd can keep an eye on them from a distance. He is not worried about them. But that one valuable, cherished one is a serious concern. What happened to it? It is in great danger of being attacked and devoured by predators. It cannot be left all alone. It is defenseless. It is in grave danger of perishing. It must be sought out and found; it must be brought back into safety and reunited to the flock.

Jesus is concerned about each one who goes astray. Darkness will envelop it. It is in grave danger of perishing. Once it falls into serious sin and tenacious addictions, it becomes very difficult to bring it back to safety. Its vulnerable passions, so strongly attached to its forbidden pleasures, will bring it back again and again into the clutches of the evil one—away from the saving presence of its gracious Lord.

As valuable and precious are the ninety nine other sheep, the good shepherd is so distraught with losing the one, that he painstakingly goes out seeking the lost one. He suffered crucifixion to save that one. He gave up his life and died for it. He cannot possibly give it up now. He has got to spend himself utterly for its sake. His great love for it will not allow him rest until he finds and retrieves it.

That is how we ought to feel about the members of our flock who get lost. We must show our concern and let them know that we care. We have to go out of our way to look for and find them.

When the shepherd finally finds his lost sheep he experiences great joy. His delight in finding this one is greater than all the others that stayed together. These remained safely with their group. But one was in danger of being lost forever. It's as if that lost one had died and came back to life again. That is how happy finding the lost one makes the shepherd feel. That is how concerned the heart of the heavenly Father is about each of the least of his disciples.

Wednesday of the 2nd Week of Advent

Mt 11:28-30

Jesus' compassionate heart calls out to us, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest". He felt very much concerned about the heavy burden that the law, as interpreted by the Pharisees, imposed on the people of his day. There was no end to the minute preoccupation it demanded to be carried

out. These external rubrics did little spiritually for the people. The time had come to put an end to this heavy burden and replace that old law and its unreasonable additions imposed by the scribes and Pharisees.

We ourselves can become too caught up in the external letter of the law and our failure to keep it in all of its details. It is impossible to be perfectly flawless in keeping it. It is written, "For the just man falls seven times and rises again..." (Prov 24: 16). And St. Paul frankly admits, "For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want....Miserable one that I am! Who will deliver me from this mortal body? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 7: 19, 24).

Having assumed a human nature and lived among us, Jesus understands our needs and weaknesses. He is our merciful Savior. He suffered and died and rose again for our salvation. He came especially to rescue us from our wretched condition.

He is full of mercy and compassion. He invites us to come to him habitually, as often as we fail, so he can help us. His grace makes up for our deficiencies.

So he says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves". In place of the yoke of the law, complicated by scribal interpretation, Jesus invites us to take the yoke of obedience to his word (NAB footnote). Obeying the word of God fulfills our deepest spiritual needs. It makes us live on the level of spirit where God lives. That is where the highest joy can be experienced. Keeping God's word requires self-discipline which opens us to the spirit world and makes us like God.

Jesus assures us that his yoke is easy, and his burden light. God's word fits us, it does not chafe us. It brings us to our full spiritual development as images of God. We then come to be our true selves, what we were meant to be in God's design.

Thursday of the 2nd Week of Advent Mt 11:11-15

Jesus praises John the Baptist as the greatest prophet of the Old Testament because he is the one chosen by God to introduce the Messiah. Among the succession of prophets who spoke God's word that looked to the coming of the Messiah, the high point was reached when John was privileged to point him out. He is the one who actually introduced the awaiting world to the Messiah. The Holy Spirit prompted John to announce Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He described him as the Isaian Servant of the Lord who will redeem the world by his sufferings (Isaiah 53). What the other prophets look toward it was John the Baptist who inaugurated him into his mission by baptizing him in the Jordan River. It was then that the Holy Spirit came upon him to usher him into public ministry, and the Father pride-fully proclaimed him as his Beloved Son in whom he was well pleased (Mt 3:13-17).

Although John had the unique honor of presenting Jesus as the Messiah, his own mission terminated in the Old Testament. His call was to connect the Old Testament world to the new one. He died a martyr's death before the New Covenant was fully inaugurated.

Because of the superiority of the New Covenant era and its excelling grace, Jesus says that the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than John. That is how far superior the outpouring of the Spirit as the result of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection has made members of the New Covenant. The superabundance of the grace won for us by the Messiah makes us children of God with a dignity and grace far greater than those who belonged to the Old Covenant.

The enemies of the Kingdom have violently opposed it as seen in John the Baptist's life. He was imprisoned and then beheaded. Similarly Jesus suffered violent persecution for preaching the holiness of the Kingdom. People oppose

the call to holiness. They prefer to follow their base passions. What the law and the prophets prophesied was seen fulfilled by John. He fulfilled the role of the prophet Elijah that Malachi announced (Mal 3:23).

Friday of the 2nd Week of Advent Mt 11:16-19

"The people of this generation" refers to the scribes and Pharisees and their followers who rejected both John the Baptist and Jesus. It was impossible to satisfy them. Jesus compares them to children playing in the marketplace. One group complained to the other that they refused to cooperate with them. They played the flute as at a wedding feast, but they would not take part in the fun by dancing. They sang a mournful song as at a funeral, but again, they would not play with them by pretending to cry.

This parallels the situation when John the Baptist came preaching the imminent arrival of divine judgment. He called for repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. They refused to accept his baptism as a sign that they had sinned and were sorry. Instead, they criticized John who was dressed in clothing made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. He came from the desert doing penance, following a very meager diet. They considered him to be a mad man or possessed by a demon. John was too serious and penitential for them. They rejected his approach and refused to repent in cooperation with God's call.

On the other hand, Jesus came with a different style of ministry. He mingled with sinners, sharing their wine and meals. He proclaimed God's mercy and forgiveness. The wedding feast was already beginning with the arrival of Jesus. The heavenly bridegroom had come to take his bride. This was a time of joy and celebration. The water turned wine at Cana and the other miracles were definite signs of the Messiah's arrival. But again, the scribes and Pharisees refused to take

part. They only knew how to criticize. They claimed Jesus was a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

“Wisdom is vindicated by all her children” means that God’s children recognize the wisdom expressed by John and Jesus. They realized that the kingdom of God was arriving through their preaching, and they gladly accepted the invitation to enter the kingdom of God.

Saturday of the 2nd Week of Advent Mt 17: 9a, 10-13

The scribes said that Elijah must come before the Messiah arrives because the prophet Malachi had predicted, “Lo, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, Before the day of the Lord comes, the great and terrible day, To turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come to strike the land with doom” (Mal 3:23-24).

Elijah was taken heavenward in a fiery chariot. The Jews expected him to return before the Day of Judgment. It is difficult to interpret exactly a prophecy such as this. Jesus explains that Elijah did come before him to prepare his way in the person of John the Baptist. He came in the Spirit of the fiery prophet by his ardent preaching. Many were converted and prepared for Jesus the Messiah as he appeared on the Jordan. This is what the angel of the Lord had told Zechariah regarding John: “He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah...to prepare a people fit for the Lord” (Lk 1:17).

The leaders of the Jewish people were too caught up in themselves and upholding their traditions to be free to enter into responding properly to John’s preaching. They were indisposed for conversion. They were not children of grace. They thought that keeping the external letter of the law made them perfect. Yet their hearts were full of avarice and lust. Their hearts, therefore, were actually far from God. They believed the holy, penitential John to have a demon (Mt 11:18). Whereas those

who sought God realized that he was truly a man of God. Many were converted through his preaching. Because John dared to tell Herod it was not right for him to take his brother Philip’s wife, Herod had John arrested, imprisoned and eventually beheaded.

Jesus announced that he also was going to suffer at their hands. He knew quite well what was going to happen to him. The spiritually ill-disposed religious leaders misjudged Jesus as they had John. Of Jesus they said, “Behold a glutton and a drunkard” (Mt 11: 19). They totally misunderstood him and ended up crucifying him.

Monday of the 3rd Week of Advent Mt 21:23-27

Jesus, as messianic king, entered the city of Jerusalem seated on a young donkey in fulfillment of prophecy (Zech 9:9). A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road and cut branches from the trees and strewed them on the road to welcome him as the Messiah. They sang “Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest”.

Upon entering the temple area Jesus proceeded to drive out all those engaged in selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. In doing this, he quoted Holy Scripture saying, ‘ “My house shall be a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of thieves”.

It is for that reason the chief priests and the elders of the people approached him; for he also presumed the authority to teach in the temple. They said “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?” These leaders of the people want Jesus to prove that he has authority to act in this way or to admit openly that he is the Messiah. But Jesus knows that they are ill-intentioned. He is too wise to allow himself

to be trapped by them. So he in turn puts them on the spot. He tells them he will answer their question if they answer his. He tests their sincerity and whether they prove themselves worthy to be answered.

So Jesus asks them whether John the Baptist's authority to baptize was divinely inspired or simply from human impulse. They figured out that if they admitted that John had been sent by God, Jesus would ask them, "Then why did you not believe him" and be baptized like the rest of the people. If, however, they answered that John acted simply under his own, they feared the crowd who considered John to be a divinely inspired prophet. So these leaders answered, "We do not know". Thus they prove themselves to be incapable of speaking with authority. They show that they are unworthy of being given an answer to their question. So Jesus rightfully refuses to tell them by what authority he acted.

Tuesday of the 3rd Week of Advent Mt 21:28-32

Jesus continues to strive to enlighten the Jewish leaders regarding their behavior. He does this by presenting the parable to them about the two sons. The man asks the first son to go out and work in their vineyard. He responded by saying he would not. But afterward he changed his mind and went. This son represents the sinners who repented at the preaching of John. They had disobeyed God by breaking his commandments and leading sinful lives. But when they became aware of their sinful behavior through the preaching of John, they repented of their sins and began to live enlightened lives in accord with God's will.

The man came to the second son and asked him also to go and work in the vineyard. He said that he would, but actually did not go. This son represents the Chief priests and elders of the people with whom Jesus was speaking. They claimed to be following the way of God, and yet

they refused to go along with John's message. They continued their prideful obstinacy even when they saw these tax collectors and prostitutes turn to God in sincere repentance. John preached the way of righteousness, yet these leaders refused to budge from their sinful ways. They were too proud to admit that they were sinners. They were hardened in their unrepentant state. They were too embarrassed to admit that they were wrong.

The fact that tax collectors and prostitutes were entering the Kingdom of God before the Jewish leaders helps us to realize that past sins are not an obstacle to holiness of life. God's love and mercy absolves us from repented sins. They are no more. It is human to err. God understands our weakness. St. Paul considered himself to be the foremost of sinners (1 Tim 1: 15-16), and an example of how mercifully God treats us. "Where sin increased", he says, "grace overflowed all the more" (Rom 5:20). Even if we said, "no" to God at first by our sins, now we are given this marvelous opportunity to respond gratefully to God's wonderful mercy toward us. We also like St. Paul can be brought by God's grace to the heights of holiness.

Wednesday of the 3rd Week of Advent Lk 7: 18b-23

John the Baptist had been imprisoned by Herod because he dared to tell him that it was not right or lawful for him to take and live with his brother's wife. John's disciples told John about Jesus' miraculous raising of the widow's son from the dead—among his many other acts of loving mercy.

This information imparted to the imprisoned John must have made him wonder. The fiery prophet had warned the people of God's coming wrath. "Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees." John presented the Messiah as a severe judge. He will gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he

will burn with unquenchable fire (Mt 3:10-12). In the darkness of the dungeon where John was so unjustly imprisoned, he may have been having second thoughts about Jesus as the Messiah. He is not the kind of Messiah that John expected. It is true that he had seen the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus in the form of a dove when he baptized him. He had even proclaimed Jesus in these words: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world". God had told John, "...he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit" (Jn 1:29, 33). And yet he, John, was perishing in these dark and damp prison walls while evil men are allowed to go free and carry out their sinful deeds. If Jesus is really the Messiah, would he not bring judgment and justice to these Godless people?

So John's disciples presented Jesus with his question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" While they were there, these disciples of John witnessed Jesus perform many cures: the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.

John would be able to tell from these acts that Jesus fulfills the Isaian prophecy about the appearance of the Messiah (Is 35:4-6). John must broaden his view about the Messiah. Before he is to come as judge, one of his present roles is to bring blessings upon the oppressed and neglected of society. Blessed is the one who takes no offense at Jesus because he appears different from one's expectations.

Thursday of the 3rd Week of Advent Lk 7: 24-30

Jesus was a great admirer of John the Baptist. People flocked to the desert to see this man of steel, of strong, moral principles. He was not afraid to speak out the truth. He was a penitential man. He wore clothing made of Camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. He understood that luxurious

living and pampering the senses militated against living a spiritual life. A life of hardship fostered the life of the spirit. For this required virtue and moral strength. Such a spiritual life opened him to communion with God and deep prayer. God could then reveal his will to him. He became a perfect instrument to proclaim the coming of the Messiah. He was an example to the people of how to turn away from their self-pleasing sinful lives and dispose themselves for the coming of the Messiah.

John was a prophet and much more. He not only came to announce a distant Messiah; he was God's chosen one who actually introduced the Messiah as he was appearing. Jesus explained that John is the one who fulfilled the prophecy announced by Malachi: "Lo I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me; and suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek and the messenger of the covenant whom you desire" (Mal 3:1). John is that messenger who prepared the way for Jesus the Messiah, who is Lord and mediator of a new covenant. "Among those born of women", Jesus testifies, "no one is greater than John". John was prepared for this unique mission of his from his mother's womb. It is believed that John was sanctified and original sin was removed from him when Mary went to visit Elizabeth who was pregnant with John. The newly conceived Jesus and the sound of Mary's greeting caused the infant John to leap for joy in his mother's womb. John was especially sanctified for his mission as Precursor of the Messiah even before he was born. Grace was given to him in proportion to the special need of his mission.

But John remained in the Old Testament age. He died a martyr's death before the paschal mystery inaugurated the New Testament and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It can be said that the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than John, because of the superior grace bestowed on each through Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection and the gift of the Spirit. Baptism effects in each a new creation that makes us children of God with an accompanying spiritual dignity. All who heard Jesus (those who received John's baptism)

acknowledged the righteousness of God. The scribes and Pharisees, however, refused baptism and rejected God's plan of salvation for them.

Friday of the 3rd Week of Advent **Jn 5: 33-36**

John testified to the truth when the leaders of the Jews sent a delegation to question him (Jn 1: 19-27). He explained to them that he was not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet foretold by Moses (Deut 18:18) who was to come (actually the Messiah). John further explained that his mission was to prepare the way for the Messiah. He had such an exalted impression of the One coming after him that he felt unworthy even to untie his sandal strap. Only a man of deep prayer and pure of heart would be able to discern such holiness in a person, and in the case of the Messiah, a divine Person.

Jesus does not rely on human testimony because it is so often fickle and fallible. He depends on his Father to affirm him interiorly and by his miracles. Jesus also relies on his Father to stir faith in those who reverence God and who are righteous to speak on his behalf. "Whoever believes in the Son of God has this testimony within himself" (1 Jn 5:10).

For a brief while John was like a burning and shining lamp. He spoke the truth to enlighten and prepare the way for repentant sinners to receive their Messiah. John testified to Jesus by saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me'" (Jn 1: 15). John's mission did not seem to last very long. He was arrested by Herod and then later beheaded.

There is still another testimony to consider—even greater than John's. The works that the Father gave Jesus to accomplish testify on his behalf, that the Father sent him.

The authority with which Jesus spoke is an example of this (Mk 1: 32). The power of Jesus' word held people spellbound. They listened to him for three days in the desert until they ran out of food. The fact that he could cast out devils with a word and with such ease is evidence that the Father sent him. Similarly, the fact that the Father empowered Jesus could be seen through his miraculous powers: he gave sight to the blind, made the crippled walk, cleansed lepers, enabled the deaf to hear and raised the dead to life. Clearly only one from God could accomplish so many works.

December 17th-Advent **Mt 1: 1-17**

St. Matthew traces Jesus' lineage back to Abraham through whom the divine blessings come to all the nations of the earth. Similarly Jesus' forefathers are Isaac and Jacob. He comes from the tribe of Judah, one of Jacob's sons. Eventually Jesse was born to that tribe, and one of his sons was David.

David is an important link in this family tree because God promised him through the prophet Nathan that the Messiah would come from him. The prophet told David, "I will raise up your heir after you...and I will make his kingdom firm...and I will make his royal throne firm forever...Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever." (2 Sam 7:12, 13b, 16).

The angel Gabriel referred to Nathan's prophecy in his annunciation to Mary: "the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk 1:32-33).

It is unusual that four women are included in this genealogy--and all four are non-Jewish: Tamar and Rahab were probably Canaanites, Ruth was a Moabite, and Bathsheba (wife of Uriah) was probably a Hittite. It is interesting to note that

these women are Gentiles. They are included in Jesus' genealogy. And three of them, excluding Ruth, are associated with immorality (see Gen 38: 12-26; Josh 2:1; 2 Sam 11: 2-5). We can see the wisdom of God at work in intervening in our sinful human race and the necessity of Mary's Immaculate Conception for a new sinless, grace-filled beginning. Mary could then be a worthy mother to conceive and form the Messiah and Son of God. Jesus came to redeem a sinful human race including his own family. Yet he was sinless and could lift us up and call us to a new level of life, making us children of God.

The Gentile blood in Jesus' family background anticipates the universal scope of Jesus' mission. The Gospel and the salvation it proclaims is meant for all nations and all people of every race.

December 18th-Advent Mt 1: 18-25

Mary's virginal conception of Jesus took place while Mary and Joseph were betrothed or engaged. This was equivalent to marriage among the Jews, except the couple did not live together. It was during this time of betrothal that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and caused her to conceive Jesus.

Joseph became aware of Mary's pregnancy. Perhaps Mary revealed to him how the angel Gabriel had appeared to her and asked her consent to become the mother of the Messiah (Lk 1: 26-32). She did give her consent and so conceived Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It appears that Joseph did not feel worthy to be the husband of his beloved Mary and felt the need to break their engagement. However, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him not to be afraid to take Mary to be his wife. In this way the public would see them as a married couple so that Mary's good name would be protected and she and her child would have Joseph to support and protect them. Joseph was commanded to

name the child Jesus, which means "Yahweh saves", because he will save his people from their sins. This indicates to us that Jesus will be a spiritual Messiah, not a worldly or political one.

Mary's virginal conception had been foretold some eight centuries before by the prophet Isaiah: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel" (Is 7:14). St. Matthew sees this prophecy fulfilled in Jesus' birth. As God Incarnate he fulfills the meaning of the word Emmanuel: God is with us. That is, in fact, how St. Matthew concludes his Gospel. As the glorified Jesus sends out his apostles to make disciples of all nations, he concludes, "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). As the Incarnation event took place in history and the angel commanded Joseph to name the child Jesus, we realize that the name Emmanuel actually describes the mystery of the Word made flesh rather than a personal name for him to be called.

The Hebrew word "almah" meaning young girl in Isaiah 7:14 was translated "parthenos", meaning virgin, in the Greek Septuagint. According to Fr. John L. McKenzie, "This gives the text of Isaiah a new dimension of reality, and Matthew uses it to affirm the virgin birth" (see the Jerome Biblical Commentary).

In obedience to the angel, Joseph took Mary as his wife into his home. "He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus." By the word "until" St. Matthew is stressing the fact that Joseph is not the natural father of Jesus. Jesus' Father is God; the agent of his conception is the Holy Spirit. The word "until" refers only to that fact. The Greek particle does not imply any marital relations beyond the point of Jesus' birth. Mary's perpetual virginity is firmly established in Sacred Tradition. A couple of examples using the word "until" shows the correctness of this interpretation; "And so Saul's daughter Michal was childless to [until] the day of her death" (2 Sam 6:23). St. Paul tells Timothy "until I arrive, attend to the reading, exhortation, and teaching"

(1 Tim 4:13). This correct interpretation of Mt 1:25 shows us how important Sacred Tradition handed down to us by the apostles is for the orthodox interpretation of holy Scripture.

December 19th-Advent **Lk 1:5-25**

The event that is going to be described took place when Herod the Great was the King of Judea until his death in 4 B.C. Zechariah was a priest of the priestly division of Abijah, which is a reference to the eighth of the twenty-four divisions of priests. He served for a week at a time, twice a year in the Jerusalem temple. Elizabeth, his wife, was from the daughters of Aaron and a Levite. Both she and her husband were righteous before God in that they obeyed the commandments and laws of the Old Testament. They were getting old and Elizabeth was not able to have children.

It was Zachariah's turn to enter the Holy Place, the room right next to the Holy of Holies, to burn incense. (Priests burned incense twice a day in the Temple, at the morning and evening sacrifices.) The evening hour of prayer occurred at 3 PM while crowds prayed in the Temple courts. This was the crowning moment of Zechariah's ministry, since most priests were honored to burn incense only once in their lifetime. At this time he would offer prayers and incense, and then he would come out and bless the people.

It was on this occasion that the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah to tell him that his prayer was heard and that Elizabeth would bear a son. He was to name him John. The name means, "Yahweh has shown favor". We can see how well it fits John the Baptist since he will prepare and introduce the people to the Messiah. The angel reveals that John's birth will bring joy both to his parents and many others. He will be great before God and be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. He will not drink any alcoholic beverage so that his mind can be totally

free for God and his word. St. Luke records John's sanctification in the womb when Mary went to visit her (Lk 1:41). The angel went on to explain that John will turn many people to God; he will be endowed with the spirit and power of Elijah.

Zechariah doubted that they could have a child during their old age. But all will happen by the power of God as explained. However, he was to be unable to speak until all came to pass.

In our own lives we may not think that our sanctification in fulfillment of God's promises is possible because we focus on our own weaknesses. But if only we would trust in God and focus on his power he would bring it about.

When Zechariah finally came out to the people, they realized that he had seen a vision and could only make signs to them.

Elizabeth did conceive and was greatly consoled that her barrenness had been removed. She hid herself from the public eye. Was it to contemplate the mystery that was taking place in her? In silence, free from distraction and excitement of much talk, she could interiorly rejoice in God and the favor shown them. We are reminded of Mary's attitude and joy expressed in the words, "my soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Lk 1: 46).

December 20th-Advent **Lk 1:26-38**

Six months after Elizabeth had conceived John, the angel Gabriel also appeared to Mary living in Nazareth. This was a small insignificant village of Galilee in northern Palestine. Mary was a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph from the family of King David.

The angel addressed Mary with the word "Hail!" or "Rejoice!" This kind of greeting resembles that of the prophets who bring the good news of God's favor upon daughter Zion (Jerusalem)

(Zeph 3: 14-18). He addresses Mary as “favored one” or “full of grace”; “the Lord is with you”. This indicates that Mary has been the object of God’s favor from the beginning, even from the first moment of conception in preparation for her divine maternity. She has been most exalted by God’s grace so that she did not have the least inclination toward sin. In this way she could worthily form the Son of God in his human nature. Mary has “found favor with God”—she need not be afraid. Her initial fullness of grace has now grown to a greater fullness and God is well pleased with her. Mary, the angel says, will conceive and bear a son whom she is to name Jesus. He will be called Son of the Most High. This is a title for God commonly used by St. Luke (1: 35, 76; 6:35; 8:28 etc.).

“The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David” as God had promised King David (2 Sam 7:12-17). Jesus will receive royal lineage legally from Joseph. However, he will also receive it naturally from Mary since the law commands that daughters “may marry anyone they please, provided they marry into a clan of their ancestral tribe” (Num 36:6).

The angel explains to Mary her son “will rule over the house of Jacob”, the Kingdom of Israel, forever, “and of his kingdom there will be no end”. This was fulfilled by Jesus through his resurrection and glorification by which he becomes immortal and becomes the king of Kings and will rule over all the nations.

Although Mary was engaged to Joseph, she seems to have made a vow of perpetual virginity since she asked the question “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” (or better, “since I know not man”). Her intention seems to be absolute. The angel explains to Mary that her conception of the Messiah is going to be a miraculous one. The Holy Spirit will come upon her and the power of the Most High will overshadow her. God will be the Father of this child. He will be the holy Son of God. As a sign of the possibility of this miraculous conception, the

angel informs Mary that her relative Elizabeth has conceived a son in her old age six months ago—for nothing will be impossible with God. Mary is totally believing and accepting of God’s will as revealed by Angel Gabriel. She answers, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word”.

December 21st-Advent

Lk 1: 39-45

The angel Gabriel had told Mary that Elizabeth in her old age had conceived a child six months earlier. This was a sign to Mary that nothing is impossible for God. And Mary must have felt a need to share her joy with her relative so that together they could praise God for the wonders he was working in them.

So Mary traveled to the home of Elizabeth. She went with haste. There was so much good news and excitement to be shared. It would have been difficult for Mary to contain herself, such was the joy of salvation that had been revealed to her: She would become the mother of the Messiah. The difficulty of a four day journey to what was probably Ain Karim, a small village near Jerusalem, did not impede her decision. She already proves herself to be the strong woman. When she entered the house, Mary greeted Elizabeth. Upon hearing her greeting, the infant John leaped within her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Mary’s grace-filled person, sanctified still more with Jesus in her womb, sanctified John by her holy greeting. Her graced words and the presence of Jesus within her caused John to leap for joy. He sensed the presence of the incarnate God, and he could not restrain his joy. That presence had already freed him from sin. He could begin at the moment to announce the presence of the redeemer.

Elizabeth was inspired by the Holy Spirit to realize that Mary was the most blessed woman in all the world because of her divine pregnancy. She felt so honored that Mary, the mother of her

Lord, should come to visit her. She was given to understand this when her infant son leaped for joy within her. When we pray, “Holy Mary, Mother of God” in the Hail Mary prayer, we have this passage in scripture to verify that fact: Mary is the Mother of God-made-man.

Elizabeth congratulates Mary and calls her blessed for having believed that what was spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled. When Mary asked the angel, “How will this be, since I do not know man?” she was not expressing a doubt. She wanted to know how this request was compatible with her virginal state. In this, Mary was a true daughter of Abraham who believed God who promised him a son despite the fact that he and Sarah were too old to have a child.

December 22nd-Advent **Lk 1: 46-56**

Elizabeth is full of congratulations and praise for Mary. She is the most blessed among all women because she has been chosen to be mother of the Lord. Mary is also praised for having believed that such an incredible mystery would be accomplished in her. We would think that such adulation because God favored Mary would cause her to become self-centered. Her being praised for believing such a preposterous mystery could easily cause her to become proud. But these superabundant favors only caused Mary to give God the glory all the more. All is due to God’s greatness. Her joy is focused totally on God. He is the one to be praised. She is full of wonder at how God has chosen such a lowly one as herself on whom to bestow his favors. It is because of him that all ages will call her blessed. She is full of admiration for God’s power that has done such marvels for her. God is holy—there is none like him. He is beyond anything in this world. God’s supreme love expressed as mercy continues to be extended over the ages toward those who reverence him. All praise is extended toward God. He is the one who is glorified for

his marvelous compassion. He is the one to be honored—no one else. God, in lifting up Mary, is demonstrating his infinite power. The proud are being put to shame as they see one as lowly as Mary being chosen to be the Mother of the Redeemer before all others. The high and the mighty are rejected in favor of his humble servant Mary. It is those who hunger for God who are filled with spiritual benefits. Those who are full of this world’s goods are indisposed for God’s spiritual blessings. They are too full of themselves through self-gratification.

God continues to show mercy toward his people Israel through Mary his lowly servant—just as he promised to Abraham and his descendants.

Mary remained about three months with Elizabeth. We suspect that Mary remained until John’s birth. Perhaps the mention of three months is to present Mary as the New Ark of the Covenant. (compare 2 Sm 6:11; Lk 1:43; 2 Sm 6:9).

December 23rd-Advent **Lk 1: 57-66**

At last, Zechariah’s and Elizabeth’s child was born. They knew he would be a boy. He had been sanctified in his mother’s womb when Mary’s greeting reached Elizabeth’s ears. The neighbors and relatives rejoiced with the old couple. They had been waiting for a child for so long....and now they experienced the miracle of birth. A new person, made in the image of God, was born to them. What excitement this birth caused! The sight of him and the amazement his birth caused continued the wonder of the miraculous conception. He surely was a special child. God had plans for him. He was going to sanctify people so they would be well-disposed to receive his Messiah-Son. The sanctity with which he was endowed even from his mother’s womb was astounding. Light must have brightened his features with a noticeable glow. A sense of joy would have

pervaded the atmosphere and affected all who were present. The child would be named at the time of his circumcision. The children were circumcised on the eighth day. It is at this moment that a child became a member of the people of God. We can compare this event to baptism when we are united to Christ and become members of his body. As children, like John, we were privileged to become members of God's people as a sheer gift to us, without any merit of our own, without our even being asked. There is a big difference, of course, between entering in the old covenant and the new. We have been enriched beyond description with spiritual graces of Christ's paschal mystery: his suffering, death, resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the case of Zechariah's and Elizabeth's child, there was confusion about his name. Members of the family wanted to call him Zechariah after his father. But his parents over-ruled them and named him John as commanded by the angel. The name means "Yahweh has shown favor". And John would play a special role in revealing that favor in preparing the people to receive the Messiah. As a result of obeying God's word, Zechariah was allowed to speak again and began to praise God. The people were greatly edified and given a deep reverence for God. They sensed God's hand in this and wondered what this child would be.

December 24th-Advent Lk 1: 67-79

After nine months of silence, prayer and recollection so that he would come to believe God's word, Zechariah was indeed sanctified and was inspired to speak that word.

He began by praising God for having visited his people. He already foresees the redemption that Jesus is going to bring. The "horn" represents strength. In this instance, it is Jesus who arises from David's family who is going to bring

salvation—just as Nathan has promised David. The salvation being spoken of here is the spiritual salvation from sin and evil. God is faithful to his promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For example, God renewed his promise to Abraham that in his descendants, "All the nations of the earth shall find blessing" (Gen 22:18). With the birth of John who is going to prepare the people for God's anointed one, the Messiah, that salvation promised long ago is imminent.

In light of the Last Supper, the Paschal Mystery, made present again through the Mass, we can better understand how "we might worship [God] in holiness and righteousness before him all our days". The wonderful sacrament of Penance and the forgiveness of sins, along with the powerful grace of the sacrament to overcome sin in our lives, show us how this prophecy is fulfilled.

John is indeed going to be "prophet of the Most High" to speak God's word with unusual power to prepare them for the Son of the Most High.

John will bring people to repent of their sins by his dynamic preaching. They will then experience salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. They will come to know God and his tender mercy toward them.

"The daybreak from on high will visit us" refers to the Messiah who will enlighten the people by his teaching and grace. His truth will guide their feet into the path of peace. Here we recall the words of the Messiah, Jesus, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12).

December 26th-St. Stephen, The First Martyr Mt 10: 17-22

As Jesus was departing for heaven in the mystery of his Ascension, he told his disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you

will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). St. Paul was very conscious of fulfilling that obligation. He put it in this striking way, “woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor 9: 16 RSV). He tells us that we are obliged to speak the word to others also: “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved” (Rom 10:9-10).

This serious obligation of proclaiming Jesus as Lord and his saving word is going to meet opposition by those who lead selfish, egotistic lives. So Jesus warns us to beware of people who will persecute us. He makes his early disciples aware that they will be led before courts and councils who will oppose them. They will be scourged and commanded to stop speaking of Jesus (Acts 5: 40-42). They will be led before governors and kings so they can witness their faith in Jesus (Acts 26). The Holy Spirit will be given to them at that moment to enlighten them on what to say.

St. Stephen, whose feast we celebrate today, is a perfect example of how the Holy Spirit spoke through him. He was brought before the high court, the Sanhedrin, so he could defend and explain himself to his false accusers (Acts 6: 8-15). His speech was so powerfully convicting of them they became infuriated, led him out of the city, and stoned him to death (Acts 7: 54-60).

Some early believers from Jewish families will be handed over and put to death—one family member against another. They will be hated for believing in Jesus. He will be the occasion for division in families. “Whoever endures to the end will be saved”. That endurance refers to sustaining persecution even to death. “Saved” is used here in the sense of safe passage to eternal life.

December 27th-St. John, Apostle and Evangelist

Jn 20:1a, 2-8

On this feast of St. John the Evangelist, the gospel presents him to us as one of the key witnesses to the resurrection. He is the one who was most privileged to be closest to Jesus among the Apostles.

He writes about his experience of Jesus, the word of life: “what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the word of life—for the life was made visible; we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was made visible to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ” (1Jn 1: 1-3).

John conveys his experience to us with keen enthusiasm so that we too can participate in this wondrous mystery and enjoy communion with him and the Father and the Son.

The gospel continues to present John as a first hand witness to Jesus’ resurrection. Now we are taken into the exciting events of Easter morning. Mary Magdalene and other women went to the tomb and found that the stone blocking the tomb was rolled back. So she ran to Peter and John to tell them that Jesus was no longer in the tomb. She believes that the body of Jesus was removed and placed somewhere else. The apostles therefore went to investigate the situation. John, who is younger and loves Jesus the most, runs faster and reaches the tomb first. But he waits for Peter, out of deference for the Chief of the Apostles, as he gazes at the burial cloths. Then Peter arrives and “enters” the tomb where he views the burials cloths. There was something noteworthy about the burial cloths. If thieves had stolen the body, they would have taken the linen cloth with it. Its shape would have been flattened somewhat

because Jesus' glorified body would have passed through it. When John entered the tomb the cloths that he had observed made him realize that Jesus had risen as he foretold. He believed.

December 28th-The Holy Innocents

Mt 2: 13-18

AS head of the family, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph. He tells him to rise and take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt. Others in the past frequently fled there to escape famine or persecution. Large Jewish colonies existed there such as at Alexandria. Joseph is to remain there until the angel tells him; for Herod would be looking for the child to kill him.

Joseph was an obedient man, so he arose and took the child and his mother at night and departed for Egypt. Flight by night under these conditions would have been a real hardship. It is difficult for us to imagine all the difficulties this entailed. The holy family remained in Egypt until the death of Herod the Great. St. Matthew anticipates the holy family's departure from Egypt (vv20-21) and quotes the prophet Hosea 11:1: "Out of Egypt have I called my son." Just as the Israel of old was called out of Egypt by God from an oppressive Pharaoh, so Jesus the new Israel is delivered from the cruel Herod and later brought out of Egypt to the Holy Land. Herod was in a furious rage because the wise men did not return to tell him where the child was as he had asked them. They had been warned in a dream not to return to him. Herod who had murdered his favorite wife, three of his sons and others, who threatened his throne, had no qualms of conscience to have all the male children in Bethlehem and in the surrounding area who were two years old or under killed. He had figured that Jesus would be a year or so according to what he had learned from the wise men. St. Matthew quotes the prophet Jeremiah 31:15 who portrays Rachael, the wife of the patriarch Jacob, weeping for her children taken

into exile at the time of the Assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom in 721 B.C. The mourning of Rachael is here applied to her lost children of a later age, the Holy Innocents. She was buried near Bethlehem. Her sobbing and loud lamentation were so great, she could be heard some five or six miles away in Ramah. This expresses the sadness over the murder of these innocent children by a cruel tyrant.

December 29th-5th Day within the Octave of Christmas

Lk 2:22-35

The Holy Family went to the temple in Jerusalem about five or six miles from Bethlehem. A mother who had given birth to a male child was obliged to go to the temple forty days after the birth to undergo a purification ceremony and to make an offering—a lamb for those who could afford it, or two turtledoves or two young pigeons for those who were poor. The Holy Family gave the offering of the poor.

Jesus was presented to the Lord as the law required. The law stipulated that the firstborn son should be redeemed by the parents through their payment of five shekels. St. Luke does not mention this. The Book of Exodus required the presentation and redemption of the firstborn son because the firstborn sons "belong" to the Lord who saved them when the Egyptian firstborn were destroyed at the Passover (Ex 13:15). Parents could redeem, that is, buy back such a child from God. Here we see how the Holy Family was obedient to the law in every respect.

At the time that Mary and Joseph went to the temple, there was a righteous and devout man named Simeon. He was awaiting the consolation of Israel. He and many devout Jews were looking forward to the restoration of God's rule in Israel. They were hoping that he would rescue the people from Gentile rule (the Romans) and reestablish the glorious kingdom of David in Jerusalem. The

birth of Jesus brings these hopes to fulfillment, but in a spiritual sense. The devout Simeon was a man ruled and led by the Holy Spirit. He had come to understand through the Holy Spirit that he would see the Messiah before he himself died. Thus inspired by the Holy Spirit, he came into the temple. When he saw the child Jesus being brought for the presentation, he took the child in his arms and gave praise to God. Now he was ready to depart from this world in peace. For he has seen the one who is to bring salvation for all people just as he had promised. He would be Israel's glory and a light of revelation to the Gentiles. Joseph and Mary were marveling at what Simeon was saying. He blessed them and told Mary that the child would be an occasion for the rise and fall of many. Some would be for and some against him. Those who accept him will be blessed and uplifted; those who reject him will fall away from God. This will cause Mary intense suffering.

December 30th-The Holy Family

Lk 2:22-40

The evangelist has already made it clear that Mary conceived Jesus without a human father, through the power of the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:31-35). Joseph became the child's adopted father.

Simeon blessed the holy family by calling God's favor upon them. He foresees and points out that Jesus' very Person will be a dividing line. Some will be for and others against him. Those who love and live by the truth will decide in his favor and follow him. Whereas, the proud will choose to go against him. Their decision is based on the desire to keep the self at the center of existence rather than God. Simeon prophesies that Jesus' being a sign that will be contradicted is going to cause Mary much suffering. She is told that a sword will pierce her very soul. This image symbolizes the deep anguish and suffering Mary experienced at seeing Jesus attacked by his enemies, their

continuously persecuting, and finally crucifying him. She stood beneath the cross and suffered in her heart with Jesus the excruciating pains of crucifixion (Jn 19:25). St. Luke tells us that the eighty-four year old widowed prophetess, Anna, who never left the temple but worshipped night and day with fasting and prayer, came forward at that very time when Jesus was being presented in the temple.

Anna, like Simeon, recognized Mary's baby as the Messiah. What an astonishing presence that child presented to these two holy people that made them realize in such a striking way that they had indeed come into the presence of God's anointed one! She could not but tell everyone she met about the arrival of the infant Messiah. Thus, both Anna and Simeon join the shepherds and the Magi in bearing witness to the arrival of the Messiah in Jesus. We, who have experienced his glorious presence within our very persons, must also proclaim him in some way to all we meet.

St. Matthew explains that an angel warned Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt because the king was going to search for the child to destroy him (Mt 2:13-15). It was only after Herod died that Joseph was again told by an angel to return to Israel. So the Holy Family settled in a town called Nazareth (Mt 2:19-23). And there, too, Jesus' hidden life began—except for the episode of his being left behind in the temple and found by his parents after three days (Lk 2:41-52).

In that hidden life, Jesus grew up and learned to practice the virtues that built up his strong character in preparation for his public ministry. Jesus was known as “the carpenter's Son” (Mt 13:55) and later “the carpenter” (Mk 6:3). The difficult work of carpentry without the convenience of modern tools, contributed to making Jesus into a strong man. That hidden life was also a contemplative one where Jesus could observe nature prayerfully and learn wisdom in the secrecy of his heart.

**December 31st-7th Day within the
Octave of Christmas
Jn 1:1-18**

God the Son is presented as a Word that proceeds from the eternal Being of the Father. He always existed with God. He is a divine Person who shares the divine nature with God the Father. He existed from the beginning before time began. All things were made through him. In him is the fullness of life expressed as light to enlighten human beings. That light shines in the darkness of death, sin and evil which have not been able to overcome it.

John the Baptist was sent by God to point out Jesus as the light who takes away the darkness of sin in the world. He is the true light who comes to enlighten everyone. It was through him that the world came to be, but when he came into the world it did not know him. Even his own people did not accept him. Sin and selfishness are blinding and prevent people from seeing the light of truth.

But to those who opened themselves through faith to receive him, he enabled to become children of God. Faith leading to baptism causes us to be born of God. We receive a new nature: we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).

The Eternal Word of God, the Son, became flesh; he assumed our human nature and began to live among us. John the evangelist experienced his glorious being at the transfiguration and on the Island of Patmos. He experienced Jesus' grace-filled Person and the truth or divine reality that he was. "We saw his glory": God's visible manifestation of majesty in power, that is, the magnificence of God's presence. John the Baptist testified as best he could to Jesus' divinity. John understood that although he was six months older than Jesus, Jesus existed before him. John felt so inferior to Jesus he did not feel worthy to be his slave. Jesus was "full of grace and truth" and "from his fullness we have all received" grace

upon grace—grace to overflowing by which we participate in the divine nature of God. Whereas the law of the Old Testament came through Moses, "grace and truth" (mercy and faithfulness) came through Jesus Christ. The only Son of God who shares the divinity equally with the Father has revealed him to us! How privileged we are!

**January 1st
Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
Lk 2:16-21**

We dedicate the first day of the year to God as a sign that we want to give the rest of the year to God. We come to receive God's blessing empowering us to do so. Today is the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. We honor Mary because she was chosen to be the mother of God made man and because she is full of grace. Jesus made her our mother, too. He said to Mary, standing under the cross, "Behold your son; and to the disciple, Behold your mother" (Jn 19:26-27).

We go in haste to Bethlehem to find Mary and Joseph and the infant lying in the manger. With the shepherds we contemplate the mystery of God-made-man. We prayerfully assimilate the mystery revealed by God's word. We spend time, taking the mystery in at length. Only in this way can we experience the mystery and be moved to glorify and praise God like the shepherds.

In the Eucharist, we take in the very mystery of the God made man into our very persons. In faith we draw the divine life from the Son of God given to us. All the graces of the mysteries of Jesus' sinless human life are available for our assimilation.

We must enter into communion with God through faith expressed as prayer. That is how we assimilate the divine life so that "we are being transformed into his very image from glory to glory" (2 Cor 3:18). The Eternal life of God becomes our own. God gives us a participation

in his own divine life so that we actually begin to live the supreme life of God. We come to know and experience for ourselves the very blissful life of God himself (see Jn 17:3).

God promises that he will show favor to the people who are blessed by his priests. Jesus continued this tradition of blessing people, e.g. people would bring their children to him so he could bless them. Jesus' very last gesture, as he was ascending to heaven, was to extend his hands over his followers in a blessing. (Lk 24:50-51).

The sacrament of Holy Orders gives priests a participation in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. We act in the person of Christ the head, "in persona Christi Capitis". Listen to what the Catechism of the Catholic Church says by quoting Pope Pius XII:

"It is the same priest, Christ Jesus, whose sacred person his minister truly represents. Now the minister, by reason of the sacerdotal consecration which he has received, is truly made like to the high priest and possesses the authority to act in the power and place of the person of Christ himself (virtute ac persona ipsius Christi)." (CCC 1548)

So when the priest blesses you, it is Christ himself who is blessing you through the Sacrament of the priesthood. It is up to you to open your heart in faith to receive that blessing.

18 Through faith, you contact Christ himself. Without this receptive faith, the blessing will not reach or affect you. Like Jesus, we extend our hand(s) to bless you. But, we end with the sign of the cross through which Jesus won our salvation and all of the blessings we receive. Because of the New Testament revelation, we can also be more explicit in calling upon God. He is not only "Lord" or "Yahweh"; he has revealed himself as Father, as Son and as Holy Spirit. So we invoke the Blessed Trinity in our blessing.

Not only do we bless you, God's people; we also bless objects such as homes, cars, etc. so we will

use these according to God's will and so he will protect them or allow them to be a grace for us. We also bless sacramentals, religious objects such as candles, scapulars, crucifixes, holy water, medals, etc. These little signs are meant to stir faith in us; they remind us of God and his saints whose intercession we seek. All of these stir faith and incite us to prayer; they remind us of God and call us to be receptive to his constant outpoured love.

The Gospel tells us that the name "Jesus" was given to the child in obedience to the angel who said, "You are to name him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins"(Mt 1:21). The word "Jesus" means "Yahweh saves". God is present in Jesus saving us from sin. We must call upon his name often. Rather than use vulgar or irreverent words when we are experiencing difficulty, we must call upon the Name of Jesus. The Name gives us the divine person who is ready to help us go through our troubles with patient endurance.

May Jesus himself bless you for a holy and happy new year.

January 2nd Christmas Weekday Jn 1: 19-28

The Jews from Jerusalem are the hostile authorities which consisted of the Pharisees and Sadducees who refuse to believe in Jesus. They sent priests and Levites to question John the Baptist about himself. "Who are you?" they asked.

He admitted that he was not the Messiah, God's anointed one from the family of David. They thought he might be Elijah. The prophet Malachi said that God would send Elijah before the day of the Lord to prepare the people for his coming. John said he was not Elijah. (Later Jesus explained that John came in the spirit of Elijah (Mt 17: 12-13)).

They questioned John further whether he might be the Prophet that Moses spoke about (Deut 18:15). (Actually “the Prophet” came to be understood as the Messiah.) But John said “no” to that question also.

Finally his questioners said, “Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us?” So John frankly admitted, “I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, make straight the way of the Lord”. Here John rephrases the passage from Isaiah 40:3 and makes it his own to express his mission. His work is to prepare the people for the arrival of the Messiah through repentance and turning away from sin.

The Pharisees wanted to know why John was baptizing if he was not the Messiah, Elijah or the Prophet. He then explained to them that his baptism with water was to prepare for one among them whom they do not recognize. He is coming after John. His dignity is so great John feels unworthy even to be his slave. John is just a voice, a nobody, appointed to announce one who is greater than we can imagine.

January 3rd Christmas Weekday Jn 1:29-34

John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him. What a magnificent sight that was. Surely the majesty of God could be seen scintillating through the God-man’s human features. The Holy Spirit inspired the prophetic eyes of John to see and proclaim Jesus to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is that paschal lamb who is going to be led to the slaughter as prophesied by Isaiah: “Though he was harshly treated, he submitted and opened not his mouth”. He is that Suffering Servant who, through his suffering, shall justify many and their guilt he shall bear (see Is 53:7, 11).

Again John’s prophetic gift enables him to see Jesus beyond what the human eye can see. He

acknowledges again (v. 15) that Jesus ranks ahead of him because he existed before him (although John was six months older than Jesus). Somehow the prophet intuits something of Jesus’ eternal birth and existence.

John says that “I did not know him” – perhaps he knew his relative on a natural level, but it took a special revelation of the Holy Spirit to make him recognize Jesus as God’s anointed one. For God had told John that the one on whom the Spirit would descend and rest upon is the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. John knew that God’s anointed one would be made known through his baptism of water.

John saw the Spirit come down on Jesus like a dove from the sky and remain upon him. The dove reminds us of the Spirit that swept over the waters in the first creation (Gen 1:2) which now signified the beginning of a new creation (see also Gen 8:8-12). Jesus, the anointed one, is the permanent bearer of the Spirit as seen in the dove who remains on him. He is the source of the Spirit for us all.

January 4th Christmas Weekday Jn 1:35-42

John the Baptist feasted his eyes once more upon the Lamb of God and invited two of his disciples to look upon Jesus as he was passing by. The majesty of his being must have called attention to itself. In humility John sees Jesus as so much greater than himself and encourages them, it seems, to go and spend some time with him. He wants them to behold him, to contemplate him at length. This they did. They left the great prophet and were so taken up with Jesus they spent the rest of their lives with him.

When Jesus turned and saw these two disciples of John, Andrew and John following him, he asked them what they were looking for. They responded

by asking where he was staying. He then invited them to come and see for themselves. This they did. They liked so much what they saw they stayed with him the rest of the day—it was about four in the afternoon, an unforgettable moment in their lives.

Andrew was so excited from his experience of meeting Jesus, he found his brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah,” God’s anointed one, that they were all waiting for. So he brought him to Jesus. When we truly love others, we desire their greatest good. We do our best to have them meet Jesus. He is the God-man who can bring them to a new, heightened level of being, a joy that can only be found in God.

The moment Jesus met Simon, in his divine mind he immediately understood who he was. He had already plumbed the depths of his character. So Jesus looked at him, and, without questioning who he was, told him, “You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Kephas” (which means rock in Aramaic and translated Peter). It was much later, when Simon expressed his faith in Jesus as the Messiah, that Jesus would say more completely “... You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church” (Mt 16:18).

January 5th **Christmas Weekday** **Jn 1:43-51**

Jesus went to Galilee and found Philip [He was from the same town as Andrew and Peter—Bethsaida.] Jesus said to him, “Follow me”. Philip seems to have experienced the same excitement as Andrew in his encounter with Jesus. For he also found his friend Nathanael and told him that they had found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law as well as the prophets, that is, the Messiah. He is Jesus from Nazareth. (Here he is regarded as the son of Joseph. We learn from Sts. Matthew and Luke, however, that Joseph is Jesus’ foster father. God is really the Father of Jesus.)

Nathanael was surprised that Jesus was from Nazareth. It was an insignificant village that was never mentioned in the Old Testament. No prophecy had connected the Messiah with Galilee—much less Nazareth. Nathanael wondered whether anything good could come from Nazareth. So Philip invited him to come and see for himself.

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him he remarked, “Here is a true Israelite. There is no duplicity in him”. Nathanael was completely taken by surprise by such a remark. “How do you know me?” he said. Jesus said, “Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree.” The fig tree was a symbol of Messianic peace where people would go in its shade to read the scriptures (see Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10). Jesus would have known by his divine knowledge something of a personal nature that Nathanael would have experienced. This knowledge astonished him and made him exclaim, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel”.

The kings were known as sons of God in a general sense. So Nathanael is expressing his belief that Jesus is the Messianic king. Jesus tells Nathanael that if he came to believe because Jesus saw him under the fig tree, he will see still greater things. He will see the sky opened and the angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man. In other words, Jesus will become the center of divine communications. Nathanael will experience this when he sees God acting in Jesus through his ministry as he speaks with authority, casts out demons, cures the sick and those crippled, and feeds the multitudes through the miracles of the loaves and fish.

January 6th **Christmas Weekday** **Mk 1:7-11**

The holy prophet John had such a sensitivity about the exalted nature of the one who was coming after him. He had a sense of his power and majesty. His pure heart grasped the magnitude of the mystery about to be revealed.

John also had a sense of his own lowliness compared to the holiness of the one he was going to introduce to the people. He felt unworthy even to loosen the thongs of his sandals—something only a slave might do.

John saw his task of baptizing with water as insignificant compared to the baptism that the Messiah was going to confer. He is going to baptize the people with the Holy Spirit. He will immerse believers into God who is a consuming fire (Heb 12:29). The fire will cleanse them from all the impurities of their sins and make them new creatures—children of God—no less! They will receive power to communicate with God on a divine level.

Jesus came to John who was baptizing people in the Jordan River. He also baptized Jesus. When Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn open and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him. The Spirit anointed Jesus for his public mission which he was about to begin. The Spirit will empower Jesus with the divine authority he needs to fulfill his ministry. God was so pleased with his Son Jesus who so humbled himself as to be considered an ordinary sinner. He could not but exclaim and correct any wrong impression: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

January 7

Weekday Before The Epiphany

(If the Epiphany is celebrated on Sunday, January 8, the following Gospel is used for the Mass on January 7)

Jn 2: 1-11

“There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.”

Mary is not only there, she is the one in charge: She sees that the wine has run out—symbolizing that the old law has run dry. She is the one who has authority over the

servants and gives them orders. She is the chief servant who makes the wedding feast possible: It is through Mary’s consent that the wedding between God and man takes place. The human nature and the divine nature are joined together in her womb. Mary’s cooperation with God as chief servant brings about the Incarnation: God becomes wedded to humanity. The wedding at Cana is the formal celebration of the marriage between God and man, between heaven and earth. But who are the bride and groom of this wedding? Mention of the names of the bride and groom is left out, so we will come to understand who the real bride and Groom are. Realize that you are very much involved in this celebration. The abundance of wine and the superabundance of grace it signifies is a sign that the Messiah has arrived in the person of Jesus. He comes that we can have life in greater abundance. Jesus himself describes his presence among us in the kingdom of God, the Church, as a marriage feast: “The Kingdom of heaven,” he says, “may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast” for his son (Mt 22:2). Jesus is talking about himself. Baptism unites each of us to him. We are called to live in communion with him in a holy marriage. Jesus considers himself to be the Groom of the wedding that he is celebrating in the kingdom of God. So we see then, that Jesus is the Messiah and Bridegroom of the wedding. And the bride is the people of God who come to be united to Jesus in faith. John the beloved disciple tells us in the book of Revelation about the final and greatest marriage feast to be celebrated when Jesus the heavenly Bridegroom comes to be united to us at his second coming, when God will become “all in all” of us (see 1 Cor 15:28). He writes: “I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband...” (Rev 21:2). In the sacrament of matrimony, it is Jesus himself who unites you and holds you together by his holy presence. You may find it strange that Jesus calls his own mother “Woman”. So too, the word “Woman” refers us to the book of Genesis, especially chapter 3. There we see the old Eve leading Adam into sin. In the Gospel, we see Mary as the new Eve

leading the new Adam to a good act, the miracle of changing water into wine in today's Gospel, saving a family from embarrassment. In Genesis 3: 15, God proclaims a perpetual enmity between the devil and the woman, and his offspring and hers. Although the serpent will strike and wound the heal of the woman's offspring, he will crush the serpent's head by his fidelity to God in his suffering, death, and resurrection. That is why we see in the Gospel of John 19:25-27, Jesus addressing his mother once more as "Woman". She is the new Eve whose Son crushes the head of the serpent on the cross. So the Gospel today sees Mary as the servant woman who sees a need and fulfills it. She is also the mother of Jesus with a special claim of authority over him as our intercessor. The word "woman" makes her our mother in grace as the new Eve, confirmed by Jesus' proclaiming her our mother on the cross. She sends us to Jesus and commands us, "Do whatever he tells you." Moreover, we can also see in the word "woman" that Mary is the new Eve and helpmate of the new Adam as representative of the Church and people of God. She is also the Bride of the heavenly Bridegroom!

Monday after Epiphany

Mt 4: 12-17, 23-25

"When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee."

You may remember that John was arrested and imprisoned in the dungeons of the Castle of Machaerus by Herod Antipas. John's crime was that he had publicly denounced Herod for seducing his brother's wife, and making her his own wife, after he had put away the wife he had. It is never safe to rebuke an eastern despot and John's courage brought him first imprisonment and then death. Jesus marches into Galilee, the territory of King Herod who had just imprisoned John. Jesus is consciously taking John's fallen banner and continuing in the teeth of opposition. He is also moving to safer grounds.

Jesus left Nazareth and took up residence in the town of Capernaum. There was a kind of finality in that move. In that moment, Jesus left his home never again to return to live in it. He would now devote his life totally to proclaiming and establishing the Kingdom of God. The evangelist, inspired by God, sees Jesus' coming to Galilee as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. This land, devastated and abused in Isaiah's time, will be the first to receive the light of Christ's life and preaching. The messianic meaning of the prophecy is, therefore, clear. "The people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen." "From that time on Jesus began to preach." That was the first way that Jesus began to enlighten the people. Jesus was a "great light" to the world by his preaching. He unveils the invisible world to us; he reveals to us that there are three Persons in God; heaven and eternal life will be given to those who obey God; those who disobey God separate themselves from him in this life and will remain separated throughout eternity—unless they repent before they die. St. Matthew emphasizes the formal inauguration of Jesus' ministry with the solemn phrase, "from that time on, Jesus began to preach". The word "preach" stands for a herald's proclamation from a king. The herald was the man who brought a message directly from the king. This word tells us of certain characteristics of the preaching of Jesus,

- The herald had in his voice a note of certainty.
 - The herald had in his voice the note of authority. He was speaking for the king; he was laying down and announcing the king's law, command, and decision.
 - The herald's message came from a source beyond himself; it came from the king. Preaching is the voice of God transmitted through one man to the people. It was with the voice of God that Jesus spoke to men.
- Jesus, the herald, continues the work of John, the herald, and brings it to fulfillment. Jesus now begins recruiting his first disciples, three of whom will become part of his inner circle: Peter,

James, and John. “As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, ‘Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ At once they left their nets and followed him.” The emphasis is on the authority of Jesus who calls, and the immediate obedience of those called. The creative word of God simply meets them in their everyday world, lays hold of them, and changes their lives forever. Peter and Andrew “immediately” left their nets and followed Jesus—so did James and John leave their boats and their father to follow him. God passes by and calls us. If we do not answer him immediately, he may continue on his way and we could lose sight of him. It would be sad if we were to fall behind because we wanted to follow him while still carrying many things that are only a dead weight and nuisance. “Proclaiming” in St. Matthew’s gospel always has as its object the kingdom of heaven (He avoids the direct mention of God out of reverence). Healing is closely related to “proclaiming” in this gospel and is really part of proclaiming. Jesus brings healing and restoration to suffering people so that they can carry out their God-given purpose. Thanks be to God!

Tuesday After Epiphany

Mk 6:34-44

Upon returning from their missionary journey, Jesus was taking the twelve for a rest (31). Instead, they came upon a large crowd waiting for them. Jesus’ heart was moved with pity for them. They were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began to teach them many things as spiritual nourishment.

Since it was getting late, the apostles suggested to Jesus that he send the crowd away to procure something to eat. Jesus said they should give them food themselves. The apostles thought that would be too costly, and they had only five loaves and two fish in their possession.

Jesus then ordered the people to sit down in groups on the green grass—this they did in groups of hundreds and fifties. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, and looking up to heaven, blessed them by praising and thanking God for them. Using the same words as at the Last Supper, Jesus blessed, broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples (see Mk 14:22) to set before the people. He also divided the fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied. And there was more left-over’s than they started with—twelve wicker baskets full of fragments, after feeding some five thousand men.

This messianic banquet looks forward to Jesus’ feeding the multitudes with the Eucharist. There is always plenty left over to feed the new Israel led by the twelve apostles.

Wednesday After Epiphany

Mk 6:45-52

Jesus had kept busy ministering to the people and meeting with the apostles after their mission. Aware of his need for prayerful communion with his Father, he dismissed the crowd and sent his disciples by boat to Bethsaida, a village at the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus needed to restore his human nature with spiritual energy through prayer. We too must take time off to be alone with God in prayer to generate the spiritual energy we need to minister to those in our care. Otherwise our words are not graced and life-giving. We, like Jesus, are also in need of silence and solitude to give our exclusive attention and love to God. About the fourth watch of the night, between 3 and 6 am, Jesus noticed that his disciples were having difficulty rowing against the wind. He began walking toward them on the sea. When the disciples saw him, they were afraid, for they thought he was a ghost. But he calmed their fears by speaking to them, saying, “Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid”. The words “it is I” can be translated “I am”, which is the divine name with which God identified himself

to Moses in the burning bush (Ex 3:14); Only God “treads upon the crests of the sea” (Job 9:8).

When Jesus got into the boat with the disciples, the wind died down. They were astonished, for they still did not fully realize that Jesus was divine. The multiplication of the loaves and fish had not enlightened them. Their hearts were hardened in the sense that they were unable to perceive the deeper meaning of Jesus’ self-revelation through the miracles he performed.

Thursday after Epiphany

Lk 4:14-22

In his gospel, St. Luke presents to us the result of a new and accurate investigation of the “events” that have been “fulfilled” among us. He is speaking of the events surrounding the Incarnation of the Son of God—Jesus—events that were the fulfillment of prophecies made over the centuries. In order to accomplish this, St. Luke must have contacted “those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning” so that we “may realize the certainty of the teachings [we] have received.” These witnesses contacted by St. Luke reassure us of the certitude of the events surrounding Jesus’ person. St. John the evangelist, one of these eyewitnesses writes: “This is what we proclaim to you... What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched—we speak of the Word of life. This life became visible. We have seen and bear witness to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life that was present to the Father and became visible” (1 Jn 1:1-2). What a striking testimony from a living eyewitness of his experience of the reality of Jesus. Such a vivid account reassures us in our holy, catholic faith of the “certainty of the teaching [we] have received.” St. Luke completes what others omitted in Jesus’ life. For example, he tells us about Jesus’ birth and childhood. The details he describes in his infancy narratives could only come from Mary herself: the virginal conception, the circumstances

of Jesus’ birth, and the ensuing events of his childhood. The very words of Mary are quoted when she and Joseph find him in the temple. “Only one human person was eyewitness of the Word [become flesh] from the very beginning, and that was the virgin mother. It was doubtless, therefore, that she was the evangelist’s primary source for his infancy narrative. This conclusion is confirmed by his insistence on her memory: ‘And his mother kept all these [things] in her heart’ (Lk 2:19, 51). [St.] Luke knew that Mary treasured the things of Jesus in her heart, because she had opened up that treasury to him.” (Cradle of Redeeming Love, by John Seward, p. 191). Continuing with the Gospel of today, we read, “Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit.” He was filled with power by the Holy Spirit to inaugurate him into his public ministry. “He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all.” The synagogue was a meeting place for the public reading of Scripture, prayer, and instruction. The blessing of a priest ended the meetings. Jesus was in the “habit of going to the synagogue on the Sabbath day”. That was his habitual way of keeping the Sabbath holy as the third commandment enjoins us. We also should have a strong commitment to go to church. Participation in the holy Mass must enjoy first priority in our lives. The Sabbath was changed to Sunday after the resurrection. It is interesting to know that when the early Christians separated themselves from the Jewish religion, they continued the synagogue service of the word and simply added the Eucharistic celebration to it. We continue the tradition of meeting weekly with prayer, Scripture, and instruction on the word of God called a homily. We also conclude the service with the priest’s blessing. Our Catholic religion is rooted in Jesus’ Jewish faith. But we perfect it with the Gospel and the celebration of the paschal mystery. “He opened the scroll so that all the people might see it... and as he opened it, all the people rose.” This is a sign of respect for the word of God. Does it not remind you of when we stand to greet the Gospel? They raised their hands high as a bodily participation in their words of praise. “Then they bowed down and

prostrated themselves before the Lord, their faces to the ground.” This was their way of showing reverence to God, acknowledging his greatness and their submissiveness to him. We express our respect for God by a deep bow or genuflection. We recognize and reverence the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament as we enter into church; we do this before we enter our pew by bending the knee and touching it to the floor. We also bow before receiving Jesus in the holy Eucharist. “He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.” We usually think of the “poor” in terms of physical and financial destitution. But the kind of poverty we mean here is poverty of being... “And recovery of sight to the blind...” Our sight is limited to this world. We are blind to the supernatural world. We do not see beyond this life... “To let the oppressed go free...” We are oppressed by our sins... “Today,” Jesus announces, “This scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” The year of favor, the time of grace, the moment of deliverance has arrived. The Savior of the world makes himself available to every human being... In the sacrament of Penance, Jesus is present in his priesthood to take away the sins that imprison and oppress you... In the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, Jesus is personally present to nourish you with new strength, vitality, and sight to see your sins and empower you to win victory over them. Jesus will free you if you allow him. Go to meet him. He is waiting to embrace and free you.

Friday After Epiphany **Lk 5:12-16**

“There was a man full of leprosy” in one of the towns where Jesus was. Leviticus 13: 1-50 treats of various forms of skin disease. These were skin blemishes which were not contagious but simply disqualified their subjects from association with others, especially in public worship, until they were declared ritually clean. The Hebrew term “leprosy” does not refer to Hansen’s disease called leprosy.

This man who had this skin disease would have heard of Jesus’ miraculous powers. He had faith that Jesus could heal him. So he fell prostrate at Jesus’ feet and pleaded with him to make him clean. Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. He was not afraid of the disease; the holiness of his being caused it to disappear. Jesus said, “I do will it. Be made clean”.

The leprosy left him immediately. Jesus ordered the man not to tell anyone. He did not want to attract the crowds who would hinder his preaching of the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Their mistaken notion of a worldly messiah would interfere with Jesus’ spiritual mission.

Jesus ordered the man to show himself to the priest whose role it was to examine the man and declare him clean. A written statement would show him free to reenter social activities.

The man was also to offer for his cleansing what Moses prescribed. Special ceremonies of purification were prescribed in Leviticus 14:1-20.

Report about Jesus’ miraculous powers spread quickly and attracted great crowds. They came to listen to him and to be cured of their ailments. After Jesus had finished ministering to people, he would withdraw to deserted places to pray. He needed to be in deep spiritual communion with his Father to restore his spiritual energies for further ministering.

Saturday after Epiphany **Jn 3:22-20**

Sometime after Jesus’ visit with Nicodemus, he and his disciples went into the Judean countryside. Jesus himself did not baptize as we learn from John 4:2. It was his disciples who baptized with the same type of baptism of repentance in preparation for the Kingdom of God that John baptized. John was also baptizing at this time since he had not yet been imprisoned

by Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch, Son of Herod the Great.

John's disciples came to him because of a dispute they had with a certain Jew about ceremonial washings. They reported to John that everyone was now coming to Jesus (while his disciples baptized). John, then, explains to his disciples that God is the one who is bringing this about: "No one can receive anything except what has been given him from heaven (27). John reminded his disciples that he told them he himself was not the Messiah, but that he, John, was sent to go before him to prepare his way. John's mission was to announce the Messiah's arrival (compare Jn 1:29-34).

John considered himself to be the best man for Jesus, the bridegroom. He rejoices that Jesus, the Messiah, has arrived. The humble John's joy is now complete. His mission is accomplished. Jesus' popularity must now increase—for he is the Messiah; that of John must decrease, for his mission is now finished.

Ash Wednesday **Mt 6:1-6, 16-18**

As we enter into the solemn forty days of Lent we unite ourselves to the mystery of Jesus in the desert. We do what we can to establish a desert atmosphere through prayer and self-denial.

In the Gospel today, Jesus teaches us the spirit with which we ought to approach the three traditional works of mercy: almsgiving, prayer and fasting.

In giving alms or charitable gifts to the poor we must not be like the hypocrites who pretend to be pious but who pridefully call attention to themselves when they give alms. The praise they receive from people will be their only reward. When we give alms it is better to give anonymously so that pride will not spoil our

good intention. Not letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing means we must detach ourselves from our good works so they will not be contaminated by a secret pride arising in our very hearts. God sees our good acts done in secret and will reward us.

Hypocrites who stand to pray so as to be seen as pious have already received their reward in the form of being thought of as holy. The goodness of their prayer is thwarted by their intention to call attention to themselves and make people think that they are holy. Our intention must be to honor God and communicate our praise, thanks and petition to him. To safeguard pride creeping into our pious actions, it is good, inasmuch as we can, to pray privately. However, when we pray with others in community we are simply doing what everyone else is doing. We are less likely at such times to be prideful.

Another traditional religious act is fasting. That also should be done without calling attention to itself. It is so easy for our pious acts to be vitiated by pride. The more private we can be with our acts of self-denial the better. We can fast from food and drink. But we can also abstain from various forms of entertainment. We will then have the time to devote ourselves to prayer and spiritual reading. Participating in daily Mass and a Come, Lord Jesus! group would be extremely beneficial.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday **Lk 9: 22-25**

In only one verse Jesus reveals the whole mystery of his suffering, death, and resurrection. The Son of Man is his favorite way of describing himself. It tells of his being born as a human being with all the weaknesses this entails; it also speaks of his divinity as he comes upon the clouds (see Dan 7: 13-14). In this announcement Jesus attempts to make clear to the apostles that he is not the kind of

Messiah they think he is: one who overpowers their enemies by force. Rather he is the Suffering Servant spoken of by Isaiah 53 who takes upon himself the sins of the people and suffers and dies for their redemption and salvation. Thus he is a spiritual Messiah. Once they recognize him to be the Messiah, he quickly explains what kind of Messiah he is going to be.

Having explained himself, Jesus then addresses himself to everyone else. He states that each one's redemption and salvation will also take place through the cross. There is something about human nature that needs purification. Accepted suffering accomplishes this great good. It brings out our spiritual nature. We are made to endure suffering through spirit assertiveness. When the spirit habitually prevails, we are raised to a higher level of being and disposed for union with God.

Self-denial must be practiced to redirect our sinfully inclined human nature. We need to curb our pleasure appetite to make it conform to God's will. Otherwise selfishness tends to rule our lives. The flesh rather than the spirit then dictates our actions.

Taking up our cross also means that we must accept the sufferings that occur in our daily lives as a manifestation of God's permissive will for us. Our limited creation often falls short of our needs and expectations. We are called to bear these patiently. In this way our wayward human nature is gradually purified of its sinful tendencies.

To attempt to "save" one's life by self-indulgence is to lose it spiritually; to lose one's life by self-denial is to save it spiritually.

To attempt to gain the whole world by exclusively exhausting one's energies in attaining it would mean that one has nothing reserved for eternal life.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Mt 9: 14-15

Fasting was a sign of mourning and repentance. The Law of Moses prescribed fasting only on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29). The word used is "mortify". Fasting meant abstinence from food for the entire day from sunrise to sunset. Fasting twice a week was regarded in Old Testament times as a sign of devotion. John the Baptist's disciples and the Pharisees fasted. They approached Jesus and wanted to know why Jesus' disciples did not fast.

We recall that Jesus began his ministry by a solemn fast of forty days and forty nights (Mt 4: 1-2). This would have required heroic temperance and fortitude. Exactly what that entailed we do not know. Jesus' missionary journeys required much energy. He walked long distances and he spoke long hours without the help of our modern day public address systems. Then there was that extreme heat from which he suffered as he journeyed the hot roads on foot. It is easy to see that fasting from sun up to sun down would have interfered with his ministry. But there are other forms of fasting such as limiting the amount of food eaten. Perhaps that would have been more in conformity with Jesus' needs. For we see him "tired from his journey" and sitting at the well at Sychar while the disciples went into town to buy food. On another occasion we see him sound asleep on a cushion during a storm presumably because he was so exhausted.

Jesus responded to the question as to why his disciples did not fast by stating that just as it would be improper for wedding guests to fast as a sign of mourning during a wedding celebration, so while he, the heavenly bridegroom, is present, it is not proper for his disciples to fast. God had promised to marry Israel (Is 62:5). Jesus identifies himself as the bridegroom (Jn 3: 28-29). This was a time of joy and celebration. When he is taken away and led to crucifixion, then the disciples will need to fast as a sign of mourning.

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Lk 5: 27-32

Jesus saw Levi (also called Matthew, Mt 9:9) sitting at the customs post. He said to him, “Follow me”. Jesus, in his divine mind, would have known Levi’s heart. As is the case with the fishermen whom he called, we would expect Levi to have met Jesus before (compare Jn 1:35-51). Personal knowledge of Jesus would have so impressed Levi and captured his heart that he could not resist his call to follow him. In the majesty of Jesus’ Person he would have found a treasure exceedingly greater than the money he was dealing with.

Here we also see the graced-power of Jesus’ voice and word. His is a creative word that causes discipleship. That word enlivens and elevates one to a new level of being and understanding.

We can understand, then, why Levi could leave everything behind and rise up to follow Jesus. His divine Person was like a magnet drawing Levi to a better and exciting life that he had never experienced before.

Levi, as any true disciple, could not keep his exciting new experience of Jesus to himself—he gave a great banquet for all his tax collector friends and others so they could get to meet and know Jesus. He felt an urgent need to share him with others.

The fact that Jesus associated with Levi and his tax collector friends disturbed and worried the Pharisees and scribes. These tax collectors were considered sinners and would surely contaminate Jesus with their uncleanness; for they dealt with Gentiles and the ritual defilement of the pagans. They were like traitors who worked for the Roman government. They were also considered extortioners, exacting more taxes than required.

So the Pharisees enquired why Jesus would eat and drink with these sinners. Jesus explained

to them that he considered himself to be like a physician caring for sick people. He was there to heal them. By relating to them in this way he would be better able to prescribe proper remedies for their spiritual ailments. Jesus’ mission is to call sinners to repentance—that is his focus—not those who are already right with God.

Monday- 1st Week in Lent

Mt 25: 31-46

In this scene of the Last Judgment, Jesus comes in his glory as Son of Man and Supreme Judge. This is Jesus’ Second Coming at the end of the world as we now know it. Jesus appears with all his angels and saints, and sits upon his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him.

There are elements of a parable here which picture Jesus, the Son of Man, who comes as a shepherd; the righteous and the wicked are presented as sheep and goats respectively.

In this way Jesus shows that there will be a separation of the good and the evil, just as a shepherd separates the sheep and the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Other passages in Scripture indicate that the separation of the righteous from the unrighteous will take place spontaneously. St. Paul says, “Behold, I tell you a mystery....We will all be changed, in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised incorruptible....” (1 Cor 15: 51-52).

Jesus also tells us that “all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation” (Jn 5: 28-29).

Today's Gospel explains that the Last Judgment will be based on love for Jesus expressed through love of neighbor. The righteous will be blessed by the Father when he will give them their inheritance, the Kingdom he had prepared for them from all eternity. Jesus will explain to them that it is because they expressed love for him through their neighbor in need that they will be rewarded with heaven. Through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy they cared for those who needed help: the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, imprisoned....They were not aware that they were loving Jesus at the time. But he will declare that "whatever you did for one of these least brothers [and sisters] of mine, you did for me".

He will condemn those who failed to love their neighbor in similar circumstances. He will say to them, "Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels". In surprise they will ask, "When did they see him in need?" He will say to them, "what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me. And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Tuesday- 1st Week in Lent Mt 6: 7-15

In teaching us how to pray Jesus counsels against babbling empty words like the pagans. They would recite long litanies of divine names to gain the attention of gods. The Catechism teaches, "According to Scripture, it is the heart that prays. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain" (CCC 2562).

From the praying heart, an abundance of meaningful words may flow such as when Jesus prayed throughout John 17. Such heartfelt communion with God is most effective. Repeating Scriptural words such as the Rosary help us to remain in continuous sustained faith with God. This too may be an expression of heart to heart communion with God.

Jesus then proceeds to teach us a model prayer in the Our Father. He begins by glorifying God and then ends with four petitions.

God is the precious Father of us all. He is our Father. That makes us brothers and sisters and children of the august Creator of the World.

We express the desire that God be revered and respected by the way we speak his name. We also desire him to rule our hearts and establish his kingdom in us and our world by our doing his will on earth as the saints do in heaven.

Having praised God and expressed our longing for his reign in our hearts and world, we devote the second part of our prayer to asking for specific needs.

We pray for our daily food: what nourishment we need to sustain our bodies and our spiritual beings. This would refer to the holy Eucharist. Just as God sustained the chosen people with manna each day, so Jesus provides the Eucharist to maintain our spiritual lives. Jesus did strongly assert that unless we eat his flesh and drink his blood, we will not have life in us (Jn 6: 53). As we need to eat every day to stay energized physically, so too we do need daily spiritual nourishment.

We ask God to forgive us our moral debts as we forgive those who sin against us. Therefore we need to let go of any hurts from those who offended us so God will also forgive us our sins.

We pray that God spare us from extreme trial when evil will be at its strongest in the end times. We also beg God to deliver us from Satan himself because this fallen angel is so much stronger than we are.

Jesus insistently asserts that our Father will forgive us only if we forgive others. Otherwise our un-relinquished resentment will stand in the way of our being able to be forgiven.

Wednesday- 1st Week in Lent

Lk 11: 29-32

People could not get enough of Jesus. There was something in him that satisfied their hungry and thirsty souls. “Still more people gathered in the crowd”.

Jesus calls “this generation”, all his faithless contemporaries, an evil generation. The fact that they are asking for more signs shows that their hearts have been hardened by sin. That is why Jesus can call them an evil generation. The many miracles Jesus had already worked before their very eyes were not enough. They wanted more. Jesus mentioned some of the signs he had worked to John the Baptist’s disciples. “...the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them” (Lk 7:22). Discerning hearts would have recognized that Jesus was fulfilling an Isaian prophecy when the Messiah would come to deliver God’s people in a new exodus (Is 35: 5-6).

Jesus gives them Jonah as a sign. He had traveled a great distance from Palestine to Assyrian Nineveh to preach repentance to the Ninevites. When they heard him, even though they were pagans, they believed him and were converted to God as expressed by sincere penance. On Judgment Day the people of Nineveh will rise to condemn this generation. They repented at Jonah’s preaching, but Jesus is far greater than Jonah. He preached the arrival of the Kingdom of God. This generation is too hardened and entrenched in their sin to be moved even by the Son of God.

The Holy One of God came down from heaven to speak to them. But they would not change. They were too struck in their ways to appreciate his holy doctrine. Perhaps the dead crucified Christ will be a sufficiently significant sign to convince them of how hard hearted and sinful they were and cause them to repent. The queen of the South, from Sheba, came from afar to experience the Wisdom of Solomon. But there

is something greater than Solomon here: Jesus is Incarnate Wisdom. He is the wisdom of God in Person. He came to reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom of God for those who were disposed to hear. He came to fulfill what the prophets foretold and to bring to perfection the Mosaic Law, even to reveal the inner life of God, the Blessed Trinity. But that sinful generation was closed to listen to these mysteries hidden from all eternity.

Thursday- 1st Week in Lent

Mt 7:7-12

Jesus assures us that everyone who asks receives. He encourages us to ask: “Ask and it will be given to you.” This is an unconditional promise. A favorable response is absolute. One may wonder how this can be true when certain specific requests were not granted.

The Catechism states that, “Transformation of the praying heart is the first response of our petition” (CCC #2739). The moment we open our hearts to God in prayer, our faith is being exercised and we contact God. We are in communion with him therefore and a stream of grace flows into our trusting hearts. So the moment we begin to ask we start receiving. When we pray to God, we are centered on the Giver of gifts. We immediately begin to be spiritually enriched; we begin to receive more than we could ever ask for in material things.

Regarding requests for specific things, they will be given to us if they are good for us. St. John puts it this way, “And we have this confidence in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in regard to whatever we ask, we know that what we have asked him for is ours” (1 Jn 5:14-15). God’s will is for our good. If we should ask for something that would be detrimental for our good, he will give us something better.

Jesus also says, “Seek and you will find...the one who seeks, finds”. Our efforts to seek God

demands spirit assertiveness which disposes us for union with God. There is an immediate contact with God through such faith activity. Thus seeking God through prayer, for example, ends with finding him. We will find God in the measure we give ourselves: the prophet Jeremiah states it this way, “When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with all your heart, you will find me with you, says the Lord...” (Jer 29:12-14). Jesus also says, “Knock and the door will be opened to you.” Knocking is a symbol for prayer. Prayer is faith in action which immediately attains its divine object, God himself, who welcomes us into his dwelling place (Jn 14:23).

Just as a loving parent would not give an unworthy false substitute for a child’s request for bread or a fish, so neither would God. If humans who are so sinfully inclined give good gifts to their children, so much more will our heavenly Father give good things to his children who ask him. The golden rule uttered by the prophets and stated by the law is that we must do to others whatever we would have them do for us.

Friday- 1st Week in Lent Mt 5:20-26

Being right with God and his law among the scribes and Pharisees consisted of external conformity. Jesus went beyond that kind of righteousness. For it left the heart unchanged and not given over to God. Jesus’ new law called for a clean heart so that the very core of a person was free from sin and given over to God and his ways. Such a heart was surrendered to God’s love and grace.

The old law forbid killing another human being but did not deal with the angry heart that led to murder. Jesus went to the very root of the inclination to murder, that is, anger. He condemns murderous anger and insulting language that attack and demean another person. Such attitudes indicate that a person’s heart is full of hate, ready

to kill. That kind of extreme anger precipitates one to the fire of hell (“fiery Gehenna,” which, as a constantly burning pile of refuse, symbolized eternal punishment). The angry, murderous heart has already killed another without any external violence. The sin is an interior one. It all begins in the heart in which goodness and love have fled. Only hellish hate remains. Even if one has not laid hands on another, his defiled heart has lost all righteousness. Jesus wants to set things right. We must be in right relationships with one another. This begins with a forgiving heart which holds no grudge or resentment toward another. The heart must be left free for love. Peace must reign in it for God to reside there.

So if some misunderstanding or some form of hurt was experienced, there is a need for a friendly encounter and dialogue to bring the matter to a happy conclusion. The letting go of all resentment must ensue so that the heart is free for worship without the least trace of defilement.

It is imperative that we be reconciled to one another. Otherwise, we will be brought before the divine Judge who will condemn us to severe punishment. Does release after paying the “last penny” hint at temporal punishment after death and therefore purgatory?

Saturday- 1st Week in Lent Mt 5: 43-48

Jesus raises the standard of love and morality still higher. The general understanding in the Old Testament was “love your neighbor and hate your enemy”. Leviticus states, “...you shall not bear hatred for your brother in your heart.... Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your fellow countrymen. You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19: 17-18). Love of neighbor is understood as “fellow countrymen”. Love of neighbor here does not include foreigners. Psalm 139 says, “If only you would destroy the wicked, O God....Do I not hate, Lord, those who

hate you? Those who rise against you, do I not loathe? With fierce hatred I hate them, enemies I count as my own” (Ps 139: 19, 21-22). The new morality Jesus calls for is to extend our love beyond our fellow countrymen, even to hateful foreigners who have proven themselves to be enemies. We must express that love for them by praying for them, that their hardened hearts might be softened to love. We must also do good to those who hate us and bless those who curse us (Lk 6: 27-28).

God is love (1 Jn 4: 16) and we are his children, called to extend that divine love to those who hate us so that they can be softened to love and experience its heavenly peace. We must be like our heavenly Father who expresses his love through rain and sunshine on the evil as well as the good.

Returning love for love is good but it is natural even for our sinfully inclined human nature. We are also children of God and, through baptism, participate in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). Grace inclines us to love like God does. That puts us on a higher level and calls forth the reward of peace and communion with God. We are called to love supernaturally as prompted by grace and divine inspiration, beyond that of sinners and pagans who do not know God and his kind of love.

Jesus is calling us to the moral perfection that our heavenly Father exemplifies. “For I, the Lord, am your God; and you shall make and keep yourselves holy, because I am holy” (Lev 11:44). The moral perfection of the heavenly Father being demonstrated in this Sermon on the Mount is his astounding compassion: he is compassionate to both the good and the evil. He keeps on loving far beyond what is just. He does not retaliate with hate and punishment. He does not withdraw his loving kindness. He just keeps on loving and doing good. St. Luke’s Gospel translates “Be perfect as your heavenly Father” with, “Be merciful, just as also your Father is merciful” (Lk 6: 36).

Monday- 2nd Week in Lent Lk 6:36-38

The superabundant grace flowing from the open heart of Jesus brought about by his total self gift in love through his passion, death, and resurrection prompts us to love the way he loves. After calling us to love our enemies and to respond with loving kindness to those who abuse us, Jesus ends by commanding, “Be merciful, just as also your Father is merciful”. Mercy shown to others is seen as the pinnacle of love. Mercy is love extending itself beyond itself to its greatest perfection. Mercy expresses itself in letting go and forgiving an evil done to oneself. It seeks no retaliation. It does not try to get even. It is aware of the words, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord” (Rom 12:19). But its primary concern is love. It flees enmities. It will not be drawn into contention and fighting. It lets go of the evil done to oneself and will not allow itself to be contaminated by it. It holds on to love at all costs. It is caught up in the understanding that God is love and refuses to be taken away from that loving disposition in which it finds itself—to its great joy.

In commanding us to stop judging others, Jesus explains what he means in the next sentence: “Stop condemning and you will not be condemned”. We must evaluate other people’s actions and so judge whether they are good or evil—but without condemning them. For we know ourselves as sinners, and not in a position to condemn others—only God knows their consciences. If their external actions are wrong, we do not know what their hearts are telling them.

We are called to forgive any sins committed against us, even as Jesus forgave those who were crucifying him. We are called to give generously, even more than we are inclined. In that way we break the bonds of selfishness and open ourselves to be spiritually enriched by God. What we receive is far greater than what we gave.

Tuesday- 2nd Week in Lent Mt 23:1-12

“Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples” to advise and warn them about the scribes and Pharisees. These have “taken their seat on the chair of Moses”. The chair of Moses symbolizes the authority of the scribes to teach. It is also the name given the seat from which the teacher delivered the homily in the synagogue. The rabbis enjoyed a tradition of interpreting the Law that was traced back to Moses. Jesus proceeded to say, “Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example.” Jesus warns the people to be sure to distinguish the Law as read out and taught in the synagogues from the practical interpretations of the Law to be seen in their leaders’ lifestyles. “For they preach but do not practice”. The teaching of the scribes and Pharisees may be sound, although it is too rigorous, but their way of life, based as it is on personal pride and ambition, ruins any merit their teaching could earn for them. Jesus explains further how he finds fault with these religious leaders: “They tie up heavy burdens hard to carry and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them.” These “heavy burdens hard to carry” are the scribes’ interpretations of the Law and the imposition of these interpretations on others. For example, out of compassion Jesus cured on a Sabbath, a woman who was all bent over for 18 years. The leader of the synagogue was indignant with him instead of being overwhelmed with joy at her deliverance. Such leaders would allow one to water an ox on the Sabbath, but not permit Jesus to heal the afflicted woman. Do you find that love permeates your dealings with your family and others—or harshness, insensitivity, and a lack of compassion? Now Jesus begins to expose their vanity and pride, “All their works,” he said, “are performed to be seen. They widen their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels.” What are phylacteries? The phylacteries were tiny, oblong, leather-covered cases containing four strips of parchment on which were written the most

important words of the Law, such as the command to love the one God with all their hearts. These were fastened to the left wrist and to the forehead in such a way that they hung in front of their eyes. The professional Pharisee would wear this phylactery all day long and be sure that they were large enough to be seen, to mark themselves out as more religiously observant than others. That was prideful and blameworthy.

They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greeting in marketplaces, and the salutation: Rabbi.” The Pharisees were greedy for honor and recognition; but Jesus insists that every form of authority, particularly in the context of religion, should be exercised as a form of service to others... The word Rabbi literally means “my great one”; it was a title of respect for teachers and leaders. But instead of giving glory to God, whose teaching authority they bore, they usurped it for themselves. All human titles are only shadows of God’s authority from which they derive. Note that Jesus is not a language teacher regulating the use of certain words. He is a doctor of the spirit. He forbids, for example, any acknowledgement of fatherhood that obscures the fatherhood of God—nothing more. He would not forbid a human son to use the word “father”, nor would he forbid the term addressed to one who is God’s representative; in this case, indeed, it serves to remind its user of the fatherhood of God. In writing to the Corinthians, St. Paul did not hesitate to say, “... for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (1Cor 4:15). A spiritual guide is not independent but is subject to the one Teacher and Guide, Jesus Christ himself. And this is how the Gospel ends today, “The greatest among you must be your servant.” The person most closely united to God has the deepest humility and the highest, strongest love. Such a person expresses his spiritual greatness or high sanctity through various forms of service to others. We pray to have the humble attitude of Mary, our Mother, and consider ourselves the servants of the Lord and of his people.

Wednesday- The 2nd Week in Lent

Mt 20: 17-28

On their way to Jerusalem Jesus took the twelve apostles aside by themselves and, for the third time, told them about his sufferings, death and resurrection (see also Mt 17: 21-23; 17: 22-23). He gives more details in this prediction. He will be handed over to the Gentiles, mocked, scourged, and crucified. Jesus always concludes that he will be raised on the third day. The apostles and their family members still have the worldly idea about the Kingdom of God that is going to be established by Jesus. The mother of James and John came to petition Jesus for the two highest places of honor in the kingdom.

Jesus asks the two apostles whether they can drink the cup that he is going to drink. This refers to Jesus' suffering that he will endure for the redemption of the world. The two brothers answered that they were able. As a matter of fact James suffered death by the sword, which means that he was beheaded (Acts 12:2). He was the second person to suffer martyrdom after Stephen (Acts 7: 54-60). According to tradition, all the apostles died as martyrs, except John. He was exiled on the island of Patmos (Rev 1:9). John suffered as well, however, for he speaks of "the distress...and the endurance we have in Jesus".

Jesus assured the brothers that they would drink of his cup of suffering, but it was not for him to give them the places of honor (to sit on his right and at his left) that they are requesting. That is the privileged right of the Father. The other ten apostles became very angry that the two brothers were trying to get ahead of them. None of them had yet grasped the spirit that Jesus was trying to impart to them. Only the Holy Spirit will enable them to understand and live according to that spirit. So Jesus summoned the group together and proceeded to explain to them the attitude that was needed in the Kingdom of God.

The way things are done in the Kingdom of God is entirely different from the world. Those with political power exert their authority over others and make themselves served. But in the kingdom greatness consists in charity which moves those in authority to serve out of humility. The one who is first and at the top must distinguish himself by becoming the servant of all those he rules. He must be like Jesus, the Son of Man, who came to serve others rather than be served. He came to give his life for the redemption of the world.

Thursday- The 2nd Week of Lent

Lk 16:19-31

Money is everything in the eyes of the world; it is a kind of god which people worship. In today's Gospel, Jesus explains further why he called money the mammon of iniquity. He demonstrates its dangers and evil effects in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. "There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day." Here we already see how riches tempt us to luxury, which caters to sense life. Since "God is Spirit" (Jn 4:24) we can only remain in communion with him if we live on the level of spirit. But riches tend to foster the life of the flesh instead and strengthen the life of the senses. Thus we are indisposed to commune with God; we become blind to spiritual realities. In order to derive profit from spiritual activities, we must begin to live on the level of spirit.

"And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores." It was customary at that time for a family or friends to place a cripple at a street corner or at one of the gates of the city or near the entrance to a rich man's home so that he could collect enough alms to eke out some kind of living. But the rich man was too

engrossed in himself and his pleasures to give Lazarus even the scraps of food that fell from the table. The problem with the rich man was not that he had riches, but that he had become callous and selfish, blind and deaf to the needs of the poor who was so close to him. What was his sin? He was too self-indulgent and self-centered to be able to see Lazarus's plight. He did not use his wealth in a way that was in conformity with God's will (See CCC #2405, #2446, #2448). Let us remember today: we all have needy people living alongside of us—people like Lazarus. In addition to the sharing of material goods, we should also be sowers of understanding sympathy and friendship. We are not forbidden to have some of the world's goods. We need some, and God provided them for our use. But we must use them properly and not set them up as idols to be adored.

“When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham”. As in life, Lazarus had no one to care for him, so in death, there was no one to bury him. So the angels came for him and brought him to Abraham's bosom; there all his needs were fulfilled in the bliss of the eschatological (heavenly) banquet.

“The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.” The rich man is nameless throughout the Gospel, while the beggar Lazarus' name is given as if to reverse the world's opinion. In the next world, the nobodies will be somebodies. The first will be last and the last first. The rich man was buried with due pomp and ceremony, as we would expect. But then, what happened after he died and was buried? We read that “he was in torment”. He had no life of the spirit to enjoy communion with God. Heavenly life is a communion of love and respect for others. The rich man was totally unprepared for that kind of life: How do you treat people at home and at work?

The rich man cried out, “Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his

finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.” But the time for repentance and mercy is in this life. Now is the time to change; now is the time to begin making proper use of wealth by sharing some of it with the needy and the deprived or other charitable works. In this way we free ourselves from wealth's addictive hold on us so that our hearts can give itself to its primary call—which is to love God with our whole heart and our neighbor as ourselves.

Friday- The 2nd Week in Lent

Mt 21: 33-43, 45-46

The parable of the wicked tenants is an allegory, that is, each of its details is important and symbolic. The landowner is God, the vineyard is Jerusalem, the tenants are Israel's leaders, and the servants are the Old Testament prophets who were persecuted for preaching to Israel about its sins. The son is Jesus who will be thrown outside of the vineyard and crucified outside the city. Because of the wickedness of the tenants, God will put them to death when he judges Jerusalem through the Roman army who destroyed it in A.D. 70. He will entrust the New Covenant Kingdom to the other tenants, which is the Church.

God established the chosen people in the Promised Land and cared for them with love, symbolized by a well-prepared vineyard. God sent his prophets to look after the people to encourage them in the practice of virtue through keeping the Law of Moses. But the ruling class persecuted them, even to the point of death. Over the years God sent more prophets to show the people the right way by doing God's will. The leaders treated these just as harshly. In his goodness God decided to send his Son to guide them and teach them the way of holiness. Surely, he thought, this would win their hearts and make them understand to do what is right and produce good works. Instead, they attacked the Son as well; they led him outside of

the vineyard, representing Jerusalem, and killed him so they could inherit the vineyard. This brings out how Jesus was crucified outside of the city.

As a result of all this hardhearted cruelty, God put all these wicked leaders to death through the invasion of the Roman army. He then gave his Kingdom to a new people and established the Church who would then produce good and virtuous works. Jesus quotes Psalm 118: 22-23 to prophesy that the stone, representing Jesus, which the leaders rejected, became the cornerstone of the Church through the resurrection.

The Kingdom will be taken from Israel and given to the Gentiles who will form the Catholic Church along with some of the faithful Jewish disciples. The Chief priest and Pharisees realized that Jesus was speaking about them, but they were afraid to arrest him because they feared the crowds.

Saturday- The 2nd Week of Lent

Lk 15: 1-3, 11-31

The Gospel today begins with sinners drawing near to listen to Jesus. The merciful love of God the Father in Jesus, working through the Holy Spirit, attracted sinners. They felt the solace of his love; he understood them. They experienced compassion in Jesus whose name means "God saves" his people from their sins (Mt 1:21). His merciful love brought peace and healing to their troubled hearts... These were repentant sinners. They had experienced the evil of sin and the unhappiness that it brought into their lives. They wanted to change. Their hearts were open to Jesus' person and his words. Jesus received these repentant sinners with compassion and love... However, there were other sinners there who were not happy with Jesus. They complained that Jesus welcomed sinners and ate with them. They were not open to Jesus' forgiveness... The other sinners, the Pharisees and Scribes, did not believe they were sinners because they kept the external letter of the law. They failed to realize that their internal attitude did not correspond to

their external actions... For example, they may not have committed adultery, but they lusted; they may not have stolen, but they coveted; they may not have killed, but they hated unto death... The humble sinners were drawn to Jesus. But the proud, unrepentant ones hated him. They could not see or acknowledge their kind of sin. They were too proud to even see their own sinfulness... So Jesus told a parable with the hope of helping them to see themselves. The parable is a story about a very kind, loving, generous, and merciful father. This good father had two sons whose attitudes demonstrated two kinds of sinfulness... First, Jesus tells about the younger son. The good father gave into his demand for his share of inheritance. "Life was too dull on the farm," he thought. He wanted to go off and really live it up. The father allowed his son to go off and experience life for himself. The son soon learned that happiness is not in things. He spent everything he owned without finding any happiness in giving in to his passions and desires... His humiliation and pain were illuminating. He began to see what he had lost. Happiness was being with his father, living in the joy of his company with the farmhands. Happiness is a matter of heart, heart full of love and gratitude to God, our parents, and other benefactors or friends... He would return home and beg forgiveness from his father... In the second part of the parable, Jesus speaks about the older son. He demonstrates another kind of sinfulness. The older son found out about his brother's return as he was coming back from the field. He inquired from a servant about the music and dancing. When he heard it was because his brother was back, he became infuriated and refused to go in. His good father came out pleading with him to join in the celebration. But he adamantly refused. He was insulted that his younger brother was given such a joyful and extravagant reception after demonstrating such irresponsible behavior. He should have been severely reprimanded and punished! Instead, he is received with joy, showered with love and honors... What about him? The older son who has been so faithful and obedient to his father? He felt neglected, unloved... How do we respond

to this older son's hurt feelings?... The older son, representing the Pharisees, did not give the father his heart. He kept it for himself as he begrudgingly obeyed his orders. Where was his heart? —On himself? —On his own dreams and desires? —On all the property he is going to inherit? Where is your heart as you go about fulfilling your daily duties? The human father represents the divine Father. As we obey his command, we must also give our hearts to him... If we withhold our heart from God, it becomes empty, void, a black hole... On the other hand, if we repent and give our hearts to God in love and gratitude, we are filled with God's reciprocal love and holy presence. We become loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, generous, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled (see Gal 5:22-23).

Monday- The 3rd Week in Lent

Lk 4: 24-30

Jesus begins by saying, “no prophet is accepted in his own native place”. Is it not because people are too familiar with the prophet? We say, “Familiarity breeds contempt.”

“Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” ...What Scripture passage? “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...to bring glad tidings to the poor...liberty to captives...sight to the blind... and to free the oppressed...” (Is 61: 1-2). Jesus is declaring the great jubilee year. He is the anointed one (English), the Messiah (Hebrew) the Christ (Greek). The divinity, communicated through the Holy Spirit, flows from Jesus' heart to sanctify us, for he is the source of the divine Spirit. At his baptism..., the Father came out of his silence from heaven to tell us that Jesus is his beloved Son in whom he is well pleased (see Mk 1: 9-11). The messianic era has arrived; the age of salvation—after centuries of waiting (cf Abraham 1850 BC). God is faithful to his promises. He fulfills and carries out what the prophets announced long ago. He comes to celebrate the great jubilee year in Person—in the Person of Jesus. He comes to

deliver us from the oppression, the captivity, and the blinding and impoverishing effects of sin. He is ever present with us through his Holy Spirit.

This Jesus, the Holy One of God, who is saturated with the divine Spirit of the Father, is freely available to us. At our baptism, Jesus, one with the Father in the love of the Holy Spirit, came to dwell within our very heart (Jn 14:23).

“All spoke highly of him and were amazed at his gracious words.” Words of grace and salvation flowed like honey out of Jesus as charm and eloquence. The people began to ask, “Isn't this the son of Joseph?” They began to reflect on Jesus' family background, his occupation and upbringing in Nazareth. Who is he trying to make himself to be? He is only the son of a carpenter. We know him. He is trying to make himself more than he really is. The natural and the familiar were barriers too formidable for them to overcome. Their prejudice takes over. They no longer listened and allowed their hearts to be ministered to by Jesus' words of grace. They refused to allow Jesus to anoint them with the Holy Spirit....Sometimes we allow our familiarity with our priests and their faults and limitations to interfere with our being able to listen to their challenging words—although ordination has configured the priest to Christ. He becomes the instrument of Christ himself: “He who hears you hears me.” It is the priesthood of Jesus directly operating through them. When we resist the words of God's priest we are fighting against God himself.

“Do here in your native place (Nazareth) the things that we heard were done in Capernaum”. The people were looking for the wrong kind of Messiah, a worldly one instead of a spiritual one. They were primarily interested in miracles for their curiosity. In response, Jesus explains to his fellow townsmen that they put him in the same position as Elijah and Elisha. It is the faith of two gentiles, the widow of Zaphath and Naaman the Syrian that merited miracles from these prophets. The people of Nazareth lacked faith. This lack of faith prevented Jesus from performing any miracle of healing for them (Mk 6:5). The suggestion that

Gentiles were better disposed than the people of Nazareth was an insult and produced an outburst of fury and nationalist fervor. However, the angry mob was overawed by the sheer majesty of Jesus' commanding presence.

They could not touch him: "Jesus passed through the midst of them and went away". He enjoyed divine protection. They were left high and dry to think about their sin—only wanting to be entertained by miracles and passing temporal benefits. Is that what you are looking for in your religion and in your prayers?

Tuesday- The 3rd Week in Lent

Mt 18: 21-35

Our Gospel today begins with a question Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?" Peter was trying to be generous. But he put a limit to the number of times we would forgive someone who sins against us. We, ourselves, are always offending God...who never stops forgiving us, provided we are sorry for offending him...and we must reflect that forgiving love to others.

Jesus answered Peter's question with, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times" which symbolizes an unlimited number of times... and those who belong to the kingdom must reflect that forgiving love in their relationships with others. When Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants..." we are reminded that judgment day is coming...and we are accountable for the way we treat others and for the proper management of our lives.

The parable continues, "A debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount," (literally 10,000 talents). This would be equivalent to \$10 million. "Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property,

in payment of the debt"; therefore, a form of punishment. At the threat of being sold, "The servant fell down, did him homage, and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.'" Although the official asks for patience to pay everything, it is clear that he cannot possibly do so. This symbolizes the sin of man against God; it is a debt which cannot be wiped out by man... and condemns the debtor to eternal bondage.

"Moved with compassion [at the servant's plea] the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan." The king does not take up the promise of repayment; he forgives the debt completely: the fantastic sum of \$10 million, which represents our debt toward God—wiped out completely out of sheer mercy and generosity. "When the servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount" (literally 100 denarii). This would be equivalent to \$20.00. "He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, 'Pay back what you owe.' Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' Instead, he had the fellow servant put in prison until he paid back the debt." If God has forgiven us all, equivalent to \$10 million, how much more should we be ready to forgive the petty sins, equivalent to \$20.00, of those who have done wrong to us? Our neighbor's offenses against us can never compare with ours against God—and still God forgives. Nevertheless, our forgiveness of neighbor is the condition of God's pardon of us. If man does not forgive, he cannot expect forgiveness. When the king heard of the matter, he summoned the servant and said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me too. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?" Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt." But he will never be able to raise so large a sum; therefore, his imprisonment and suffering will never come to an end—and that's the equivalent of hell.

Jesus concludes the parable with, "So will my

heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart.” Acting in forgiveness is the way of the kingdom; God pardons those who pardon others. Unforgiveness can easily turn to bearing a grudge, a deep-seated resentment and stewing anger that would make us hostile and incline us to seek revenge...Sometimes people say, “I forgive but I can’t forget.” The hurt of the injury may be so severe that it tends to linger in our memory. We can use this memory to intercede for the one who harmed us and draw divine mercy from God to be able to forgive. Such love and mercy may very well one day erase the memory of the hurt and be replaced by the memory of the loving and forgiving Jesus on the cross, who was praying for his murderers, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34). In so doing, Good Friday will become Easter Sunday for us.

Wednesday- The 3rd Week in Lent Mt 5: 17-19

Jesus came to bring to perfection what the law and the prophets had laid down. His mission was to bring them to completion.

His purpose was to build on what had already been taught. But here he was thinking in terms of the Ten Commandments, not the various minute prescriptions of ceremonies of purification.

Jesus went beyond the external letter of the law; he went to the heart of it, to the very core. He did not stop at the external sin of murder; he went to the uncontrolled anger that brought it about. It is in that sense that he brought the law to completion. Jesus also condemned words that expressed and intensified that anger. The law forbade adulterous unfaithfulness in marriage. Jesus condemned the lustfulness that led to it. He also clarified the severe punishment due such sins and the need to take the means to avoid the occasions of sin. He taught that it is those who are pure of heart who will see God.

He preached the importance of a forgiving heart and that an unforgiving heart is an impediment to friendship with God. Only the forgiving person will be forgiven.

The Scribes had made it their business to reduce the great principles of the Law to thousands of rules and regulations. The Pharisees separated themselves from all the ordinary activities of life to keep all these rules. This was the oral law which was never written down until later when they were codified in the Mishnah. These are the rules that Jesus ignored and did not consider as part of the law which he came to build on and perfect. It is especially the law of love that Jesus brought to perfection. He urged generous self-gift to others. He commended and exemplified humility in service. He pushed love to its height in loving one’s enemies. He advocated utter generosity in selfless giving. He challenged us to love unto self-sacrifice the way he loved. Love is the fulfillment of the law. That is how Jesus perfected the law and the prophets. He taught that the whole law and the prophets depend on the love of God and neighbor (Mt 22:40). He brought the divine law to its highest point of perfection by his own dying out of love for his enemies and all of us sinners. These least commandments lead us to the highest perfection of love and greatness in the Kingdom of God.

Thursday- The 3rd Week in Lent Lk 11: 14-23

Jesus was one with his Father in power. He was able to cast out evil spirits with ease. In this case it was a spirit that caused his victim to be mute. Having cast out the evil spirit Jesus then proceeded to enable the mute to speak. It was usually the Pharisees who attacked Jesus at every opportunity. They claimed in this instance that Jesus cast out demons by the prince of demons. Beelzebul was a derogatory name for Satan.

Others who were present at the scene were not satisfied with the evidence Jesus gave of his godly power when he exorcized the demons. They demanded a more spectacular sign to prove himself. Jesus did not encourage their bad will by another miracle. They were too hard hearted to be convinced by any sign.

Jesus proceeded to show that their reasoning made no sense when they claimed that it was by the chief devil that he had cast out a minor demon. Satan is not that stupid that he would fight against himself. Should he do that he would destroy his own kingdom.

The Jews had their own exorcists, and with much difficulty, would sometimes succeed in casting out demons. Jesus asks, then, how did their people cast out demons? Their own exorcists would condemn their false reasoning.

Jesus argues, “But if it is by the finger of God that I drive out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you”. The phrase “finger of God” is taken from Exodus 8:15 when Pharaoh’s magicians admitted that it was Aaron’s staff that caused the gnats to infest their area. St. Matthew interprets “finger of God” as referring to the Holy Spirit (Mt 12: 28). So it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus casts out demons.

The demon is like a strong man fully armed guarding his palace. The only reason why the demon left the mute that he possessed is because Jesus is stronger than he and overpowered him.

Whoever is not with Jesus in understanding this has taken sides against him. Thus he shows those arguing against him to be his enemies siding with Satan himself. Rather than cause people to be drawn and brought to Jesus who is the truth, they cause them to fall away from the truth and driven away.

Friday- The 3rd Week in Lent Mk 12: 28-34

A scribe is one who is learned in the written Law of Moses and the oral traditions. They interpreted the Scriptures but Jesus condemned them for the burdensome additions to the law which made it difficult for the people to carry it out.

This particular scribe seems to respect Jesus. He saw how well Jesus answered the Sadducees and seems sincere in wanting to know the answer to his question: Among the 613 precepts, some positive and some negative, which is the first and greatest?

Jesus had no hesitation in answering his question. He summarizes the entire Old Testament in two Commandments. The greatest is the Shema (the Hebrew word for “hear”); it is taken from Deut 6:4-5. This citation came to be known as the Shema, named after the first words of Deut 6:4. The Shema became the Jewish confession of faith. It was recited by pious Jews every morning and evening. Every synagogue service begins with it. It is stated in these words, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength”. The Israelites were to drill those words into their children, and speak of them at home and abroad, whether they were busy or at rest. They were to bind them at their wrists as a sign and keep them before their minds. They were to write them on the doorposts of their houses and on their gates (see Deut 6: 6-9).

Then Jesus did something new. He added the love of neighbor to the love of God from Lev 19:18, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” And for Jesus, “neighbor” goes beyond those who lived among them, whether fellow Jews or aliens—it included foreigners and even enemies.

The Ten Commandments anticipated this double concept of love. For there we are commanded to love God in the first three, and to love our neighbor in the last seven. In these instances God is quite specific on how we are called to love.

We must realize that God is love (1 Jn 4:16) and love is the most important activity of all. Love must fill all of our actions, all of our times, all of our day, all of our minds and hearts.

The Scribe was in accord with what Jesus said. So Jesus complimented him. He was close to entry into the Kingdom of God.

Saturday- The 3rd Week in Lent Lk 18:9-14

“Jesus addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else.”

It may be possible, at least for certain brief periods of our lives, to keep the external letter of the law. But because of original sin, we are often, sooner or later, inclined to personal sin. The Pharisees were experts at keeping the external letter of the Law of Moses, but the fact that they “despised everyone else” immediately warns us of the shallowness or incompleteness of their holiness. Their external conformity with certain aspects of the Law was the extent of their holiness. Internally, however, they were oozing with sin. Their ability to keep certain aspects of the letter of the Law of Moses brought them to the conclusion that they were better than others. This led them to despise everyone else. To despise means to look down on with contempt or aversion; to condemn implies a vehement condemnation of a person. Surely such an attitude is a serious sin against love for others. Leviticus 19:18 says, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” This is one instance, for example, that the Pharisees did not keep the whole Law. We learn from this that the ability to keep the Law of

God must come from God. God is above us. He is supernatural. To live his kind of life requires a union with him and a holy dependence on him. This requires the virtue of humility, which gives us a sense of our own lowliness and poverty of being. This virtue inclines us to a holy dependence on God for everything. Pride, on the other hand, is undue self-exaltation. This capital sin inclines us to be self-centered and independent of God. It can contaminate all of our good work. Pride also blinds us to our sins and weaknesses.

An example of how pride blinded the Pharisees from seeing their sins can be found in St. Matthew’s Gospel, Chapter 23. Jesus exposes their sins; here are some examples in the form of quotes: “All their works are performed to be seen.” So the Pharisees were not without sin, as they thought they were. Jesus is teaching us about the attitude we ought to have when we go to prayer. He does this by telling the parable of “two people [who] went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector.” The Pharisee’s prayer is boastful and self-congratulatory. He is very self-centered as he compares himself to others. He tells God how good, how perfect he is. He does much more than the Law requires. For example, instead of fasting once a year, on the Day of Atonement, he fasts twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays! That means no food or drink—not even water—from sunrise to sunset. That’s quite a feat in that hot, dry country. The Pharisee is very full of himself; he is blind to his own sinfulness, such as judging and condemning others without really knowing their hearts. So the Pharisee leaves the temple with the same burden of sins that he came with. He left without God or his grace of justification that would have made him right with God. Our conscience echoes back to us whether we are in conformity with the will or law of God or not. We must grieve over the least sin and ask God’s forgiveness. We pray for the grace to overcome our weakness. If our contrition is perfect, our hearts are totally cleansed so that no moral contamination or stain remains.

Monday- The 4th Week in Lent

Jn 4: 43-54

The Samaritans were so receptive to Jesus that he spent two days there with them. They were impressed to no end with Jesus and could say, "...we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world" (Jn 4: 42). Although it is said, "a prophet has no honor in his native place", we see in this passage that the Galileans welcomed Jesus. For, they had gone to Jerusalem and seen for themselves all that he had done. Perhaps that was their main reason for welcoming him. People were always looking for miracles of healing. Jesus was hoping that these miracles would move them to faith that he must be from God.

Jesus then went to Cana where he had changed water into wine. There was a royal official there; he was probably under Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee. This officer heard about Jesus. We do not know whether he was Jew or Gentile. He went from Capernaum to Cana where Jesus was—about fifteen miles away—to ask him to come to heal his son who was at the point of death. Jesus expressed his concern that people needed to see miracles (signs and wonders) before they would believe. But the man expressed implicit faith in Jesus' ability to heal his son by pleading with him to hurry to his Son before he died.

Jesus, then, tested his faith by telling him to go home, that his son would live. The man proved his faith by following Jesus' orders—he went on his way back home. His son improved miraculously—immediately. His servants met him on the way back home and reported to the officer that his boy was going to live. Upon enquiring when he began to improve, he was told at one o'clock in the afternoon. This was the exact time that Jesus told him that his son would live. At this second miracle in Galilee, the officer's faith in Jesus was confirmed. His whole household began to believe in Jesus.

Tuesday- The 4th Week in Lent

Jn 5: 1-16

We do not know which feast of the Jews is being referred to—it is not significant. Jesus left Cana after healing the officer's son fifteen miles away. He then went to Jerusalem. There was a sheep gate in the North East wall of the temple area where animals for sacrifice were brought in. Nearby was a pool with five porches where a large number of ill, blind, lame and crippled lay. One man lay there who had been ill for thirty-eight years (that is the number of years it took the Jews to reach the Promised Land) (Deut 2:14). Jesus saw him lying there and knew he had been ill for a long time.

When Jesus asked the man if he wanted to get well, he explained that he had no one to help him get to the water when it stirred. Apparently there was an intermittent spring that became active at certain times. Perhaps it had certain minerals with healing qualities that cured the first to enter when the water began to flow. Others would always get there first. Jesus had pity on the man and said to him, "Rise, take up your mat, and walk." Immediately, Jesus' life-giving words healed the man. He took up his mat and began to walk. This reminds us how valuable it is for us to spend time listening to God's word. They are life-giving as well as therapeutic.

The day this happened, however, was a Sabbath. So the Jews, the leaders who were strict observers of the Sabbath, told the man that it was not lawful for him to carry his mat. The man explained that it was the one who healed him who told him to do so. He did not know Jesus' name.

Jesus had slipped away from the crowd. When Jesus saw the man again, he told him not to sin any more so that nothing worse would happen to him. It is because of Adam's sin that illness has come into the world. But perhaps Jesus knew of some sinful habit that this man had. The man then told the Jewish authorities that it was Jesus

who had made him well. They began to persecute Jesus for healing on the Sabbath.

Wednesday- The 4th Week in Lent Jn 5:13-30

The Father created the world out of nothing. If he would not unceasingly sustain it by his power, it would return to its nothingness. In that sense, the Father is always working—even on the Sabbath he continues to sustain the world in being. For, it is “In him we live and move and have our being”

(Acts 17: 28). And Jesus is one with the Father in his divinity (Jn 10:30). In this way Jesus is implying that he is equal to God. It would take the resurrection to convince people of that amazing truth.

Jesus does what the Father does. If the Father is at work even on the Sabbath, Jesus can rightfully do the same. The Father in his love for him shows the son everything that he must do. If his critics think Jesus’ miraculous healing of the man lying on his mat was something, they will be even more amazed when they see him raise Lazarus from the dead. Jesus claims to be able to raise people from the dead just as the Father. The Father has extended to Jesus a divine privilege which is to judge, to acquit or condemn. Actually people condemn or acquit themselves when they reject or accept Jesus (Jn 3:19). Those who dishonor the Son dishonor the Father.

Jesus has the power to give eternal life. We receive that life by believing in his word and the Father who sent him. Such faith gives a person eternal life. Faith leads to baptism and the forgiveness of sins so that we avoid the judgment of condemnation. We begin to participate in divine life. We overcome the death of sin, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23). Even now we have passed from death to life and begin to live the eternal life (see Jn 17:3).

Those who are dead in sin, who hear the voice of Jesus, the Son of God, and believe him will begin to live. Faith connects us to Jesus and his life-giving power.

The eternal life possessed by the Father is given to the Son who also possesses it in himself. The Son of Man as described in Dan 7:13-14 foresees Jesus glorified and as endowed with all power and authority to judge the world. There will come a day, when the Lord returns, that all who are in the tombs will hear his voice. They will be resurrected and come to life and come out of their tombs. Those who have done good will resurrect to a glorious life; those who have lived unrepentant, evil lives will arise to condemnation. Jesus is so united to his Father that he judges as the Father judges. He always judges according to the Father’s Will.

Thursday- The 4th Week in Lent Jn 5:31-47

One witness alone is insufficient in court; “a judicial fact shall be established only on the testimony of two or three witnesses” (Deut 19:15). Jesus is going to present five witnesses on his behalf who testify to his authenticity: he is sent by the Father and speaks the truth.

Jesus is speaking to the Jews, that is, those leaders who are opposed to him. When they sent their followers to John the Baptist, he told them that he was not the Messiah, and that he saw the Spirit come down upon Jesus, anointing him as Messiah (Jn 1:32-34).

Jesus is presenting John as his witness for his opponents’ sake, to help them understand the truth and believe in him. John is like a beacon of light as a witness to truth.

A second witness that Jesus is truly sent by God are all of the miracles for the sick and lame

testifying to God's love for the poor. His love and mercy for sinners and his good works toward them show that he is sent by God.

Thirdly, the Father himself speaks on Jesus' behalf, such as at Jesus' baptism, calling Jesus his beloved Son in whom he is well pleased (Mt 3:17). But his hearers do not understand because they are indisposed to hear God's voice within their hearts which are hardened by resistance to grace. They have no true heart knowledge of God. They do not keep the word of God in their hearts to dictate to them what is God's will.

Jesus' fourth witness that he has been sent by God is the Holy Scriptures. He is the one they are speaking about as the one who is to come (see Mal 3:1). He is the woman's offspring who will crush the serpents' head (Gen 3:14). All of the Scriptures' promises are fulfilled in him. Yet Jesus' opponents will not believe and come to him that they may have life. Their unbelief shows that they do not have true love for God. Jesus comes in the Father's name but they will not accept him. But they accept others who come in their own name because they are like themselves. They seek praise from one another instead of from God.

Jesus' fifth witness that he comes from God is Moses. He will accuse them before God for their disbelief. It is about Jesus that Moses wrote. For example, Jesus is the Prophet Moses speaks of to whom they must listen (Deut 18:15). If they truly believed Moses, they would also believe Jesus.

Friday- The 4th Week in Lent **Jn 7:1-2, 10, 25-30**

The "Jews", the leaders who were opposed to Jesus, were trying to kill him. In perfecting the law and giving its proper interpretation, Jesus was overturning their oral traditions that made it so difficult for the people to keep the genuine aspects of the Law of Moses. For example, these "Jews" had a misconception

of how the Sabbath rest was to be kept. They went to such an extreme that they were against Jesus healing on the Sabbath. These "Jews" were too prideful to see the value of what Jesus was doing. They could not distinguish what was good and what was bad in their teaching. They were so angry with Jesus and his actions that they wanted to get rid of him. They were looking for opportunities to kill him. That is why Jesus kept away from appearing publicly in Judea.

The feast of Tabernacles was near. This is one of the feasts that the men were to attend each year (Deut 16:16). It was a joyful feast that lasted seven days. It was also called the feast of Booths. They celebrated the completion of the autumn harvest and how God provided for them as they journeyed through the desert toward the Promised Land. During this feast the pilgrims dwelled in small huts made of tree branches called booths. Huge crowds attended this feast. Jesus decided to go to this feast privately when the feast was half over. While there he began to teach. The people were amazed at Jesus' knowledge. They said, "How does he know scripture without having studied?" (Jn 7:15). If we want to be like Jesus we also must read and learn the scriptures.

When the people observed Jesus teaching, they were surprised. They asked, "Is he not the one they are trying to kill? And look, he is speaking openly and they say nothing to him. Could the authorities have realized that he is the Messiah?"

The people thought they knew where Jesus was originally from so they discarded the idea that he could be the Messiah. They believed that no one would know where the Messiah was from.

Jesus overheard their conversation and cried out in the temple area, commenting on what they said. They think they know him, but they really don't. He comes from the Father. They can only really know him when they realize that he is the one sent by God whom they do not know. But Jesus knows him because he comes from him and was sent by him.

They tried to arrest Jesus but no one laid a hand on him because his hour had not yet come. His Father protected him from harm until the hour of his passion.

Saturday- The 4th Week in Lent **Jn 7:40-53**

Some who heard Jesus speak were so impressed with him and his words they believed him to be the Prophet that Moses said God would send. All were to listen to him (Deut 18:15); In other words, and as others said, “This is the Messiah”.

But there was a division among the people; still others questioned whether the Messiah would come from Galilee. They reasoned that the Messiah would come from David’s family, from Bethlehem, the place where David came from. So the people were undecided as to who Jesus was. They could not figure him out. They really did not know all the facts about him as we do.

This helps us to understand how privileged we are in knowing all the facts about Jesus’ origin and how the gospels help us put all the facts together. This helps us put all the pieces of the puzzle to figure it out and see the whole picture to convince us that Jesus is really the Messiah that God promised to send us.

Again we see that some of them wanted to arrest Jesus but no one laid hands on him.

The guards who were sent by the Chief Priests and Pharisees to arrest Jesus came back empty handed. (These Chief Priests and the Pharisees are the ones St. John refers to by the term “the Jews”.) They asked the guards, “Why did you not bring him?” The guards answered, “Never before has anyone spoken like this one.” This reminds us how Jesus held the crowds spellbound by his teaching. For example, the crowds remained

three days in the desert listening to him until they ran out of food.

But the Pharisees were on a different wave-length. Their pride and self-centeredness blinded them to the truth. They were totally opposed to Jesus and what he stood for and taught. They felt that those who differed from them were accursed, damnable. Only Nicodemus who had come to Jesus by night (Jn 3:1-2) differed from them. He stated that the law does not condemn a person before it first hears him out and investigates his actions. But the others countered that no prophet comes from Galilee (where Jesus lived).

Monday- The 5th Week in Lent **Jn 8:1-11**

Jesus spent the night on the Mount of Olives. The Garden of Gethsemane was located there. It probably belonged to a friend and disciple of Jesus. Jesus would go there to pray, or even sleep when it was too late to go to Bethany where Martha, Mary and Lazarus lived. Mount of Olives was a ridge a little more than a mile long. It is directly east of Jerusalem and rises to a height of about 2,700 feet, some 200 feet higher than Mount Zion. A magnificent view of the city of Jerusalem and of the temple could be viewed from its peak.

Early in the morning Jesus arrived again in the temple area. All the people started coming to him. Jesus sat down and began to teach them.

The scribes and Pharisees were always on the look out to see how they could embarrass Jesus or get him in trouble with the Roman authorities. It is for this purpose that they brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made to stand in front of Jesus. In the Law, Moses commanded that such a woman should be stoned. Having stated this fact to Jesus, they proceeded to ask him, “So what do you say?” They now thought that they had him trapped. If he said to stone her he would be arrested by the Roman authorities who alone

had the right of execution. If he said let her go free he would be going against the Law of Moses.

At this point, Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. Perhaps Jesus was simply scribbling in the dust while he thought of how to answer them. Since they kept on asking him for his answer, he straightened up and said to them, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” (Normally, the witnesses were to be the first to throw the first stone—Deut 17:7.) Having said this, Jesus again bent down and wrote on the ground. Their consciences must have bothered them, for, in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. They were caught in their own trap. If they stoned the woman they would be arrested by the Roman authorities. If they abstained from stoning the woman, the Pharisees were made to look like the ones who were going against the Law of Moses. Jesus was left alone with the woman: the miserable one standing before the infinitely merciful one. No one had condemned her, and neither would he. He said to her, “Go, and from now on do not sin anymore”.

Tuesday- The 5th Week in Lent Jn 8:21-30

Jesus is going away to his Father. He is aware that his hour to depart from this world is approaching.

Those who are opposed to him will look for him, they will look for the Messiah and they will keep looking, for the one they are looking for already came in Christ.

When Jesus said, “Where I am going you cannot come” they thought he was going to kill himself. This was an ironical statement. For Jesus is going to freely lay his life down in crucifixion for the salvation of the world. They will die in their sin of unbelief. Jesus is going to the Father, but they cannot follow him

there. Only through faith in Jesus are they able to unite themselves to him and reach the Father.

They are of the earth and are unable to rise above it. Jesus comes from the Father who is above. They are of the earth and cannot rise above its material elements—that is why they have such a difficult time understanding him.

Wednesday- The 5th Week in Lent Jn 8:31-42

Our passage begins by saying that Jesus is speaking to the Jews who believed in him. However, verse 37 quotes Jesus as saying “You are trying to kill me”. If these Jews really believed in Jesus, would they be trying to kill him? Believing here may simply mean that some were impressed by Jesus’ words and were disposed to hear more. Jesus says that “If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples”. We remain in his word when we receive it into our hearts and live by it. We call it to mind often and apply it to the different circumstances of life. Through the knowledge we obtain from his word we understand how to live and become followers of Jesus, his disciples.

Jesus is the Truth. By assimilating the truth from his word we know the truth, that God is supreme and that our lives must revolve around him. We submit our wills to his so that what is highest in us, spirit, subordinates our lower powers, such as our passions, to him. We become free of their dictatorial tyranny and can then enjoy the freedom of the children of God. We are no longer under the enslaving dominion of sin.

These Jews deny that they have been slaves to anyone. And yet they have been continuously under the rule of foreign nations throughout their history: the Egyptians, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians and now the Romans. And the reason why God allowed this is because of their sinful disobedience to him. Yes, indeed, they are in

bondage. They may have been physical descendants of Abraham, but they lack his faith and obedience. The fact that they want to kill Jesus shows that they are sinners and so are slaves of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever. They could well be sent off like Ishmael, the son of Abraham's slave woman, Hagar (Gen 16:21). Only the Son, Jesus, like Isaac, remains forever. Only Jesus can free them from their sin and enable them to be truly free and become true sons of God. These Jews cannot accept what Jesus is saying. They follow their own sinful inclinations so that his words find no room in them. His words are contrary to their whole life-style. As a matter of fact, they seek to kill Jesus because he speaks the truth which he heard from his Father. Abraham was not like that. He lived in conformity with God's will.

Thursday- The 5th Week in Lent Jn 8:51-59

When Jesus begins a statement with "amen" or a double "amen", be attentive, because it is going to be a solemn statement: "Whoever keeps my word will never see death".

To keep Jesus' word means to accept it, believe in it, and faithfully carry it out. Jesus promises that we who keep his word will never see or experience death. We will pass through death retaining our consciousness as we enter the spiritual realms of eternity. Our bodies die but our spirits are immortal. They are images of God and share his immortal, spiritual nature. Keeping Jesus' word through faith and baptism, moreover, makes us partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). That means we live the supernatural life through sanctifying grace. We can lose that life of grace through mortal sin. But if we keep God's word we are kept free from sin, so that our spirits, endowed with supernatural life, will pass through death unharmed. We may need further purification before we can see God. We will want to undergo this immediately, if necessary, so we

can get to see God face to face as soon as possible. As often happened Jesus was speaking on a higher level than his audience could understand. He was thinking of spiritual death while they were thinking of physical death. Jesus' statement seems outlandish. Only a person out of his mind, the Jews thought, could make such an unbelievable claim. Abraham and the great saints of old, the prophets, all died. Does Jesus actually believe his is greater than they? What they think to be absurd is actually true—yes, Jesus is greater than the prophets and Abraham as well. They have come face to face with the Incarnation: In Christ, God has become man! No wonder they have such a problem of understanding Jesus. Only the gift of faith could accept Jesus' claims.

But what Jesus is saying is totally supported by his Father as seen by his many miracles. Jesus only does what his Father asks him to do. He is wholly in accord with his will. Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus' day in the promise (Gen 17:7) and in the birth of his son Isaac (Gen 21:1-6). He is the beginning of the fulfillment of blessings promised Abraham, that all nations would be blessed in his offspring, Christ. Jesus made this statement when he was just over thirty years old. So they could not understand how he could make such a statement. But again their minds were too small to follow Jesus' thinking. Jesus responds by identifying himself with the divine "I am" name. At that they tried to stone him but he escaped and left the temple area.

Friday- The 5th Week in Lent Jn 10:31-42

The Jews picked up rocks to stone Jesus because he stated that he and the Father are one, that is, one thing.

In response Jesus states that he has done many good works; miraculous cures from the Father. For which of these are they trying to stone him? They answer that they want to stone him because

he is blaspheming: he, a mere man, is making himself God. This is what is known as Johannine irony, meaning the reality is just the opposite: Jesus, who is God, has made himself a man.

Jesus now turns to the Scriptures to prove he is permitted to call himself God: the law itself addresses those who receive it as gods. Psalm 82:6 says, “You are gods”. And they must respect the authority of the Scriptures. This being so, Jesus, whom the Father consecrated and set aside to come into the world, has every right to say, “I am the Son of God”. (Of course in this case, Jesus is using this title in quite a different sense.) If Jesus would not be performing the Father’s works through all these miracles of healing, “the Jews” would not be blamed for not believing in him. But he is performing them. If they will not believe Jesus for himself, they ought to believe because of the miraculous works or deeds he is performing. These ought to make them understand and realize that God the Father is in Jesus and he is in the Father. Again, they are one (Jn 10:30). Even if it seems absurd that Jesus is actually God, this should make them stop and think. How could he demonstrate such divine power for good, if he were not united in some way to God himself. Surely he must be in some way from God. Still they tried to arrest him, but he escaped again from their power.

Jesus moved away from that area and went across the Jordan where John the Baptist had first baptized. He remained there, safe from the grasp of his enemies and many came to him. They began to believe in him. They said, “...everything John said about this man was true.”

Saturday- The 5th Week in Lent

Jn 11:45-56

As a result of Jesus raising Lazarus from the grave many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him. Others went to the Pharisees

and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees convened the Sanhedrin. This was the Supreme Court of the Jews.

They did not know what to do as a result of Jesus performing many signs. One would think that these leaders of the people would see that these signs pointed to his divinity or at least that he was closely united to God. They reasoned rather that if they permitted Jesus to remain free, all would believe in him, and the Romans would come and take away their land and nation—and actually, just the opposite happened. The Romans came and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. Caiaphas, the high priest that year, without realizing it, was giving a prophecy when he said “...it is better for you that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish.” He was actually prophesying that Jesus was going to die for the nation and all the children of God scattered through the world. From that day on they planned to kill Jesus.

It seems strange that Jesus’ greatest miracle of raising Lazarus after he had been corrupting in the tomb for four days moved the leaders of the people to kill Jesus rather than to believe in him. We would think this amazing miracle would have convinced them that he was from God. But they were too taken up with the old law to understand that their long awaited Messiah had arrived and was beginning to establish the new law. They were too angry to see the wisdom of Jesus’ teachings on perfecting the law. They were too blinded by their own self-interest and pride to see and humbly admit the truth. They only got angrier with Jesus and were determined to get rid of him.

So Jesus had to leave the area and went away to Ephraim located about twelve miles northeast of Jerusalem. He remained there with his disciples. Many of the Jews were going to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. One example of such purification was when God told Moses to have the people wash their garments in preparation for when the Lord would come down on Mount Sinai before the eyes of all the

people (Ex 19: 10). The people kept looking for Jesus, wondering whether he would come to the feast.

Monday of Holy Week

Jn 12: 1-11

Martha and Mary were so grateful to Jesus for having raised their brother Lazarus from the dead. They were honoring Jesus with a banquet of gratitude. This took place on the Saturday before Palm Sunday at Bethany where these close friends of Jesus lived. It was located only about two miles from Jerusalem, a haven of rest where Jesus could stay when he came to the Temple on feast days. Martha was serving in her usual humble way to show her loving gratitude, while Lazarus reclined at table with Jesus. Mary also had to express her gratitude to Jesus in a singular way for bringing her brother back to life from the grave. She was beside herself in trying to demonstrate how appreciative she was for Jesus' merciful love toward them. So she took a whole liter of genuine aromatic nard, a very expensive fragrant ointment and lavishly poured it all out on Jesus' feet. It was the best way that she could contrive to show how utterly grateful she and her sister were for bringing their brother back to them. She then began to dry Jesus' feet with her hair with total abandon and forgetfulness of herself. The house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. It symbolized the sweetness of Mary's love which, in its extravagance, knew no bounds. She kept nothing for herself; it was all poured out upon Jesus who deserved her total gift of self.

Judas protested such extravagance. That expensive nard was worth three hundred days wages. It could have been sold, he said, and the money given to the poor. St. John, who knew him better, said that Judas really would have pocketed the money; for he was a thief and would steal from the money bag which he kept as their treasurer. But Jesus took up for Mary and felt that the anointing was in preparation for his burial.

He would not always be with them as the poor. There would be other opportunities to give alms to them. Large crowds came to see Jesus as well as Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead. The chief priests were so blinded by their anger, they wanted to kill Lazarus too for many of the Jews were beginning to believe in Jesus because he raised Lazarus from the dead.

Tuesday of Holy Week

Jn 13:21-33,36-38

Jesus was deeply troubled as he thought about Judas' betrayal. All his efforts at forming Judas were in vain. Even being in the presence of the Holy One of God could not change him from his determined course. He was fed up with all this high spiritual doctrine. Jesus was troubled that one of his own cherished disciples would betray him.

He had previously announced that he would be handed over to the Jewish authorities and condemned to death. But now he is revealing that one of his own chosen disciples is going to betray him. This weighed heavily on Jesus' heart. The disciples were utterly surprised at this announcement. Jesus knew all along who would betray him (Jn 6:64), but he kept this to himself.

So Peter beckoned to John, the beloved disciple who was reclining at Jesus' side to find out which of them would do such a despicable act. John then leaned back on Jesus' chest and asked him. Jesus said that it was the one to whom he would hand the morsel of bread after he had dipped it in the sauce. This was a gesture of love. Even then Jesus was trying to win over Judas with an act of loving kindness. But he did not succeed in melting his hardened heart. Instead, Satan entered into him. Jesus told Judas, then, to leave quickly and do what he was going to do. No one understood what was happening. Some thought he was being told to go and buy what was needed for the feast, or maybe give something to the poor. Judas took

the morsel and left at once. It was night—evil had taken over his heart.

The hour now had arrived for Jesus to be glorified by his total submission to the Father's will and his selfless love for us human beings. And the Father would be glorified and praised for his altruistic love. This will result in the glorification and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus lovingly addressed his disciples as "My children". He told them that he would be with them only a little while longer and that they would not be able to follow him now, only later. Peter was insistent about wanting to follow Jesus. He said that he would even lay his life down for Jesus. It was then that Jesus told him that before the night was over, before the rooster crowed, Peter would deny Jesus three times.

Wednesday of Holy Week **Mt 26:14-25**

Judas Iscariot was one of the Twelve Apostles. He had been with Jesus from the beginning—towards three years. Jesus was too spiritual for him, especially when he began to say that it was necessary to eat his flesh and drink his blood. That was too much for him (Jn 6:64).

We have already seen that Judas had been stealing from the money bag which he kept for Jesus and the apostolic community (Jn 12:6). That was the question he asked the chief priests: how much money would they give him if he handed Jesus over to them. We should note that attachment to earthly things such as money blurs our spiritual insight and prevents us from knowledge of the spiritual and supernatural. For example, being sense-bound by attachments interferes with higher forms of prayer. The chief priests paid Judas thirty pieces of silver for handing Jesus over to them. That was the amount due in compensation paid to one whose slave had been gored by an ox (Ex 21:32). We remember that they had been trying to arrest Jesus for a long time but he always eluded them. It

was only when Jesus freely handed himself over to them at the arrival of the hour that apprehending him became possible. But this would happen only at the precise time Jesus allowed.

In Jesus' time the Passover supper was held on the first day of the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread. It was a dual feast. The unleavened bread reminded the Jews of their hard times of slavery in Egypt and the haste with which they fled. Jesus himself decided where he would celebrate the Passover. In this way the place would not be known by others so Jesus would have the privacy needed to celebrate the Last Supper in peace. Apparently Judas was not in on this secret location until the last minute. Thus he could not reveal it to the chief priests.

When evening came Jesus reclined at table with his disciples. In those days they reclined at a low table to eat rather than sit as we do. While they were eating Jesus announced that one of the apostles would betray him.

The apostles were deeply distressed and surprised at this. They knew nothing about it. Each wondered whether it might be himself. Each of us has that potential. Jesus said it was one who dipped his hand into the dish with him who would betray him. It was a shocking fact that the betrayer is one who shares table fellowship with Jesus. Is this any different from us who have communion with Jesus in the Eucharist and then sin against him? This kind of betrayal by a dear friend, the handing over to murderous enemies of the Son of God, is so serious a crime it would have been better if Judas had never been born. Judas was finally identified as the betrayer.

Thursday of Holy Week **Jn 13: 1-15**

The time had finally come, Jesus' hour, for him to pass from this world to the Father. What a confident and self-assured way to

approach death; that was Jesus' attitude "...rejoice that I am going to the Father" (Jn 14: 28). He had come from God and was returning to God. Even at this moment when the devil had entered into Judas' heart to hand Jesus over, Jesus loves his chosen disciples to the very end with a fathomless depth.

He proceeded to remove his outer garments, tied a towel around his waist, poured water in a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet. This was a sign of how he became a slave for us when he became human. It was also a sign of his self-emptying life of service and saving death. Fr. Raymond Brown, S.S. comments, "The simplest explanation of the foot washing, then, remains that Jesus performed this servile task to prophesy symbolically that he was about to be humiliated in death. Peter's questioning, provoked by the action, enabled Jesus to explain the salvific necessity of his death: it would bring men their heritage with him and it would cleanse them of sin" (The Gospel According to John, The Anchor Bible).

Jesus knew that even if he had washed Judas' feet, he was not clean because his heart was set on betraying him. After Jesus had washed his disciples' feet, he put his garments back on and resumed reclining at table with them.

Then he began to discuss what he had done for them. Although he was their teacher and master, he humbled himself to wash their feet—a task that only a slave might do. If he washed their feet so they also ought to wash one another's feet. In other words, they need to humble themselves and serve one another. Jesus was symbolically doing by his feet washing what he had been doing all along in his ministry. His washing their feet was a striking way of demonstrating his life of service. This was the model he set for them to imitate. This is the kind of service that love prompted. Love wants to give itself. Love wants to express itself. It finds ways through humble acts of service. And humility is present at love's side to accomplish these acts and love to the end. Service is a simple means of

passing from self to others. Such love for others is a high form of detachment from self-centeredness. Opportunities arise around us each day so that loving service can become a whole life-style.

Friday of the Passion of the Lord

John 18: 1-19:42

Those who came to arrest Jesus went with lanterns and torches. They do not accept Jesus the light of the world, so they need artificial lights. With Judas in the lead they are swallowed by darkness, possessed by evil. (In heaven the blessed need no lamps (Rev 21:23).)

When Jesus identified himself with the divine name, "I Am", Judas and the soldiers fell to the ground, prostrate before their king. Jesus had complete power over the forces of darkness. He could have resisted them if he had wanted to. Jesus is master of his own fate. He permits his arrest.

But he has concern for his disciples, so he said, "If you are looking for me, let these men go."

Jesus is king who puts others on trial throughout. He questions them:
"Why ask me? Ask those who heard me"....

In response to the temple guard who struck him Jesus said, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" Jesus stands up for his innate dignity and right to be respected.

In contrast to Jesus who denies nothing and stands before his questioners, Peter cowers back: As to whether he is Jesus' disciple, he said, "I am not." A second time he denied it again and said, "I am not." A third time Peter denied being in the garden with Jesus.

When asked by Pilate "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus again put his questioner on trial, "Do

you say this on your own or have others told you about me?” When Jesus responded with, “You say I am a King” he means that the word “King” is not his preferred way of referring to himself—it is too easily misunderstood. He explains further that he came into the world “to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Those who belong to God have an affinity to the truth—others cannot bear to hear it. They continue to live a lie in the form of a self-centered existence.

After questioning Jesus, Pilate went out to the Jews and said, “I find no guilt in him”. He tried to release Jesus as was the custom to release one prisoner at Passover. But the Jews wanted the revolutionary and murderer, Barabbas, instead. Pilate tries to find a way out. He seeks a middle position—many want to remain neutral. But indecisiveness leads to tragedy. He ends up choosing the world and serving it. It takes great strength to resist evil; it takes determination and positive resistance. Pilate had Jesus scourged, hoping that this will satisfy them or cause pity. Pilate brought Jesus out to them and said, “I find no guilt in him”. He presented Jesus to them crowned with thorns and wearing the purple cloak, saying, “Behold the man!” The Jews cried out, “crucify him”...For the third time Pilate said, “I find no guilt in him”. Yet they demanded that he die. They not only turn away from the light but want to extinguish it! And they prevailed.

Mary and John were standing by the cross. Jesus gave his mother over to John to care for her.

Jesus said, “I thirst”. As Ps 42:3 says, “Athirst is my soul for God, the living God...” His human nature was craving for the glory of the divinity of which he had emptied himself.

After drinking the wine-soaked sponge, the fourth “cup” of the Paschal meal, Jesus declared “It is finished” and handed over the spirit.

A lance was thrust into Jesus’ heart so that blood and water poured out, fulfilling Jesus’ words,

“Rivers of living water will flow from within him” (Jn 7: 38). Jesus now becomes the new Temple of God overflowing with the life-giving waters of the Spirit and the Blood of the Eucharist. He is also the new Paschal Lamb sacrificed for the sins of the world whose flesh must be eaten to receive its life-giving power.

Easter Vigil

Mk 16: 1-7

On the morning of the Resurrection, Easter Sunday, we would expect to see a stark, shocking revelation of the glorious, risen Jesus. Instead, we find an empty tomb and an angel announcing that Jesus has been raised. The women are told, “go and tell his disciples... He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him...” We are told to seek Jesus. We must exercise our faith and make the effort to meet Christ who awaits us.

Jesus usually reveals himself to us gradually, by degrees in response to our seeking him. That is how faith usually works. We are called to seek Jesus in prayer, in Scripture, the sacraments, and works of love. Our faith response causes Jesus to reveal himself further. Such seeking spiritualizes us and disposes us to see God.

Seeking is our first movement toward God and away from apathy and self-centeredness. Seeking supposes love, interest, and effort—this is a necessary preparation to be able to see Jesus. Discipline and assertion of spirit dispose us for God who is spirit.

“On entering the tomb” the women “saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe.” We met this “young man” before. Remember when we were reading the Passion account in the Gospel of Mark (14:51-52)? This young man was covered by a linen cloth. When they seized him, he left the cloth behind and ran off naked.”

He fled because he would not die with Christ. He took the cowardly way out. He lost his dignity when he fled naked. But now he is clothed with the glorious baptismal robe, because he joined Christ in the tomb by dying to self and living according to the spirit. He has become an angel, the Greek word meaning messenger of the good news.

This young man is believed to be St. Mark, whose parents owned the upper room where the Last Supper took place and the adjacent Garden of Gethsemane where this event of Jesus' arrest took place.

Through the Gospel we read today, St. Mark is the angel, the messenger, who is telling the good news of Jesus' resurrection. If we seek him in this way, we too go to Galilee, where the Risen Jesus will reveal himself to us.

Monday within the Octave of Easter

Mt 28: 8-15

The women, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, went to the tomb as Easter Sunday morning was dawning. Then an earthquake occurred while they were there. An angel descended from heaven, rolled back the stone that had blocked the entrance to the tomb, and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing was white as snow. Those guarding the tomb were so struck with fear that they became like dead men.

The angel reassured the women and told them that Jesus had been raised from the dead. He showed them the place where he had lain. They were to go quickly and tell his disciples that he had been raised from the dead, and he was going before them in Galilee where they would see him.

The women went away in fear, yet overjoyed, and ran to announce the good news. But Jesus met them on the way and greeted them. They embraced his feet and did him homage. Then Jesus repeated the message given by the angel:

they were to tell the disciples to go to Galilee where they would see him.

The women got to see Jesus because they disposed themselves by seeking him. They went to the tomb looking for Jesus. They wanted to anoint his body with spices. The other disciples, the men, were still at their houses, perhaps still asleep or overcome with grief too great to move. While the women were on their way to tell the men as the first evangelizers, the guards came back to their senses and went into the city to report to the chief priests all that had happened. These assembled with the elders and took counsel. This is what they decided to do. They gave a large sum of money to the soldiers and told them to say that Jesus' disciples came at night and stole the body while they were asleep. These leaders of the people continued to sin against the truth. They were too hardened to admit the truth so they attempted to deny the resurrection with a bribe and a lie. They promised to cover up for the soldiers if this news got to the governor. The soldiers, for their part, took the money and continued to spread the lie among the people.

Meanwhile Jesus began to appear to various disciples in his resurrected state. He had entered into death with a human body like ours and overcame it. Now he was sharing the good news that is for all of us.

Tuesday within the Octave of Easter

Jn 20: 11-18

After Peter and John left the tomb, Mary of Magdala remained alone weeping. Her love kept her there where Jesus her great love was last seen. As she bent over to look into the tomb, she saw two angels in white sitting at the head and the foot where the body of Jesus had rested. They asked her why she was weeping. She explained to them that her Lord had been taken from the tomb and she does not know where they laid him.

Then Mary turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not recognize him. He asked her why she was weeping and whom was she looking for? She thought he was the gardener and that he might have carried him away. “Tell me where you laid him”, she said, “and I will take him”. She loved Jesus very much and wanted to be near him. She missed him so much!

Jesus called her name. “Mary!” Then she recognized him. She addressed him in Aramaic, using the word for “My Master”. She then proceeded to embrace his feet (Mt 28:9). But Jesus told her not to hold on to him. The situation has changed now. He has been glorified. A new kind of relationship is now necessary. Once he has ascended to the Father and sent the Holy Spirit, the previous way of hugging and embracing will no longer be possible. For now through his spiritualized nature he will begin to dwell in each of his disciples. He will be with them continually, never to be separated from them anymore. He will reveal himself to each of them through his indwelling presence. They will come to know him as he lives in the Father, and they in him and he in them (see Jn 14: 15-23). These promises Jesus had made at the Last Supper are about to take effect when he will communicate the divine presence to them through the gift of the Spirit. But for now, Mary must go and evangelize the brothers that Jesus is going to his Father and theirs, to his God who is his Father by nature, and to their God who is their Father by adoption. With joy Mary went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord” and all that he told her.

Wednesday within the Octave of Easter

Lk 24: 13-35

On Easter Sunday two of Jesus’ disciples were going to a village called Emmaus seven miles from Jerusalem. They were conversing about all the things that had happened. Jesus joined himself to them as they were talking.

But they did not recognize that it was the risen Christ.

He asked them what they were discussing. They proceeded to tell him about how the chief priests and rulers had Jesus, who was considered a mighty prophet, sentenced to death and crucified. They were hoping he might be the one to redeem Israel from Roman domination. On the third day some women, they said, astonished them. They had gone to the tomb but the body of Jesus was not there. They saw a vision of angels who announced that he was alive; others went to the tomb but did not see him. Then Jesus began to speak and reprimand them for their lack of faith in what the prophets spoke. It was necessary that the Messiah should suffer, he explained, and enter into his glory. Beginning with Moses and the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures. They were approaching the village by the time Jesus finished explaining how everything that had happened to him had been prophesied and fulfilled by him. It would have been a surprise to them that the Suffering Servant songs of Isaiah would have referred to the Messiah: “Through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear...Because he surrendered himself to death and was counted among the wicked; and he shall take away the sins of the many, and win pardon for their offenses” (Is 53: 11, 12). As they were arriving at the village Jesus gave the impression that he was going farther. They urged him to stay with them, for it was nearly evening. So he went in to stay with them. While they were at table, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and praise to God, broke it and gave it to them. This would have reminded them of the Last Supper. They realized then that this “stranger” was actually the risen Jesus. But he vanished from their sight. He had been such a consolation to them: as he explained the scriptures to them their hearts were burning with new hope: all the things that happened were actually the fulfilling of the scriptures regarding the Messiah. He had opened the scriptures for them. They forgot how late and tired they were and hurried back to Jerusalem. The eleven and those with them excitedly told them: “The Lord

has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon.” He had readily forgiven Simon for his denials...he was still his man to lead the flock. The two then explained how Jesus had made himself known through the breaking of the bread. Now that they could recognize him in the breaking of the bread, the Eucharist, there was no need for him to remain visibly present, so he vanished from their sight.

Thursday within the Octave of Easter Lk 24: 35-48

The two disciples returned from Emmaus to tell the eleven and those with them how Jesus had made himself known in the breaking of the bread. While they were still speaking about this, Jesus came and stood in their midst. “Peace be with you”, he said. This startled and terrified them. They thought they were seeing a ghost.

So Jesus began speaking with them so they could recognize his voice. He was concerned about how troubled they were. He could tell that they had many questions about him in their minds. Therefore he proceeded to have them look at his hands and feet so they could see that he was the same Jesus they saw crucified. He invited them to touch him. Even if he could pass through closed doors, he was still tangible—he was not a ghost. He had flesh and bones.

They just could not believe their eyes! They were still incredulous for sheer joy. He asked his amazed disciples if they had anything to eat. They gave him a piece of baked fish. He took it and ate it in front of them. The glorified body is an amazing new creation. This had never been seen before. Jesus was so considerate of them and did everything he could to reassure them. He was the crucified one that they had come to know so well. Once Jesus had calmed them down and they could see that he was the same one they knew—and yet was different now because he was glorified—he began to teach them.

He had told them beforehand, for example in his third prediction of the Passion: “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem and everything written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.” Now Jesus is a bit more specific. He goes through the Law of Moses, then the prophets, and the Psalms and other writings. Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. One example Peter gives of this is in his Pentecost sermon. He sees Psalm 16:8-11 fulfilled by Jesus, the Messiah, “I saw the Lord ever before me, with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed... you will not abandon my soul to the nether world, nor will you suffer your holy one to see corruption”. He also quotes Psalm 110:1 (see Acts 2:25-36). That the Messiah would suffer can be seen, for example, in Psalm 22. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” etc or Is 53. On three occasions Jesus said that he would rise on the third day (see Lk 18: 31-33). Jesus instructed the disciples to preach repentance to the nations. They are to witness the whole mystery of Jesus to the world so they can have faith in God’s love for humans and begin to live for eternity.

Friday within the Octave of Easter Jn 21: 1-14

After Jesus’ resurrection he revealed himself to his disciples in different situations. On this occasion he manifested himself to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberius (which is also called the Sea of Galilee).

This is how it took place. Peter announced that he was going fishing. This means that although he had left his boat to follow Jesus when he called him (Mt 4: 18-22), it was still available to him when he needed it. Six of the other disciples went with him.

They fished all night but caught nothing. At dawn Jesus was standing on the shore. The disciples did not recognize him. He asked if they had caught anything. They said, “NO!” Then he told them to

cast their net on the right side of the boat, they would find something there. So they did cast their net which was so full they were not able to pull it into the boat.

The disciple that Jesus loved, John, realized by the miraculous sign that it was Jesus. So he said to Peter, “It is the Lord”. At these words, Peter dived into the sea and swam hurriedly to meet Jesus, for he loved Jesus very much. And he was so grateful that Jesus had forgiven him (compare Lk 24:34). The other disciples came in the boat dragging the net with the fish. When they arrived at the shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. We may wonder how and where Jesus got these. Did he miraculously create them? They were probably the best tasting fish and bread that they ever ate. We remember the headwaiter’s comment about the miraculous wine at Cana, “...you have kept the good wine until now” (Jn 2: 10).

Jesus then told the men to bring the fish they had just caught. Peter dragged the net of one hundred fifty-three large fish. This is a sign of how the apostles will gather believers from every nation into the Church. The fish usually caught in that lake were tilapias, now called “Peter’s fish”. It was surprising that such a large number did not tear the net.

Jesus then invited the men to come and eat breakfast. Although the resurrection changed Jesus’ appearance considerably, they still realized that it was he. He fed them with the bread and fish that he had prepared. This was the third time he appeared to them (as a group—for he had also appeared to Mary Magdalene) (Jn 20: 11-18).

Saturday within the Octave of Easter **Mk 16: 9-15**

In this account we notice that Jesus himself overcame death and arose with his own divine power. This occurred early Easter Sunday morning. Although it is assumed that

Jesus appeared first to Mary his mother who was so faithful and supportive till the very end, this passage asserts that Jesus made his first public appearance to Mary Magdalene. St. John describes this scene in his Gospel 20: 11-18. She too, had been faithful to Jesus to the very end (in 19:25). We learn from this Gospel that Jesus had driven seven demons from her (Lk 8:2). This expression indicates that Jesus healed her from a very serious illness. There is no reason to believe that she was an immoral person. She is not to be identified with the woman who was a sinner and who came to weep at Jesus’ feet during the banquet at Simon the Pharisee’s house (Lk 7: 36-38). She was one of the grateful women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities. They accompanied Jesus and the Twelve, and provided for them out of their resources (Lk 8: 1-3). She went to the tomb early in the morning while it was still dark. She saw that the stone was removed from the entrance to the tomb. So she ran to tell Peter and John, who was known as the disciple whom Jesus loved (in 20: 1-2). This passage tells us that Mary Magdalene went and told Jesus’ companions who were mourning and weeping. They were so sure that Jesus had succumbed to death like the rest of men and thus held captive by it forever. They were inconsolable, and could not believe that he was truly alive. He had been through such a horrible death—and death had always kept its victims. They could not believe that Mary had seen him alive. Our passage also records the incident of Jesus appearing to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He was completely changed. This account tells us that these disciples returned and told the others who refused to believe. Jesus had to appear to the eleven at table and rebuke them for their unbelief and hardness of heart—they had refused to believe those who saw him after he had been raised.

The only reason why they began to believe is because of the sheer stark evidence that stood before them in the risen Christ. They were finally forced to admit the truth of Jesus’ resurrection—he had really overcome death. He commanded them to go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.

Monday of the 2nd Week of Easter

Jn 3:1-8

Nicodemus, we are told, was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews. He, in fact, was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court and governing body of the Jews. Such a prominent leader as Nicodemus had to come and see Jesus at night because of the Council's official opposition to him. He comes, from and out of the darkness, to see Jesus. He became a secret disciple of his. We see him taking up for him when the soldiers failed to arrest him. He said to his fellow court members, "Does our law condemn a person before it first hears him and finds out what he is doing?" (Jn 7:51). We also see Nicodemus bringing "a mixture of myrrh and aloes" to assist in preparing the body of Jesus for burial (Jn 19:39).

Nicodemus came to Jesus because he understood that the miraculous signs he was performing indicated that he had to be from God. Nicodemus must have been a humble man. For, he was a Pharisee and yet submitted questions to Jesus that exposed his ignorance.

The Jews generally thought that they belonged to the Kingdom of God because they descended from Abraham. Jesus, however, explained that no one could experience the Kingdom of God without being born from above. Nicodemus understood Jesus to mean born again. So Jesus explained that one had to be born of water and Spirit to enter the Kingdom of God. Faith in Jesus leading to baptism would bring about a spiritual rebirth. Human nature itself can only bring about natural life. Only the Holy Spirit can effect spiritual regeneration and the beginning of eternal life.

There is mystery involved here. The transition from earthly life to eternal life brought about by the Spirit of God is something like the wind. You cannot see it but you know it is present by feeling its force or hearing the sound it makes. It also causes the branches and leaves of the trees

to stir and move about. So it is with the Spirit of God. One cannot see it, but when he opens himself to receive it through faith, it causes him to experience a spiritual rebirth.

Tuesday of the 2nd Week of Easter

Jn 3: 7-15

We must be born of God, from above, to participate in the divine nature. It is the Spirit of God that brings this about. Jesus was preparing Nicodemus for the gift of the Spirit. On the day of Pentecost... "suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were....and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit..."(Acts 2:2, 3).

Nicodemus was amazed at how such a thing could happen. He had forgotten how Joel had prophesied, "Then afterward I will pour out my spirit upon all mankind. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy..." (Joel 3:1). He also needed to recall the words of Ezekiel, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities....I will give you a new heart and place a new Spirit within you....and make you live by my statutes..."(Ez 36: 25, 26, 27). The Spirit of God would transform them into new creatures.

The early Christians had experienced all of this. Jesus and those reborn of the Spirit knew how these Scriptures had been fulfilled. Prophesying by those who had received the Spirit was their way of trying to express exuberantly their rebirth experience of God. They were besides themselves with joy and the fullness of divine life.

Jesus was trying to explain to Nicodemus heavenly things. He knew as one who had come down from heaven what he was talking about. By mentioning the "Son of Man", that mysterious figure in the book of Daniel, who is human and yet comes on the clouds and receives dominion, glory, and kingship from God (Dan 7: 13-14),

Jesus is hinting to Nicodemus at who he is. He is trying to enlighten him through a scriptural phrase that will awaken faith in him.

Jesus compares his being lifted up in crucifixion and ascension to the bronze serpent that Moses lifted up to heal those bitten. Those who believed God's word and looked upon the uplifted serpent were healed. So everyone who believes in the uplifted Christ will be healed from sin and begin to live the eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Wednesday of the 2nd Week of Easter Jn 3:16-21

God's boundless love prompted him to give us his only Son. Becoming human required an infinite demotion—he had to live on our human level after having left the divine glory. That lowering of himself with its limitless limitations was costly enough. But redeeming ungrateful sinners entailed taking on and carrying the suffocating and crushing weight of the sins of the world—sins committed from its beginning to the end of the human race. Jesus experienced that weight in his agony in the garden; he made up for our sins yet further through his passion and the excruciating pains of crucifixion and death. It is to such extremes that God went to express how much he loves us. He had Jesus go through all of this so that we would escape eternal punishment and enjoy eternal life—he wanted us to share his own divine life and glory. God's love for us is so great it cannot be fathomed or sufficiently expressed—it is ineffable.

God's purpose for sending Jesus into the world was to redeem and save it rather than leave it in its sinful state and condemn it. Those who believe in Jesus open themselves to an influx of divine righteousness, making us one with the divine. We actually become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). However, those who refuse to believe in the divinity of the only Son close themselves off from the divine life and condemn themselves.

We may ask why is it that those who do not believe in God's Son condemned? Why are they judged and so definitively condemned? It is because Jesus is the light of truth who came into this world. He shows us by word and example how to live according to the truth and so dispose ourselves to be in union with God.

This way of truth is the orthodox way to open ourselves to the divine. It saves us from sin and enables us to live in the light and in the presence of God.

Some prefer to live in the darkness of unbelief from the light of Christ because of their sinful actions. They do not want to expose themselves and their sins to the light of Christ. They prefer to hide in the darkness. They refuse to change their life-style and conform to the light of truth. Their sinful lives are opposed to the truth. Their self-centered lives are contrary to a God-centered one as demonstrated by Jesus. They are an end unto themselves which is a dead end. That is the lie they live. They are totally indisposed for union with God and the eternal life that comes from this union. That is how they condemn themselves.

Thursday of the 2nd Week of Easter Jn 3:31-36

The "one who comes" is the Messiah. He was announced by John the Baptist as the one who comes after him. (Jn 1:15; 27; Mal 3:1) He comes from above in that he brings heavenly life. He is above all: he is beyond all that is merely earthly, such as the baptism of John and the purification ceremonies of the Old Testament. The Jews were concerned about earthly matters like their animal sacrifices or the many rules to be kept on the Sabbath. Jesus, the Messiah, comes from heaven. He is above all. He testifies what he has seen and heard from the Father. But his hearers are far too earthly to understand and accept his testimony.

God is doing something new. In Jesus he is revealing a new order in which people will be able to worship God in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23).

Jesus speaks on a spiritual level. The gift of the Spirit is needed to understand him. As St. Paul put it, “Now the natural person does not accept what pertains to the Spirit of God, for to him it is foolishness, and he cannot understand it, because it is judged spiritually” (1 Cor 2:14).

Whoever does accept the things that Jesus is revealing such as the fact that he comes from God, is certifying that God is trustworthy: he promised to send a savior-prophet who speaks the truth. And Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise.

Jesus was sent by God the Father, and he speaks only what he has heard from the Father. He speaks the Word of God, which is the truth.

Unlike the prophets of old, Jesus, possesses the fullness of divine revelation and bestows the fullness of the Holy Spirit. The divine Son is “full of grace and truth....From his fullness we have all received” (Jn 1:14, 16). The Father loves the Son and communicated everything in the divinity to him. The Son gives eternal life to those who believe and live according to that belief. Whoever claims to believe in the Son but does not live according to his teachings—he disobeys the Son—severs himself from divine life and from God himself for whom he was created. He inflicts divine punishment and anger on himself by separating himself through serious sin.

Friday of the 2nd Week of Easter Jn 6:1-15

Large crowds followed Jesus because of his healing power. St. John calls the healing miracles signs pointing to his divinity. But the people normally stopped short of that realization. They were only interested in being cured from their diseases and infirmities.

The fact that it was Passover time helps us to associate the mountain Jesus went up and the multiplication of the loaves with Moses on Sinai. And the manna in the desert and the loaves look toward the Eucharist and the daily supernatural bread that Jesus will feed the new Israel. Making their way through the desert after the Passover, the people were fed with miraculous food; and the New Moses feeds us with living bread from heaven after the New Passover. Through the waters of our baptism we enter into the new Passover and need spiritual nourishment for our journey.

We are told that Jesus raised his eyes and saw the crowd. Was that because he was in deep recollection and kept his eyes downcast? For, he never left the Father’s presence (Jn 16:32; 8:29).

Jesus felt compassion for the crowd and realized they needed something to eat. He wanted to feed them. But even two hundred days’ wages would not have been enough to buy food to feed such a large crowd. The only resource they had was a boy with five barley loaves and two fish to feed 5000 men.

But Jesus took the loaves and fish and gave thanks and praise to the Father. He then proceeded to distribute them to the people—as much as they wanted. They ate until they were full. Jesus had them gather the fragments left over after they were finished so that nothing would be wasted. They ended up collecting twelve wicker baskets full of the fragments. This signified that the twelve apostles would have enough to feed the multitudes of the twelve tribes of the new Israel to whom they would minister in the Kingdom of God. We also learn from this that we must be careful not to waste food. This miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and the fish was a sign to the people that Jesus was the Prophet, the one announced by Moses which they were awaiting (Deut 18:15). In other words he must be the Messiah they were expecting. So Jesus withdrew to the mountain alone when he realized they wanted to make him king.

Saturday of the 2nd Week of Easter

Jn 6:16-21

Jesus had withdrawn by himself to the mountain. The disciples were left to themselves. Since Jesus did not return and it was getting late they embarked in their boat to go to Capernaum. Jesus needed to replenish his strength after prolonged ministry to the multitude whom he had taught at length and fed. He had gone up the mountain to escape the crowd who wanted to make him king, as well as to enter into deep communion with his Father through prayer (Mt 14:23) to restore his energies.

Meanwhile the disciples were struggling with rowing their boat against a strong wind that was blowing. They had gone only about three or four miles when they saw Jesus walking on the sea. As he came near the boat they began to be afraid—they thought they were seeing a ghost (Mk 6:49). They became completely terrified.

But Jesus reassured them, saying, “It is I. Do not be afraid.” The words Jesus used literally say, “I Am”, which is the divine name. These were the words God used to identify himself to Moses in the desert (Ex 3:14).

Jesus did this miraculous episode to help the disciples realize more clearly who he was. The miracle of the loaves and the feeding of the 5000 men, not counting women and children (Mt 14:21), was not enough to impress the disciples to understand Jesus’ identity. Perhaps this new self-revelation by Jesus will help them see that he is really God incarnate.

When Jesus came near the boat the wind died down and the boat immediately arrived at the shore. How could this happen so suddenly except for another miracle? Only God can conquer the waters by walking upon them and then cause them to become calm again (Ps 93:4).

Jesus is proving himself to be far greater than Moses whom God used to part the waters of the Red Sea to allow the people to cross over. He must be God himself!

Monday of the 3rd Week of Easter

Jn 6:22-29

The crowd revisited the area where Jesus had fed them with bread and fish. That food was so delicious they could not forget it. It was far better than usual—like the water made into wine was of an unusually high quality (Jn 2:10). They were looking for the source of this food, Jesus. But what they were really wanting was more food rather than Jesus himself. They would say, “Sir, give us this bread always” (Jn 6:34). They were not able to go from the food to Jesus himself. Surely, the one who gave such good food must himself be even better, to be sought for his own sake: “...I sought him whom my heart loves” (Sg 3:1).

Because they were looking for Jesus they found him—like Mary Magdalene at the tomb. Jesus appeared to her because she was seeking him. It was only through her that the apostles eventually began seeking him and got to see him. When the crowd asked Jesus a curious question, he overlooked their question as to how he had gotten there. He immediately went on to express his disappointment that they were not looking for him because of the miraculous signs he had worked for them led them to see that he must be from God. Rather they sought him because they were wanting more earthly food.

Jesus urged the people to spend their efforts at working for food that endures through eternity. We must spend part of our energies to sustain our natural lives, but the greater part should be to sustain our spiritual lives that endure forever. This is the food that the Son of Man, (Dan 7:13-14) Jesus himself, will give them. God has set his seal on Jesus, the Son of Man, by sending the Holy

Spirit upon him and proclaiming him his Beloved Son, empowering him to speak so powerfully of God and performing so many miraculous works. When the people asked Jesus what work they must do, he explained to them that they must “believe in the one he sent.” They must be receptive of Jesus through faith in him to receive the salvation he brings. They must open themselves to the words of wisdom he speaks, and the Bread of Life he will give them for spiritual nourishment.

Tuesday of the 3rd Week of Easter **Jn 6:30-35**

Jesus explained to the people that the great work they must do to obtain the food that endures for eternal life is to believe in the one God sent. He is the one, Jesus himself, who will accomplish the saving work of redemption. And faith is the virtue that perfects our intellect to be able to receive the righteousness he attained through his passion, death and resurrection. Faith, when it is activated, connects us to the glorified Christ from whom rivers of living water (the Holy Spirit) flow to enliven us with supernatural life. He will give himself to the believers in the Eucharist.

In response, the people ask a sign from Jesus so they can believe in him. The multiplication of the loaves, along with the other miracles he had performed were not enough to dispose them to believe. They wanted Jesus to do something like Moses had done for the people in the desert: He gave them bread from heaven to eat in the form of manna. God fed them daily for forty years in the desert. They wanted Jesus to do something similar for them. Actually, Jesus says, it was God who fed them with this mysterious substance. “In the morning...when the dew evaporated, there on the surface of the desert were fine flakes like hoarfrost on the ground....It was white and tasted like wafers made with honey” (Ex 16:13-14, 31). God fed them daily for forty years with the manna until they arrived at the Promised Land (Ex 16:35). The manna was a symbol of the true spiritual

bread that God would give in the end times. These times have arrived with the appearance of Jesus the Messiah. He is that True bread, that Divine Substance, which God gives. He really comes from heaven, from God, to give life to the world.

The people ask Jesus to give them this bread always—every day of their lives.

Jesus then reveals to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.” With his “I am” statement, Jesus identifies himself with God. Once we receive him, our spiritual thirst for God will be satisfied. We need look nowhere else. He fulfills our deepest spiritual yearnings. In the Eucharist he feeds us daily with the Living Bread from heaven, himself. He is the Real Manna from heaven available to us every day in the Eucharist to sustain us in our desert journey through life.

Wednesday of the 3rd Week of Easter **Jn 6:35-40**

Jesus announces that he is the bread of life. In stating that “I am the bread...” he uses the divine name. He gives himself as living bread because that bread is himself. By eating the bread that he is we are nourished with divine life. He fulfills our spiritual hunger. We come to him through faith, through which we receive his self-gift and fulfill our thirst for the infinite. The people have seen Jesus work miracles. They have seen him in Person and yet they are too coarse to perceive that he is the one sent by God to be their Messiah. They do not believe. Those who believe and come to Jesus are a gift from the Father. He will not reject them. They come to him because the Father has drawn them to Jesus by grace. They have followed that enlightening grace. They have listened to the Father and obeyed him; they have understood and followed his will.

Jesus is totally in compliance with his Father’s will. He does not operate on his own. He does

only what the Father wills. He is always in union with his Father. He and the Father are one (Jn 10:30). Jesus lived in the presence of his Father. That is why he was always aware of his will. He allowed nothing to come between them. This required that Jesus be totally selfless. Self-effacement was a prerequisite for him to always be in conformity with his Father's will. We can see why, therefore, we who are by nature selfish, need to deny ourselves and our selfish inclinations to be able to live in communion with God. That is why Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23).

Jesus is concerned about saving everyone. That is why he became human—to save us all. That is his Father's will—for he loves us more than we love ourselves. He wants to raise us up on the last day and share his glory with us.

Seeing the Son and believing in him is looking upon the Son with the eyes of faith and realizing that he is the Son of God. "Whoever believes in the Son of God has this testimony within himself" (1 Jn 5:10). Faith is the testimony of God revealing himself to us in our hearts. One must be moved by grace to see and believe Jesus to be divine. This faith opens us to receive the divine life of Jesus which is the eternal life, preparing us to be raised on the last day.

Thursday of the 3rd Week of Easter

Jn 6:44-51

In order to be attracted to Jesus and come to him in faith, the Father must first of all draw us by grace. We cooperate with his grace so that we will be drawn toward Jesus. We dispose ourselves for him by degrees as we respond to the graces given to us. When we go to Jesus in faith we are united to him and begin to share his divine life. We then begin to participate in God's own eternal life. We will thus be disposed to be raised

on the last day. We will be given a share in the resurrected life of Jesus.

In order to explain more clearly and buttress his point, Jesus quotes Isaiah, saying, "They shall all be taught by God" (Is 54:13). (We are reminded here how well Jesus knows Holy Scripture.) Again, he identifies God as his Father: "Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me". Jesus is in perfect accord with his Father. All the children of God, who listen to God, his Father, are drawn to Jesus and believe in him.

Jesus reasserts that he is from God, his Father, and only he has seen him. Jesus solemnly declares that "whoever believes has eternal life". The virtue of faith unites us to Jesus who is one with the Father. Through this union, we draw divine life so that we can live in communion with God. In a marvelous manner we already begin to live eternal life while on earth. We begin to experience the eternal knowledge between the Father and the Son in the love of the Holy Spirit (see Jn 17:3).

Jesus declares himself to be the bread of life. He is our spiritual food. When we are in communion with him we draw divine nourishment to sustain us in that eternal life already begun here on earth.

The manna was an earthly food that sustained natural life which ends in death. Jesus really comes from God in heaven. His divine life sustains us through death and brings us to God in heaven. Jesus fulfills in himself what the manna symbolized. Jesus is the true bread and will feed us with himself. At the last supper when he changed bread into his body, he will truly give us himself to consume as our spiritual food. It is living bread because it is his glorified flesh, which was transformed when he was glorified in the mystery of the resurrection.

Friday of the 3rd Week of Easter

Jn 6:52-59

We can understand how troubled the people are when Jesus says he will give them his flesh to eat. They will have had to take him at his word, since he has proven himself trustworthy, and wait and see how he will accomplish this. But he will wait until the Last Supper before he will do that.

But Jesus insists that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood to have divine life. He really means it. They understand him correctly. Just as the Jews at the Passover had to eat the lamb they had sacrificed, so they must eat the Lamb of God who will be sacrificed on Calvary.

The Jews are not permitted to drink the blood of animals because that would lower them to the level of animals. Only those who worship idols drink that blood. But to eat the body of Jesus and drink his blood means that they have to consume Christ in his entirety to be nourished with divine life. That would elevate them to a divine level. That is how they are to unite themselves to God and assimilate eternal life and be disposed for God to raise them up on the last day.

The divinized and glorified flesh and blood provide true nourishment for the consumer. They provide spiritual sustenance for their souls.

As a result of consuming Christ, a person remains in him and Christ also remains in him. A mutual indwelling takes place. There is an abiding union that occurs, even after the appearances of bread and wine disappear. The person is intimately united to Jesus and that union is solidified and causes one to remember that it endures. That grace of union calls us to live in love, and to remember the One who loves us to death.

We need to spend time alone with Jesus in exclusive prayer time with God's word so that his memory

will be indelibly etched in our hearts. Jesus' very being is united to his Father so completely they are one being. So Jesus draws divine life from the Father. Similarly, our union with Jesus resulting from consuming him enables us to draw divine life from him. As Jesus lives from the Father, so we live supernaturally from Jesus.

He is the bread that really comes down from heaven. Unlike the manna that could not sustain the people's life through death, the bread that Jesus gives communicates eternal life that sustains us through death.

Saturday of the 3rd Week of Easter

Jn 6:60-69

The people's response to Jesus insisting that they eat his flesh and drink his blood was shock and incomprehension. They could not believe what they were hearing. They just could not accept that teaching. Jesus had performed so many marvels for them. He had multiplied the fish and loaves to feed them. He cured the sick, the lame, the blind, the deaf, the lepers, and had even raised the dead to life. He spoke with such unction and authority. He had such compassion for the poor and the afflicted. Surely he must have come from God. They would have had to put aside their natural understanding of his words and trust him. He was speaking above their level of comprehension, and they would not go beyond their present natural level of thinking.

Jesus tried to raise their level of perception by mentioning his favorite term to identify himself as the Son of Man, that lowly human being coming on the clouds to receive glory and kingship (Dan 7:13-14). Jesus speaks of himself as ascending to where he was before. He was hinting at his glorification to encourage faith in himself—hoping they would come to trust him and put their faith in him.

Simple human flesh does not give eternal life—but his divinized flesh will. The flesh he is talking about will have been glorified through the Spirit. That is what they must eat. Again, the people would have to consider Jesus' saying on the level of spirit to understand him. Their mere human level of thinking is not able to penetrate spiritual matters. Jesus is speaking on the level of spirit which is life-giving. Jesus knew men's hearts and those who would not believe—such as Judas.

The Father would allow those who were cooperating with his grace to come to Jesus in faith—not the others who were too self-centered to cooperate.

Many turned away from Jesus at that moment and returned to their former way of life. They could not accept Jesus' teaching of the necessity of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. They understood correctly and Jesus did not back down. Rather, he challenged his Apostles to accept his teaching or to leave him then and there. Peter answered for the Twelve: they believed he has the words of eternal life unlike anybody else. They believed him and were convinced that he was the Holy One of God, that is, both Messiah and the actual divine Son of God.

Monday of the 4th Week of Easter **Jn 10:1-10**

This reading follows Jesus curing the man born blind and the Pharisees refusing to admit the truth. They were so exasperated with the convicting arguments of the man whose sight had been restored that they threw him out of the synagogue (9:22,34). They saw the truth but refused to admit it.

Jesus is contrasting himself with the false shepherds of Israel. These false shepherds do not go through Jesus, the gate, to enter the sheepfold. The true shepherd enters through the gate. The

false shepherds climb the walls of the sheepfold to enter. They will not enter through the gate because they are illegitimate and are not the rightful owners of the sheep. They come to abuse and kill the sheep.

The sheep hear the voice of the good shepherd and they recognize and follow him. He walks ahead of them and they walk behind him. They refuse to follow the stranger—they run away from him. They do not recognize his voice.

The Pharisees did not understand what Jesus was saying because they were not his sheep. They exemplify the point that Jesus is making. They do not recognize his voice.

The man born blind who was given sight by Jesus recognizes Jesus as the one who comes from God. He understood this as a result of his miraculous healing. He shows himself to be one of Jesus' sheep in contrast to the Pharisees who are opposed to him. They prove themselves to be thieves and robbers in the way they treated the man whose sight was restored and whom they rejected, harassed and threw out of the synagogue.

Jesus identifies himself as the true gate of the sheep. Those false shepherds of Israel who abuse the sheep, God's people, use the sheep for their own selfish purposes. But these sheep refuse to listen to them. (Compare Jn 9:31-33 and see how the man who now sees opposes these false shepherds.)

Jesus proves himself to be the gate by the way he treats the people and gives them life and wellbeing. The Pharisees are the false shepherds as proved by their abuse of the people. Jesus comes to give them abundant life as seen by his miraculous healings as well as by the spiritual life he gives them by his graced teachings filled with loving kindness by which he builds up their faith in God's love for them.

Tuesday of the 4th Week of Easter

Jn 10:22-30

The feast of the Dedication is an eight day festival of light (Hanukkah) held in December to celebrate the Maccabees' rededication of the altar and re-consecration of the temple in 164 B.C. after their desecration by Antiochus IV Epiphanies (NAB footnotes).

It is winter. Jesus walks about in the Temple area on the Portico of Solomon. This is a colonnade walkway surrounding the outer perimeter of the Temple. This section running along the eastern side is named after King Solomon. It offers protection against the cold winds from the desert.

The Jews, which refers to the leaders of the people, gather around Jesus. They ask him how long he is going to keep them in suspense. They want him to tell them plainly if he is the Messiah.

Jesus admitted to the Samaritan woman at the well that he is the Messiah (Jn 4: 25-26). He must have admitted it to his first disciples, for they were so excited that they had found him (Jn 1: 40-49). But Jesus is reluctant to admit publicly that he is the Messiah because of their misconception of his role. He does not want the excitement of the people to interfere with his spiritual mission.

Jesus responds to his questioners that he has told them but they do not believe. But Jesus never gives to unbelievers the same frank answers that he gives to the well-disposed. With unbelievers he refers to his witnesses. Thus he tells them that the works he does in his Father's name testify to him. The miracles he performs as well as the authority with which he speaks should convince them that he is the Messiah.

But they do not believe because these rulers of the people are not among his sheep. Since they do not live in accord with God's will, they are not in synchrony with Jesus and his ways. They are on a different wave length.

The people who live in accord with God's will, Jesus' sheep, hear his voice, it resonates well with them, they believe what he says, and follow him. Jesus knows who they are. He gives them eternal life. They will never perish. No one can take them out of his divine hands because he and the Father are one being—and no one can snatch them from the Father's hand.

Wednesday of the 4th Week of Easter

Jn 12:44-50

Jesus cries out so that all can hear and understand this important announcement: "Whoever believes in me", he says, "believes not only in me but also in the one who sent me, and whoever sees me sees the one who sent me."

He says earlier, that he and the Father are one thing (Jn 10:30). To believe in Jesus is also to believe in the Father who sent him. He is not proclaiming anything different from what the Father would tell them. He only speaks what the Father reveals to him. There is only one will among them. Jesus reassures them that he is an authentic spokesman for the Father and says nothing else. Believing in Jesus and his words is believing in the one true God.

Jesus is the image of the Father. To see him is to see the Father. He is the very imprint of the Father's being (Heb 1:3). Jesus is the visible expression of the Father who remains unseen. As a reflection of the Father, who is light (1 Jn 1:5), Jesus himself is likewise light. His words are illuminating. The truth he proclaims enlightens people to save them from the darkness of sin and evil. Now they can see how to live so as to avoid the evil of sin.

If people do not observe what Jesus is telling them, he allows them to do as they please. His mission is not to condemn but to save. However, the words he speaks will condemn them on the last day. Their disobedience and decision to remain in the darkness of sin in which they perish will judge them.

Jesus does not speak on his own but only what the Father commands him to say. What the Father commands gives eternal life. His words lead people to union with God who infuses them with his own divine eternal life. Jesus obediently speaks as the Father tells him; which is for the good of all.

Thursday of the 4th Week of Easter

Jn 13:16-20

When Jesus makes a statement preceded by a double “Amen” it is to indicate its importance. Here he is stressing that a man’s slave or messenger is not greater than his master or the one who sends him. Jesus is saying this immediately after he has washed his disciple’s feet. In this way he is ritualizing what his life is all about. It is laying his life down in service for love of others. Jesus has humbled himself in becoming human. He maintains that humble state and disposition by being at the service of others. He is calling upon his disciples to have the same humble attitude as he. They must humble themselves likewise through service of others. They will be very blessed if they understand and do this. To accomplish this will mean that they excel in humility and love. This will assure their growing in holiness and follow the example of their Lord and Master.

This scene is taking place during Jesus’ Last Supper. He is very much aware of what was going on in each of his disciple’s hearts. In saying, “I am not speaking of all of you” he must have been thinking of Judas. Jesus knows his heart and what he is thinking of doing. He knows what is going to happen. He allows Judas to go his own way. He will not force his will to go in the right direction. He allows him to be free to choose as he wants. Jesus is aware of the Scriptures regarding his betrayal. In particular he quotes Psalm 41:10, “The one who ate my food has raised his heel against me.” It is saddening for him to realize that it is one of his

dear friends who will commit this treacherous act against him.

Jesus wants his faithful followers to know that he is aware of what is going to happen. When the betrayal takes place they will know that Jesus has divine knowledge that it is going to happen. He forewarns them so that they might believe that “I AM”; that he is God and knows quite well what is going to take place.

Jesus stresses that whoever receives the one he sends actually receives Jesus himself and even God himself who sent him.

Friday of the 4th Week of Easter

Jn 14:1-6

Jesus had announced his departure. It is no wonder that his disciples are troubled. The way to overcome their anxiety is through faith in him. Faith unites us to God and Jesus as well. Jesus is the object of our faith as well as the Father. For, he is divine. Through faith in him we anchor ourselves in the divine stability. We are in union with the eternal where life is at its best and never ends.

The Father’s house has many rooms, dwelling places. Jesus is the new temple of God (Jn 2:19), the Father’s house. He is going to prepare a place for his disciples by his passion, death and resurrection. We are joined to his glorified body by faith and baptism. Each of us becomes a dwelling place for God through the Holy Spirit. Jesus will return at his Second Coming to take us to himself. He will also return to take us to himself when we die. But he will also return to be with us when he sends his Holy Spirit to dwell in us (Jn 14:15-17). It is consoling to know that Jesus wants to continue to be with us. He loves us to the end. Thomas does not know where Jesus is going. How then can he know the way to follow Jesus?

Jesus informs the disciple that he himself is the way because he is the Truth. The disciple has been exposed to Jesus' revelation and the way he lived and behaved. The Father was always the center of his life. He was always obedient to the Father's will—even if it was very difficult. He trusted the Father entirely. He never hesitated to do everything the Father commanded him to do. The Father, God, is the Truth and great reality around whom we must center our lives. As much as Jesus' human will cringed at having to suffer the horrors of crucifixion, he never swerved from obeying his Father in suffering and dying. Thomas experienced the absolute fidelity with which Jesus carried out the Father's least desire for him. That is the way he must go also.

Jesus is the way because he is the life. The disciple must live in close union with him. He must draw life by being firmly attached to Jesus through faith. He must be nourished with Christ daily through eating the Living Bread. He must live by every word that comes from his mouth.

That is the way the disciple must go to follow Jesus and be with him.

Saturday of the 4th Week of Easter **Jn 14:7-14**

Jesus announces that he is leaving his disciples. He is going to prepare a place for them. Then he will return to take them with him at his second coming, as well as at their deaths. This could also refer to his return through the Holy Spirit to dwell within them (14:18-23). Thomas is concerned about his not knowing where Jesus is going and not knowing the way. Jesus then explains: "I am the way and the truth and the life." The divine Jesus is the one and only way to the Father. No one can go to the Father except through him. He is the one mediator through whom we must go through to obtain access to the Father. He alone redeems us and expiates or makes up for

our sins. He is the way because he is the truth by which we know how to reach the Father. He reveals to us what we must believe and do to attain God. Jesus is the way because he is the life, the very life of God. He is the only means through which we can obtain this supernatural life. He is the fruit hanging from the only tree of life in the new Garden of Eden.

When we know Jesus we actually also know the Father. He is the external manifestation of the Father. He puts a human face to the eternal God. By associating with Jesus day to day so intimately, the disciples get to know the Father and what he is like. To see and know Jesus is to see and know the Father.

To put it differently, Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in him. The two are intimately united to each other. When Jesus speaks, he is speaking for the Father. The Father communicates himself to us through the Son. The divine Father, who is in Jesus, is the one who performs the actions of Jesus. The miracles Jesus performs come from the divine power of the Father. The authority with which Jesus speaks comes from the Father.

These works that Jesus does show plainly that Jesus is in the Father and he is in Jesus. Those who believe are so closely united to Jesus they will do the works that Jesus does and even greater because Jesus will then be glorified as he is reunited to his Father in his glory. The disciples will draw power from the glorified Christ.

Jesus will fulfill our prayer requests when we ask in his name. This will give the Son honor and glory. And the Father will be glorified in that way also. Any glory that is given to the Son redounds to the glory of the Father, for the Son receives his power and influence from the Father. Jesus encourages us to ask in his name, to present our petitions through Jesus' intercessory power—for, he intercedes for us before the Father to whom he is ascended. This supposes, of course, that we ask according to God's will and what is for our good.

Monday of the 5th Week of Easter

Jn 14:21-26

Union and friendship with God presupposes conformity to God's will. This is shown by the knowledge of and obedience to Jesus' commandments. These commandments are the words he spoke to bring to perfection and completion the Old Testament revelation. His Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) is a good example of how Jesus went beyond and perfected the old law, such as the Ten Commandments. Yet they are very important. As Jesus said, "Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:19).

Keeping these least commands that Jesus gave us is a sign that we love him. We trust that these are for our good. The Father will love us for responding so well to Jesus. And Jesus will love us in turn and reveal himself to us.

One of the apostles was curious to know how it is that Jesus would reveal himself to his disciples but not to the world. I suppose the apostle was thinking of some kind of theophany in which he would manifest himself externally to the whole world such as at his second coming. Jesus explained that those who love him keep his word and are spiritually disposed through self-discipline to perceive his presence and self-revelation. Our loving response in keeping Jesus' word calls forth the Father's love for us. Then they come to dwell in us through the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:15-17). So Jesus will reveal himself to us within our hearts by his indwelling presence. This is a presence of love, that of the love of the Father and the Son (verses 21,23) expressed through the Holy Spirit (v. 16-17).

The world, on the other hand, does not dispose themselves spiritually by keeping Jesus' word to be able to receive Jesus' self-revelation within them. They are too taken up and focused on worldly things.

The disciples may well forget what Jesus is telling them. They are too distressed to remember everything that he said. That is why he will send the Holy Spirit as their defender and advisor to remind them of everything Jesus told them.

Tuesday of the 5th Week of Easter

Jn 14:27-31a

Jesus is about to leave the upper room to enter into his passion and death. He is trying to console his disciples who are saddened at his departure.

The great gift Jesus promises to leave with his disciples is peace—his very own peace. And, he distinguishes his kind of peace from that of the world. The world attains its external peace by weapons and fighting off the enemy. But this external peace does not bring or secure internal peace of heart. It can easily be lost through anxiety or fear. The heart is left unprotected.

The peace of Jesus is internal and is not lost by external events. It is brought about by God's indwelling presence (14:23). The person is at one with himself through forgiveness of sins and the bestowal of grace. He is no longer divided within himself and in turmoil over what God wanted and what he wanted. He surrendered to God's will and repented of his sinful desires. He, now, at one with God, experiences tranquility of order and spiritual serenity. Now, even if things go wrong outside, he retains his inner peace. Jesus had announced previously that he was going away through his death and would come back through his resurrection.

If they loved him they would rejoice that he is going to the Father. The Father is the one who sent Jesus; and he receives his being and sonship eternally from the Father. And, he is mortal in his human nature. In that sense the Father is greater than he. It is in going to the Father that his glory as Son will be restored.

Jesus knew what was going to happen to him. Thus he reveals this to his disciples so that after it all happens they will believe in him. He speaks of Satan as the ruler of this world. That means that those who are worldly have him as their leader. What a fearsome reality! That should be enough to make anyone hate the world and its sinful ways (see 1 Jn 2:15-17). But Jesus is totally unworldly. Satan has nothing to hold on to in him. He has no attachments to earthly things.

Jesus' going to do his Father's will in embracing crucifixion and death is an astonishing sign of how much he loves the Father and does as he is commanded.

Wednesday of the 5th Week of Easter Jn 15:1-8

Israel of old was compared to a vineyard (Is 5:1-7) or as a vine (Ps 80:9-17). But it produced wild grapes (Jer 2:21).

The divine Jesus (I Am) is the true vine that will produce good fruit. Those who are joined to him through faith and baptism are the branches. The Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch that does not bear fruit. Such is the case of one who does not remain in Jesus (v. 6). That branch is thrown out; it is useless except to be cast into the fire and burned, a symbol of the fires of hell. The Father prunes the branches that bear fruit through works of love. He wants us to produce more and grow in love and self-giving. Perhaps, for example, he will make it impossible for those who are too attached to viewing certain TV shows to see them anymore. That time could

be more valuably spent reading and reflecting on the word of God as a means to visiting and listening to Jesus.

The disciples were already pruned and cleansed by listening to Jesus' words as he remonstrated with them for wanting the first place by pridefully vying with each other. He put them to shame by humbly washing their feet. In this way he showed them the true way to greatness.

Jesus wants them to remain united to him as he remains united to them in love. He desires mutual indwelling through loving friendship and faithfulness. This abiding union with Jesus as a branch attached to the vine is the only way they will be able to bear fruit. Through loving faith, they draw power and life to bear the fruit of good works. Without being attached to the vine, it is impossible for the branch to bear fruit. So it is for the disciple who is not closely joined to Christ.

Jesus is the vine, we are the branches. By remaining firmly attached and united to Jesus we will be able to bear much fruit. Without him we can do nothing, for the good works we produce are supernatural, beyond our natural powers.

If we remain closely united to Jesus and keep his words in our hearts, we would ask only what is pleasing to God and good for us so that we will receive what we ask for. This is true because we will ask only according to God's will (1 Jn 5:14). Living closely united to Jesus and living virtuous lives by doing works of love glorifies the Father. We are then truly followers and disciples of Jesus. Such virtuous living gives great glory to God.

Thursday of the 5th Week of Easter Jn 15:9-11

The Father loves Jesus with an eternal love. This love is ceaseless, continuous and without end. It is an infinite love. That is how the Father loves Jesus. He gives himself

entirely to his Son as he begets him eternally. He pours himself completely into him.

Now Jesus says that as the Father loves him so he loves us. It is with such a total love as the Father loves him that Jesus loves us. We can see clearly the extent with which Jesus loves us when he pours out his whole being exhaustively on Calvary. There he gives his all on the cross; with wide open arms stretched out endlessly he embraces us with his endless love. So even in his human nature he expresses his infinite love for us as he gives all of his life, pouring it all out to the last drop of blood for love of us. So Jesus can truly say, "As the Father loves me, so I also love you". What more could we ask for or want? Buoyed up with this love, we confidently go forward towards a life of holiness.

"Remain in my love", Jesus says. Do not ever leave me. I've given my all for you. You can't possibly leave me after all I've done for you. I have loved you beyond all comprehension. Remain united to me in the depths of your heart where I live and await you. Even if you are very busy, your heart can keep vigil and you can stay with me in that way. "I thirst". I cried out for your love on the cross. Love me ceaselessly the way I love you.

Jesus goes on to explain, "If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love". Jesus' commandments refer to everything he has said such as his Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) where he perfected and went beyond the Old Law. There he showed us how to give our all in total purity of heart. Following even the least of these commandments, he says, will make us the greatest in the Kingdom of God (Mt 5:19). All of these finishing touches of the new law were given out of love to call and dispose us for the greatest intimacy with our Lord. Following them will enable us to live on the level of spirit where Jesus lives with the Father.

He calls us to this because he wants us to be closely united to him and experience that greatest joy, his own joy! In this way our joy will be complete.

Friday of the 5th Week of Easter Jn 15:12-17

Jesus' new commandment is, "love one another as I love you". This is his commandment. Previously, after enunciating the greatest commandment in the law which is to love God with our whole heart, Jesus then added a second like it which is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mt 22:37-39). Now, however, after this supper of love and the gift of himself in the Eucharist, Jesus empowers his disciples to love in an even higher degree. He commands them and us to love one another as he loves us. Only his great love in us through his indwelling presence (Jn 14:23) and his nourishing us with his own self and divine love in the Eucharist could make that possible.

As St. Paul put it, "The love of Christ impels us" (2 Cor 5:14). We pray to be able to surrender to that impelling love surging in our hearts so we will love one another the way Jesus loves us.

There is no greater love than this to lay down one's life for one's friends. And yet, Jesus goes still further. To put it in St. Paul's words, "Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person.... But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:7-8).

Jesus wants to include us as his friends. But we must live according to what he has taught us. This kind of living will make us like him. In this way we will have the same kind of love as he has, the same mind, the same way of being. In this way we will become his intimate friends. A slave does not enjoy the company and friendship of his master. He does not share his intimate thoughts, or share meals with him. He does not know what the master is about.

But Jesus calls us his friends. We are his friends indeed because he takes us into his confidence. He shares with us his intimate thoughts—everything that he has heard from his Father. He is the one who chose us to be his friends. We are

so privileged to have been chosen by him. We are so undeserving! We are called to live in close communion with him.

He has commissioned us to go and bear fruit by way of works of love and to bring many who are disposed to be participants in his Kingdom. He also wants us to ask the Father whatever we need in his name. He will intercede for us so we receive what we ask for. But above all, he commands us to love one another. This is the mark of being a follower of his.

Saturday of the 5th Week of Easter **Jn 15:18-21**

Jesus warns his disciples about the hatred of the world. He is speaking here about the unbelieving Jews. Just as they persecuted Jesus, they will also persecute his disciples. But the idea of the world is far broader. St. John explains what he understands by the word “world”. This is how he states it: “Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life, is not from the Father but is from the world. Yet the world and its enticement are passing away” (1 Jn 2:15-17).

Lust, disordered desire for possessions, and pride spring from a sinfully inclined human nature. These are the works of the flesh. But these are the works that militate against the spirit. It is of such sinful inclinations that Jesus calls us to deny ourselves (Lk 9:23). Preaching against such behavior to those who live according to the flesh causes them to persecute the disciples. They want to keep on enjoying their sinful pleasures unhindered. They will hate the disciples just as they hated Jesus for preaching the truth. They desire to be left to their wrongdoing.

If the disciples participated in the worldly living with worldlings they would be liked. Their dulled

consciences would not be awakened to truth and allow these worldlings to continue unchallenged in their sinful behavior.

Jesus’ disciples have been called to live contrary to the world they live in. Those who live according to the flesh are shown to be wrong by the good example of Jesus’ followers. As a result, their consciences then begin to bother them. But, they want to continue in their wrongdoing. Therefore they hate Jesus’ disciples.

Jesus told them that is what they can expect. Those who live according to worldly standards will hate the disciples just as they hated Jesus. They will persecute them for being disturbed in their sinfulness.

Those, however, who want to live holy, spiritual lives, will be glad to know the truth and live by it.

The disciples will be hated and persecuted on account of Jesus’ name, that is, Jesus himself who carries the divine name. They will do this because they do not know God; they do not live in communion with him.

Monday of the 6th Week of Easter **Jn 15:26-16:4**

The Advocate is the Holy Spirit who comes to our defense as an attorney. He inspires us through the gift of counsel to know what to do or say. Through the gift of fortitude he may empower us to suffer heroically with joy. He is the Spirit of Truth who comes from the Father and the Son. He will testify and speak for Jesus, that he is truly the one sent by God. Earlier Jesus explained that we would know the Spirit because he remains with us and will be in us (Jn 14:17). It is a great comfort to know that the Holy Spirit is always present to us, ready to defend us.

The disciples are also called to testify to Jesus as the one sent by God. He is indeed the Messiah

and all of us must speak up unashamedly for Jesus because we have experienced the salvation that he brings: the forgiveness of sins and the peace and joy that comes from being in the presence of God. Those who have been with Jesus from the beginning of his public ministry at his baptism by John are especially called to speak up for him.

By warning his disciples what to expect, that is, persecution, Jesus wants them to be prepared ahead of time so that they will not fall away.

They can expect to be excommunicated from the synagogues. The hour or time of persecution is coming. Jesus wants his followers to be prepared. Those who kill them will consider it an act of worship of God. For those they kill are considered apostates from Judaism. And yet they will do this because they do not know the Father or Jesus. Jesus wants them to be forewarned and to expect this. The transition from Judaism to Christianity will be a difficult one.

There was no need for Jesus to tell this to his disciples while he was with them. But now that he is leaving them, they need to know what to expect and brace themselves for what is going to happen.

Tuesday of the 6th Week of Easter **Jn 16:5-11**

Jesus announces to his disciples that he is going to the Father who sent him. He will accomplish this through resurrection. Peter had asked Jesus earlier where he was going (13:36). It is only now Jesus reveals that he is returning to the Father. As a result the disciples' hearts are filled with grief.

Jesus tries to console them by telling them that it is better for them that he is going away. He must go away by his passion, death and resurrection before he can send the Holy Spirit to them. He is the Spirit of Jesus' glory. Jesus must first be glorified before he can send the Holy Spirit to

them. The disciples must rest assured that Jesus will surely send the Spirit upon them. But this can take place only if he leaves. It is through his leaving them by his passion and death that he will be glorified. He must first redeem the world by his sufferings before he can send the Spirit to sanctify them.

When the Spirit does come, he will convict the world of sin, the sin of refusing to believe in Jesus. Even after observing his sinless life and all the good he did for the poor, the sick and the lame—and even raising people from the dead—they still refused to believe that he was sent by God.

The Spirit will also convict the world of Jesus' righteousness. Many witnessed that Jesus triumphed over death and was glorified. This gives evidence of his righteousness. The Father was well pleased with him and raised him from the dead. He was unjustly condemned, but his righteousness nonetheless prevailed for all to see. His glorification was his going to the Father.

The Holy Spirit will make it clear that Satan has been condemned for misleading people to crucify the innocent Son of God. The glorification of Jesus proves all of his enemies in the wrong. By the power of the cross all evil is destroyed and Satan's power is brought to naught.

Wednesday of the 6th Week of Easter **Jn 16:12-15**

Jesus would have liked to say much more to his disciples but they were not prepared to understand him. They needed to grow in spiritual maturity to be able to understand everything he wanted to tell them. The unfolding of time and the sufferings of life would dispose them to receive the enlightenment that the Holy Spirit would give them.

After Jesus would be glorified, he was going to send the Holy Spirit to them. This Spirit of truth would guide them unto all truth. He will give them

insight into the meaning of Jesus' words and the events that would take place. For example, they would see how these events were the fulfillment of the scriptures.

The Spirit is not going to reveal anything independent of what the Father revealed in Jesus. Rather he will bring these revealed truths to completion. He will enlighten the disciples so that they will understand them in greater depth, and they will see how the development of the new order of things following the paschal mystery brings to completion and fulfillment the old order. All that the prophets announced would come true in Jesus and the new economy of salvation that he established. The Spirit reveals only what he sees and hears from the Father and the Son. All that the Son is and does comes from the Father. In giving the disciples insight into Jesus, the Spirit is also revealing the Father to them. Through this knowledge, the disciples will be brought into deeper communion with Jesus and the Father. They will enter ever more deeply into the Truth which is Jesus, who is divine Reality.

All that the Spirit does will give glory to Jesus. He will take all that Jesus said and did and interpret these for the disciples. This will glorify Jesus, and their new understanding will cause them to praise him for all that he is and did for our salvation. All that the Father has belongs to Jesus also. This is what the Spirit will help the disciples to understand and give praise to God.

Thursday of the 6th Week of Easter **Jn 16:16-20**

We are so fortunate to be living after Jesus went through his passion, death and resurrection. We understand it so clearly now. The disciples who lived before the paschal mystery happened just could not understand what Jesus was talking about. They could not comprehend what Jesus meant with "a little while and you will no longer see me." He was

referring to his leaving them through his death. They were mystified by his mysterious words.

But he continues to speak and says "and again a little while later and you will see me." The little while he was speaking of were the three days his body would be in the tomb and his spirit "sojourned in the realm of the dead... . In his soul [Jesus] joined the others in the realm of the dead... . He descended there as Savior, proclaiming the Good News to the spirits imprisoned there" (CCC 632). That was too much for Jesus to explain in detail to his worried disciples. It was better for them to be sanctified by going through the great trial of Jesus' paschal mystery. Jesus also speaks of his going to the Father. What did he mean by all of that? He would go to the Father by his glorification. Even his human nature would be divinized so that his whole being would be with the Father and immersed in him. But how could Jesus explain all of that to them? It was better for them to wait and see the mystery unfold so that little by little they would absorb it. And isn't that the way it happens with us?

We suffer through life's happenings and come to understand in time its meaning and thus we are sanctified as we go through it, pondering over its mystery in faith. Jesus can only say that his disciples will grieve and suffer as they pass through this upcoming trial with him. And those who are against him will rejoice that they finally got him. But his disciples' grief will be turned into joy which no one can take away from them.

Friday of the 6th Week of Easter **Jn 16:20-23a**

Jesus is making an important statement when he begins with a double amen. He warns the disciples that they will soon be weeping and mourning. This occurred toward the end of the Last Supper. Jesus had already told them that

one of them would betray him. There surely must have been fear mingled with that night of love. The disciples must have been wondering what was going to happen. Evil was looming according to these predictions. What did Jesus mean when he said that the world would be rejoicing? The disciples must have wondered what Jesus meant. The leaders of the Jewish people were plotting and getting ready to arrest Jesus. They had been planning to put him to death. Thus far, he would always slip away from their grasp because his hour had not yet come. But that hour is now very near and the Father will withdraw his protective hand. Jesus will be delivered into his enemies cruel hands. At last, they will finally succeed and their evil glee will be great!

The disciples, on the other hand, will be overwhelmed with grief. But that will last only for a short while. On Easter Sunday morning that temporary grief of Good Friday and Holy Saturday will be transformed into incredible joy. This will be a joy beyond any they had ever experienced. This will be an immense spiritual, supernatural joy. For they will be imbued with that Easter glory Jesus will have attained. They will be overwhelmed with its exceedingly great heavenly joy.

The difference between their painful sorrow and Easter joy will be like a woman in labor to give birth and the joy she experiences when a child has been born. She no longer remembers the pain she went through because of the joy of seeing her new born baby.

As Jesus was saying this, the disciples were in great anguish over what was about to happen. He reassured them, however, that he will see them again. And when he does, their hearts will rejoice with a joy that no one can take away. At that moment, everything will become clear to them, and they will not need to ask Jesus any more questions.

Saturday of the 6th Week of Easter Jn 16:23b-28

Jesus assures the disciples by a double amen that whatever they ask the Father in his name he will give them. Asking in his name means that they are in union with Jesus. They are in him and he is in them and Jesus is in the Father. This close union with Jesus implies that the requests would be of a serious nature, such as desiring that their apostolate be more fruitful, or that they grow in holiness. Earlier, when Jesus spoke about asking in his name, it was concerning the works he had done to glorify the Father (Jn 14:10-14).

It was because Jesus was in the Father and the Father in him that he was doing the works he was doing. The requests, then, that the disciples will ask and receive are not petty, everyday things, but those that concern the Christian life.

The disciples who ask in the name are immersed in the divinity of Jesus and the Father. They are concerned with serious spiritual matters. Their prayerful lives will bear fruit. It is as if the Spirit had already been given to the disciples and Jesus had been glorified. Before that the disciples were not immersed in Jesus' name, in his divinity. Asking in the context of being in communion with the glorified Christ who is in union with his Father in the Spirit will fill the disciples with holy joy. They will receive in great abundance the divine life outpoured and dwelling within them.

At that moment Jesus will not need to explain these supernatural realities by comparing them with things they are familiar with (parables). Now they will be enlightened interiorly by the Holy Spirit. They will enjoy the Father's presence living in them and come to know him experientially (see Jn 14:19-24).

On that day, when the Spirit will have been given to them, when the disciples ask in Jesus'

name, the Father will be so closely united to them in Jesus that he himself will hear and answer them.

The Father loves the disciples because they accept and love Jesus. They believe in him and are closely united to him. Jesus came from the Father. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit sent by the Father and was born among us. Now he is leaving the world and returning to the Father. What a beautiful and consoling way to look upon dying and leaving this world. It is a matter of returning to the Father who gave us life. Now we are heading for glory to be in the glorious presence of the Father.

Monday of the 7th Week of Easter **Jn 16:29-33**

In a moment of clarity the disciples begin to understand Jesus as never before. He speaks plainly to them, directly, and no longer in parables. They realize that Jesus knows everything. They are now convinced that Jesus is from God, or, perhaps, that he is divine. They are satisfied that he knows everything and need not be questioned. There is nothing more to ask. He has revealed all there is to know about him.

But this is a moment of over-confidence. They think they know all there is to know about him, but the worst is yet to happen. And when it occurs, despite Jesus' forewarnings, they will be utterly taken aback. All their supposed strength will vanish, and they will flee, leaving Jesus all alone to go through his passion. By using the word scattered Jesus is thinking of the words of the prophet Zechariah. St. Matthew quotes the passage saying, "This night all of you will have your faith in me shaken, for it is written:

'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be dispersed'; but after I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee" (Mt 26:31-32; Zech 13:7).

The hour of Jesus, the time of his suffering, death and resurrection, is about to happen. The disciples will be scattered, leaving Jesus to fend for himself. And yet Jesus was never alone, for he was always with the Father who is going to sustain him in his trial. He will continue to be in communion with his Father and draw strength from him to endure whatever comes.

Despite the fact that the disciples abandon Jesus, they will be consoled and experience peace in him knowing that the Father continued to be with him so that ultimately he will triumph over his enemies. Just as Jesus overcame the world during his extreme trial, so, too, his disciples can rely on him to overcome the world when it is their turn to struggle against it.

Tuesday of the 7th Week of Easter **Jn 17: 1-11a**

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven in the traditional way of acknowledging God in prayer. He speaks to him as one superior to him in his human nature and dwelling in heaven.

This whole chapter seventeen of John's Gospel gives us a rare view of Jesus speaking to his Father. The Our Father contains Jesus' words teaching us how to address God in prayer. Jesus' hour, about which he spoke so often (17 times in John's Gospel), is now arriving. It is the time of his passion and death, but extends to his resurrection. Jesus asks the Father to glorify him by sustaining him in virtue and fidelity to his will during his sufferings, as well as raising him up in the glory of the resurrection. The Son will glorify the Father in submitting and doing his will by accepting suffering and death.

By his incarnation Jesus assumed our human nature. And by divinizing our flesh through his glorification, Jesus has been given the power to raise all flesh and give them eternal life. Eternal

life, he explains, is to know God experientially and Jesus as well.

Jesus glorified his Father by always being obedient to his will in carrying out his mission. In all of his actions he always attributed his power to the Father. Now Jesus prays for the glory he had in the Father's presence before the world began. He looks forward to his rightful place and being there again in heaven with the Father.

Jesus manifested the Father's name to his disciples by revealing his characteristics to them. He was always deferential towards him. He revealed the Father's superiority and greatness to them. He relied entirely upon him and how dependent we all must be on him for everything.

The disciples belonged to the Father because they were united to him and obedient to his will. That is why they were attracted to Jesus. The Father gave them to Jesus as his disciples. He took them out of a sinful world to be with Jesus.

Jesus made sure that his disciples understood that everything he had came from the Father. He told them everything the Father said to tell them. The disciples received Jesus' teaching and knew that he came from God. Jesus is praying for his disciples since he is about to leave them. His focus is not on the sinful world at this time, but on his precious disciples given to him by the Father. They really belong to the Father. Everything that belongs to Jesus belongs to the Father likewise; and everything that belongs to the Father also belongs to Jesus. Jesus has been glorified by his disciples because they have been faithful to him and they will continue to glorify Jesus after he has risen.

And now Jesus is about to depart from his disciples—he will soon leave this world and go back to the Father.

Wednesday of the 7th Week of Easter Jn 17: 11b-19

Jesus uses the respectful title of Holy Father. He reverences his Father's greatness and apartness from everything that is in the world—He is so far superior to everything that is in it.

Jesus prays for his disciples that the Father will keep them in his name, keep them united to him, immersed in his divinity. This divine name was given to Jesus who possesses the divinity equal with the Father.

In this way the disciples will be united to each other, each participating in the divinity through grace and united like the Father and the Son.

While Jesus remained on earth he protected his disciples. He kept them in the divine name united to God by sanctifying grace. Jesus guarded them carefully. None was lost except Judas. His betrayal was foreknown by God as recorded in Scripture: "The one who ate my food has raised his heel against me" (Ps 41:10; Jn 13:18).

But now Jesus is returning to the Father. He is very joyous about his going to the Father. He wants to share this fact with his disciples so that they may completely share his joy.

He gave them the Father's word. The world hated them for this. And this is because Jesus' disciples do not have the spirit of the world—just as Jesus does not either.

He does not ask the Father to take them out of the world, but simply to keep them from the evil one, Satan himself.

Jesus repeats that they do not belong to the world. They do not share the sinful attitude of the world.

Jesus prays that the Father will consecrate his disciples in the truth. He wishes that they be

set apart from a world that does not know God and totally devoted to the Truth, to God through Jesus who is the truth, the supreme reality. In this way their lives will revolve around God. They will attain this total devotion to God by their being faithful to the word of God, which is the truth. That is how they will know the will of God. The word reveals God's wisdom and will. By following it, they will be consecrated in the truth. After being consecrated in the truth, Jesus will then be able to send them in to the world to preach the truth. People will then be able to make Jesus and God the center of their lives.

Jesus is consecrating himself for them by giving himself entirely over to the Father's will in accepting his crucifixion and death. His disciples will then be able to receive their sacrificed and glorified Lord in the holy Eucharist. In this way he will transform them and consecrate them in truth, in the divine reality.

Thursday of the 7th Week of Easter **Jn 17: 20-26**

Jesus' prayer now goes beyond those who are his present disciples. He extends his prayer for all those who will believe in him because of the words his disciples will speak. His prayer is that they may be closely united, even as he and the Father are one—as the Father is in him and he in the Father. Jesus prays that all of his disciples may be immersed in Jesus and the Father (through the Holy Spirit). This loving community will be so closely united that it will call attention to itself and cause the world to believe that Jesus was sent by the Father.

The glory that Jesus had with the Father, which he enjoyed from all eternity and of which he emptied himself, he will regain when he is glorified in the resurrection. He will share this glory with his disciples when he communicates divine life to them in the form of sanctifying grace. This grace will bring about unity among them so that they

will be closely united to one another like Jesus and the Father. Jesus will be in his disciples and the Father will be in Jesus. This divine glory will make them perfectly one so that the world will realize Jesus' divine mission and that the Father loved them even as he loved Jesus.

Jesus recognizes that the disciples are the Father's gift to him. He desires that where he is in heavenly glory his disciples will also be with him. Jesus wishes for them to see the glory that the Father gives him because he loved Jesus before the foundation of the world.

Jesus addresses his Father as righteous, true to his promises, and faithful to his word. The world does not know him. But Jesus knows him, and his disciples know that the Father sent Jesus.

Jesus made the Father's name, his Person, known to them. He will continue to make him known that the love with which the Father loves him may be in them and that he also may be in them.

Friday of the 7th Week of Easter **Jn 21: 15-19**

During one of Jesus' appearances after the resurrection, he stood on the sea shore and directed the apostles for a huge catch of fish. This miraculous catch after their failure to catch anything all night, alerted the apostles that it was their risen Lord who had done this for them. When they came ashore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. Jesus knew that his disciples would be very hungry, so he had prepared breakfast for them. After they had eaten, Jesus asked Peter whether he loved him more than the other disciples. We recall here that after Jesus predicted that all of his disciples would have their faith in him shaken, Peter boasted that though all might have their faith in him shaken, his would never be (see Mt 26: 31-33). Thus Jesus' questioning Peter whether he loved him more than the other disciples would bring to his

mind his original boast and how he had failed miserably in carrying it out. Peter responded to Jesus' question with "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Perhaps Peter is less reliant on himself now, after his dismal failure in carrying out his boast. Instead he relies on Jesus' knowledge. Jesus then tells Peter, "Feed my lambs."

Jesus proclaimed himself to be the good shepherd (Jn 10:11, 14). Now he is commissioning Peter to take his place in caring for his sheep, his followers.

Jesus then asked Peter a second time whether he loved him. Peter again answered "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you". Again Jesus said, "Tend my sheep." Jesus entrusted his sheep to Peter even if he had denied him, for he knew that he had learned his lesson, that now he would rely on Jesus for strength.

And again for the third time Jesus asked Peter whether he loved him. The distressed Peter answered, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you". Again Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep". Jesus now makes Peter the chief shepherd of his flock. He fulfills his promise, "you are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church" (Mt 16: 18).

It was by a charcoal fire that Peter denied Jesus (Jn 18:18). Now, before another charcoal fire (Jn 21:9), Peter implicitly expresses his regrets and reaffirms his love for Jesus and his fidelity. Jesus then foretells Peter's martyrdom in veiled language. This took place in Rome around A.D. 67. Peter did not feel worthy to be crucified like Jesus so he requested to be crucified upside down. This request was honored.

Saturday of the 7th Week of Easter **Jn 21:20-25**

Jesus had just told Peter to follow him. As Peter and Jesus were walking, Peter noticed the disciple Jesus loved following them. Jesus had told Peter how he would die.

This caused Peter to wonder about John who was so loved by Jesus. What would happen to him? He was so close to Jesus at the Last Supper, he simply leaned back and laid against Jesus' chest to enquire who was going to betray him. Peter was curious to know about John's death. So he asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus would not answer questions asked out of mere curiosity. For example some asked Jesus whether only a few would be saved. Jesus did not answer them and used the opportunity to exhort them to strive to enter by the narrow door. Many will seek to enter and will be unable. One has to make efforts and strive arduously to enter that narrow door to salvation.

So, here too, Jesus does not answer Peter's question. He simply says, "What if I want him to remain until I come? What concern is it of yours? You follow me." We easily get distracted from our main concerns. This throws us off course so Jesus tells Peter to follow him and not to be concerned about John.

Some thought that Jesus would return before John died. But that was an incorrect interpretation of what Jesus meant. He simply meant that what is going to happen to John is none of Peter's concern. John himself experienced that interchange and he is giving a correct interpretation to the event. We can depend on its truthfulness.

Jesus did many other things, but the inspired writers selected only certain words and deeds and recorded them for our edification.

Monday-1st Week in Ordinary Time **Mk 1:14-20**

The Gospel begins today with a reference to John the Baptist's arrest-which foreshadows Jesus' own fate. John is a type of suffering servant. He has been thrown into prison by Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee and Peraea. John has denounced him because of his adulterous union with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife (Mk 6:17).

In the plan of God, Jesus is not to proclaim the good news of salvation prior to the end of the Baptist's active mission. But there is continuity between John and Jesus' preaching: they both call the people to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom. "Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God." Jesus is in Judea, where John is baptizing. But with John's arrest and with the growing inimity of the leaders of the Jews, it is advisable for Jesus to withdraw from Judea and go to Galilee. The Gospel of God is the good news about God and his love; it is about God at work in Jesus and the salvation from suffering, sin, and death that he brings. "This is the time of fulfillment". What God has looked toward, promised, and has prepared his people for over the centuries is now in the process of unfolding: it is arriving in Jesus. "The Kingdom of God is at hand." God's sovereign rule over his people is now being established in Jesus. The long-awaited Kingdom is the realm where God reigns. That rule is now beginning in the chosen people who accept it; through them it will spread to all people of all nations. Its power can be seen as he casts out demons and performs miraculous cures to manifest the arrival of God's presence and reign among his people. The Kingdom of God is God's kingly rule and activity in and among his people. God's decisive intervention is happening in the ministry of Jesus and his disciples. The Kingdom is here and now present: the power of evil spirits is broken, sins are forgiven, and all who are repentant are gathered into God's Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is seen as being established in stages. Its arrival can be seen in Jesus, his miracles and preaching. It is brought into a new stage through Jesus' death, resurrection, and sending of the Holy Spirit. It has yet to reach its final and complete stage when Jesus returns in glory at the Parousea. Then everyone whose heart is ruled by God will be taken up into the heavenly kingdom in the glory of heaven. But in order to receive the Kingdom in its initial stage, we must "Repent and believe in the gospel." In order to receive God and allow him to rule our hearts, we must change our attitude and behavior from being self-centered to being God-centered; from following our own will to doing God's will. We pray, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will

be done..." In order for God's Kingdom to come in us, we must do his will. Jesus is passing by the Sea of Galilee. It is a freshwater lake, some thirteen miles north and south and about seven miles east and west in what is easily the most attractive part of Galilee. "He saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen." "Jesus said to them, 'Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.' Then they abandoned their nets and followed him." To come after Jesus means to become his disciples. Jesus explains that his disciples will see him with the eyes of their heart because because they will share his glorious life of the Spirit. They will know him personally because they live by his life. We who desire to love God must be exceedingly careful to heed the solemn warning of Jesus' beloved disciple: "Do not love the world or the things of the world... For all that is in the world, sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life, is not from the Father but is from the world" (1 Jn 2:15-16), whose ruler is Saan (Jn 12:31). He has had great success in seducing the children of God through the media. Through various alluring images, he awakens concupiscence and stirs blinding sense desire. Thus the children of God are unable to see God as promised the "pure of heart". May God protect us from being swept into the current of the deceiving enticements of Satan and this world.

Tuesday-1st Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 1: 21-28

As Jesus begins his public ministry with his newly appointed apostles he makes Capernaum his headquarters located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The Sabbath was the seventh day of the Jewish week, Saturday, set aside for worship and rest. The Jewish day was from sunset to sunset. Thus the Sabbath began Friday at sunset and ended at sundown on Saturday.

The Synagogue consisted of a rectangular building built in such a way that those attending were

facing Jerusalem when seated. It was the place where they met to hear the Scripture read, to hear it explained in a homily and to pray, similar to our liturgy of the word in our Catholic Church from which it derives.

Jesus customarily went to the Synagogue on the Sabbath where he grew up in Nazareth. There he would read the Scriptures as a lector (see Lk 4:16).

Jesus began teaching and astonished the people with the authority with which he taught. The assertiveness and certitude with which he taught amazed people. For, he is the Truth (Jn 14: 6). Moreover, Jesus' ability to expel demons simply with a voice of command showed quite forcefully the truth and genuine authority with which he spoke.

There was a man in the synagogue with an unclean spirit. This demonic spirit was morally unclean because of his rebellion against God. He was contaminated by sin and resistance to the holiness and purity of God.

This demon could sense the holiness of Jesus who is consubstantial with the Father. The devil experienced great fear in the presence of Jesus. He is helpless to defend himself when faced with the divine power that is in Jesus. The same authority that was expressed in Jesus' speech is now seen in his command over the devil to depart from the man he possessed. He was forced to leave with a loud cry of pain and defeat. The violence he experienced affected the possessed man with convulsions as he came out of him. It is so consoling to see the power of God in Jesus exercised in favor of us. The more we are united to Christ, the less the demons can harm us. The people were amazed at Jesus: he both taught and acted with the authority of God. Our secret power over evil and the devil is to deepen our union with Jesus—to submit our wills ever more totally to his in an unbreakable bond.

Wednesday- 1st Week in Ordinary

Time

Mk 1: 29-39

After calling the two sets of brothers to be his disciples, they went to the house of Simon and Andrew following the synagogue service. They told Jesus that Simon's mother-in-law was ill. That was the first thing that they did. They knew, as we also should know, that power for good came out of him. For, they had already seen him cast a devil out of a man. Jesus then approached the woman, grasped her hand, and helped her up. The fever immediately left. She was so totally healed that she began to serve them. That is what we do when we are spiritually healthy and strong.

Since the Sabbath ended at sunset, people were free to lift their sick and travel. So they brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons. In fact, the whole populace of the town came to Simon and Andrew's house. Jesus cured many who were sick with various diseases. He also drove out many demons. He did not allow them to speak because he did not want them to reveal who he was. Jesus' mission was a spiritual one. He did not want the excitement of people to interfere with his mission. St. Mark, who worked closely with Simon Peter and got his information about Jesus from him, tells us about Jesus' prayer life. He would rise very early before dawn and would go off to a deserted place where he prayed. This shows us that Jesus gave exclusive communion with his Father priority in his life. That is where he got the spiritual power to be effective in his preaching and his ability to perform miracles. We must learn from Jesus' example and make prayer and communion with God a priority in our life.

The disciples had to search for Jesus. When they found him, Jesus would not remain in the same place. He felt the urgency to go to other

villages to preach about the Kingdom of God. He continued to go into their synagogues, preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of the region of Galilee. We hope to feel the same urgency to proclaim Jesus and his kingdom.

Thursday- 1st Week in Ordinary Time Mk 1:40-45

There were various kinds of skin diseases under the name of leprosy. Many of these were skin blemishes which were not contagious. But they disqualified their subjects from association with others, especially in public worship, until they were declared ritually clean. The Hebrew term used does not refer to Hansen's disease which is currently called leprosy.

A leper came to Jesus and paid him homage. He begged Jesus to make him clean. Jesus had pity on him; he stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I do will it. Be made clean." The leprosy left him immediately—he was made clean.

Something similar happens to us when we expose the leprosy of sin to Jesus' healing power present in the sacrament of penance. In faith we confess our sins to the priests to whom Jesus said on Easter Sunday night: "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them" (Jn 20:22-23). The spiritual healing power of Jesus continues to be present in the Catholic Church which he established (Mt 16:18). The physical cures that Jesus performed exemplify the spiritual healing that he continues to perform through the sacraments which he instituted in his holy Church.

Jesus sternly warned the cleansed man not to tell anyone. He wanted to avoid frantic crowds so that he could focus on his preaching about the kingdom of God. He placed his spiritual

work above these physical healings. These were signs that the kingdom of God was arriving in him.

Jesus also commanded the man to go and show himself to the priest who would make his healing official. This would allow him to re-enter society and freely intermingle. (See Leviticus 14 to see what was offered for the cleansing prescribed by Moses.)

The man was too excited to keep his cleansing to himself. He went about broadcasting the news of his healing. As a result Jesus had to remain in deserted places in an attempt to avoid the crowds who came from everywhere to be with him. During this time of evangelization it is fitting and praiseworthy for us to follow the example of the cleansed leper and share with others what God has done for us.

Friday- 1st Week in Ordinary Time Mk 2:1-12

After touring the nearby villages preaching and driving out demons, Jesus returned to Capernaum. When the people realized that he had returned, many gathered and crowded the home where he was staying. He preached the word to them: the essence of his message was, "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15).

At that time four men came bringing a paralytic to Jesus. They were unable to get through the crowd. So they carried him up the outdoor stairway leading to a flat roof of clay and straw packed hard upon wooden rafters. Then they began to pull the rafters apart to make enough space to lower the paralytic down where Jesus was. Regardless of all the falling dirt and damage to the roof, these men were desperate to present their friend to Jesus so he could cure

him. Jesus saw their faith in their dramatic effort to help their friend whom they lowered right before him. He said to him, “Child, your sins are forgiven.”

The scribes were thinking to themselves that Jesus was blaspheming, insulting God, by acting like he had the power to forgive this man’s sins as though he were God himself. In his divine mind Jesus knew what they were thinking. So he desired to help them understand that he did have the power to forgive the man’s sins. He asked them whether it was easier to forgive his sins or to heal him. It was not evident that Jesus had that power and that the paralytic’s sins were actually forgiven. So Jesus gave them external evidence that he had that power.

He then commanded the man to pick up his mat and go home. To the astonishment of all, the paralytic was immediately healed. He arose, picked up his mat at once and went away in the sight of everyone. Thus Jesus confirmed his authority to forgive sins. And he transmitted that power to his apostles and priests on Easter Sunday (Jn 20:22-23). To this day, through the sacrament of penance he continues to exercise that power for our good.

Saturday- 1st Week in Ordinary Time Mk 2:13-17

Word spread very quickly that Jesus was in the area. His power for healing attracted crowds. This gave him an opportunity to teach them about the nearness of the kingdom and their need to turn away from sin to receive it. As Jesus had called the other disciples along the seashore so he calls a new one. This one is Levi who is also usually called Matthew. He was a tax collector. Just as Jesus’ unusual power and personal spiritual radiance attracted the fishermen to abandon their boats and family to follow Jesus, so here also we see Levi leave his customs post to follow Jesus.

Tax collectors were generally hated by the rest of the community, for they collected taxes for the hated Roman occupying government. These publicans were considered traitors. Some of them collected more than the required amount. We can see why the Pharisees considered them to be public sinners. They were scandalized to see Jesus eating with such people. They believed he was being contaminated by their sinful ways. Eating with such people implied personal acceptance and mutual friendship. The Pharisees required all Jews to separate themselves from all sources of uncleanness. This would surely include these tax collectors. Yet Jesus freely enjoyed banqueting with them. They could not understand how a truly holy man could do that.

So they complained to Jesus’ disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus heard what they were saying. He responded with, “Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do.” Jesus came to save sinners from their sins. His holy presence and words helped those he associated with to leave their sinful ways and to become virtuous.

Jesus added, “I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.” Jesus did not exclude anyone from his company. But the Pharisees who were actually sinners considered themselves righteous. They, too, were invited to be with Jesus and learn from him. But they excluded themselves by their pride and misconception of what true holiness consisted. As St. Paul put it, “all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

Monday- 2nd Week in Ordinary Time Mk 2:18-22

The disciples of John the Baptist and of the Pharisees were accustomed to fast on Mondays and Thursdays. Their fast

lasted from 6a.m. to 6p.m. Before and after that normal food could be eaten. Fasting from food or drink and other forms of self-denial are important forms of self-discipline. They are important means for the spirit to maintain its dominance over the sinful inclinations of the flesh. We are unable to live spiritual lives without such self-discipline. We can see why the disciples of John and the Pharisees were concerned about Jesus and his disciples not fasting.

Jesus explained to his questioners that wedding guests do not fast while the bridegroom is with them. Jesus' coming as Messiah is the fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy, "as a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; and as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you" (Is 62:5). Jesus is that promised heavenly Bridegroom who comes to be united to his people in love. While this union is being initiated it is a time of joy and celebration. Fasting is a sign of mourning and is inappropriate at this time of joy. Normally, after a wedding, the bride and groom stayed at home. The celebration with their friends continued for a whole week. The wedding guests were exempt from fasting. It was a time for feasting.

However, Jesus explained, the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken away, referring to his crucifixion and death. Then it will be appropriate to fast as a sign of grief. For, it is our sins that caused our Savior's suffering and death.

Jesus used two images to exemplify that the new and the old do not mix. It is unsuitable to patch an old cloak with unshrunk cloth—it will cause the tear to get worse. New wine in old wine skins will cause them to break when it ferments. Jesus' teaching is not a patching up of Judaism. Nor can the gospel be contained within the limits of the Mosaic Law.

Tuesday- 2nd Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 2:23-28

Walking seems to have been Jesus and the Apostles main way of travel. In this instance they were probably walking through a wheat field. They must have been very hungry. They tried to alleviate that hunger by pulling off the wheat grains, rubbing them together in their hands to remove the outer shell and then eating them. The book of Deuteronomy specifies that, "when you go through your neighbor's grain field, you may pluck some of the ears with your hand, but do not put a sickle to your neighbor's grain" (Deut 23:26).

The Pharisees attack Jesus for allowing his apostles to break the Sabbath rest: "For six days you may work, but on the seventh day you shall rest..." (Ex 34:21). Jesus responded to them by referring to an incident when David and his men were extremely hungry. They went into the house of God and asked the priest for something to eat. The only food available was the holy bread. This refers to the show bread, the twelve loaves that had been placed on the pure gold table before the Lord as an oblation.

Regularly on each Sabbath day the loaves were replaced with fresh ones. Those removed were to be eaten in a sacred place by the priest. It was considered something most sacred among the various oblations to the Lord (Lev 24:5-9). The priest gave these to David and his men to eat.

Jesus used this case as an example to explain to the Pharisees that in cases of dire need the Sabbath rest may be suspended without blame. Actually the disciples were not really breaking the Sabbath rest by plucking grain—the Sabbath law only forbid harvesting with the sickle. What the disciples were doing was quite legitimate according to the law. But the

Pharisees had their own standards which were far more strict than the law required.

Wednesday- 2nd Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 3:1-6

We are reminded once more how Jesus regularly frequented the synagogue on the Sabbath where he would read the sacred writings and explain them to the people. He continued to teach about the arriving of the kingdom of God after he entered into his public life.

Jesus is continually hounded by the Pharisees to see if he would break the Sabbath rest. They added their own rules to the law to make it even more difficult to keep. Such critical surveillance made Jesus' ministry difficult. They were always taxing his patience. The incident in today's gospel is another example of Jesus healing on the Sabbath.

There was a man with a withered hand in the synagogue. Jesus called him to come up to the front of the room. He then proceeds to challenge the Pharisees by posing the question, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?" He was trying to bring light into their darkened minds.

He placed his good deeds of healing on a new level for them to understand what he was doing. But their limited understanding was further blinded by their anger. He was too much for them. They could not deal with his brilliance. They were stuck on their own rules and unable to see the broader picture. Jesus was interpreting the Sabbath rest correctly but they were caught up and imprisoned by their own rules and made them an end in themselves.

When Jesus referred to doing evil and destroying life, his divine mind was very much aware of their

evil intent. He was doing good on the Sabbath by healing people, whereas they were perpetrating how they might put him to death. But their anger blinded them from seeing the truth. They were the ones who were in the wrong.

Jesus was really grieved at their hardness of heart. They adamantly resisted the grace that was being offered to them by Jesus' enlightening statements.

So he proceeded to heal the man with a commanding word. The man stretched out his hand which was immediately miraculously restored. This brings out the truth that one should abstain from servile works, not good works.

Thursday - 2nd Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 3:7-12

We see Jesus withdrawing from his usual ministry in the synagogues seeking some respite toward the Sea of Galilee. But as often happened, people sought him out. They were coming from all areas of Palestine: Galilee, Judea, from Jerusalem, Idumea and beyond the Jordan, even as far as Tyre and Sidon along the Mediterranean Sea. These latter would include Gentiles who would normally be ministered to only after Jesus' resurrection.

This large crowd of people were so pressing upon Jesus that he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him so that the crowd would not crush him. He had cured many. They experienced how much healing power came out of him. Those who had diseases were pressing upon him to touch him.

Jesus performed all the miracles of healing to show that the kingdom of God had arrived in him. These external physical healings announced

a marvelous spiritual reality regarding the spiritual kingdom Jesus was establishing.

Now we have Jesus in the fullness of his power as glorified Lord. In the Eucharist he becomes available to us as “the Living Bread that has come down from heaven” (Jn 6:51). He is present there for us to heal our spiritual ailments: our lukewarmness, our spiritual inertia, our lack of fervor.

Jesus is present among us as the Word of God. Just as he healed people with a touch, he touches us when we receive him in the Holy Eucharist. He also speaks to us through his powerful word. We must approach Jesus as he speaks to us in his word. St. Paul explains to us that word is “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.... For in it is revealed the righteousness of God....” (Rom 1:16-17). We must consume that word as we do the Holy Eucharist by daily meditation. It will impel us to holiness of life and enable us to do what we are unable to do by our own power.

The presence of Jesus was so powerful the evil or unclean spirits were compelled to fall down before him. They would then shout, “You are the Son of God.” But he did not allow them to make him known. The erroneous idea about the role of the Messiah would interfere with his spiritual mission.

Friday- 2nd Week in Ordinary Time **Mk 3:13-19**

St. Luke records that before Jesus chose the Twelve, he spent the night in prayer. He sought divine guidance. Through intimate union with God in prayer it was revealed to him the ones he should choose (Lk 6:12-13). When day came, he called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose twelve.

St. Mark tells us that Jesus went up the mountain and summoned those whom he wanted—and they came to him. The mountain is associated with solemn moments in Jesus’ life. He would often go there to pray. That is where the transfiguration took place while he was praying (Lk 9:28-29).

The disciples came to Jesus upon hearing his call. Those who are spiritually sensitive are drawn to obey Jesus when he calls.

He appointed twelve of the disciples to be his apostles. The number twelve is significant. The twelve sons of Jacob (Israel) represented the old covenant God established. So the twelve apostles represent the twelve patriarchs of the new covenant Jesus is establishing in his Church.

They are called apostles for they are sent out as messengers by Jesus to proclaim the arrival of the kingdom of God. Before these apostles are to be sent they must “be with him”. They must spend time being in his presence to absorb his spirit, his goodness, his love. They need to observe his virtuous life so they can become like him. They must grow strong in virtue to be able to carry out the task at hand. They must grow in knowledge and learn about the mysteries of the kingdom of God. They will hear Jesus revealing these mysteries through the parables which he will explain to them in greater detail. It is only then that Jesus will be able to send them out to preach. They will also have attained the moral strength needed and be authorized by Jesus to drive out demons.

Simon Peter is the first to be named among the Apostles because Jesus chose him as their leader. All the lists of the Apostles name Peter first (Mt 10:2-4; Mk 3:16-19; Lk 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). The Apostle Bartholomew is called Nathaniel in John’s Gospel. Thaddaeus is called Judas the son of James in Luke and Acts. Cananaean is an Aramaic term meaning zealot.

Jesus chose twelve among his disciples to be constantly with him for intense training. That

is what our small Come, Lord Jesus! groups are all about. We gather with Jesus in small groups for intense training to be able to proclaim the kingdom after being indoctrinated with his word and intimately united to him in love. Only then are we equipped to overcome the powerful force of the evils in the world that surround us.

Saturday- 2nd Week in Ordinary Time Mk 3:20-21 (Conversion of St. Paul Apostle, Mk 16:15-18)

Jesus returned to the place where he was staying in Capernaum, which was actually the house of Simon and Andrew (Mk 1:29; 2:1). He made their house his home during his public ministry. This was about thirty miles from Nazareth. Jesus went about teaching and healing people in a great part of that area. A large number of people had been miraculously cured from various diseases. Many had been freed from being possessed by demons. Word quickly spread about him. He spoke with such authority. They could tell he was from God. People wanted to hear him speak of the mystery of the kingdom of God. Those who had not seen or heard him yet traveled afar to be with him.

News spread very quickly that he had returned to his home in Capernaum. So people rushed there to be where Jesus was staying. Jesus spent much time in ministering to these needy people. He had such compassion on the crowd and was so busy in serving their needs, there was no time or privacy even to eat.

Jesus' relatives became very worried about him. This was such a drastic change from his hidden life as a carpenter. They really didn't know Jesus before he entered his public life. He was so quiet and busy earning a living, they really did not know who he really was. His hidden depths were as yet unrevealed to them. Now they failed to understand what he was about. They were afraid that he was losing his mind. What he was saying and doing

were so much different from the person they had known him to be. Therefore, they felt the need to intervene and take him back home with them in Nazareth. They thought he needed to go back home with them, resume his carpentry work and take care of his mother. In their judgment Jesus was totally off course. Thus we see that some of his relatives did not believe in him (Jn 7:5).

Monday- 3rd Week in Ordinary Time Mk 3:22-30

The scribes had a serious problem with Jesus performing cures on the Sabbath. They interpreted his effortless miracles as breaking the Sabbath law forbidding work on that day. The law forbid servile labor, however, not doing an act of mercy toward a sick or crippled person. The scribes and Pharisees were overly strict in interpreting the law and even added extra prescriptions making the law even more difficult to keep. They were not open to Jesus' more humane teaching about the Sabbath. Their pride blinded them from seeing that only God's power in him could enable him to perform such effortless miracles. Their blindness compounded by their blazing anger even attributed Jesus' miraculous powers to the devil himself.

They called the devil "Beelzebul", a pagan god worshipped at Ekron. The Jews called him "Beelzebub", "Baal of flies" (2 Kgs 1:2) as a derogatory alternate name for the prince of demons.

The scribes claimed that Jesus was casting out minor devils by the chief devil. So Jesus called these men to himself to explain to them that their contention does not make sense: that Satan is fighting against himself—he is not that stupid! It is only because he is being overpowered by a superior force that he is being coerced into leaving the people that he possessed. Jesus gave them as an example to prove his point the situation of a kingdom divided against itself by civil strife. Such

a kingdom will fall apart. Satan is too smart to fight against himself. It is only because Jesus is stronger than Satan or other demons that they are being forced to leave possessed people.

Jesus went on to explain that blasphemies, or insulting language against God, will be forgiven those who are repentant. But blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. This is because a person attributes to Satan a good work which is clearly the work of the Holy Spirit. They saw the truth but their hardened hearts adamantly claimed the opposite of what they saw. They were hardened in their position and would never repent. They will die in this attitude and enter into eternity with this final impenitence. They refuse to accept the grace of the Holy Spirit: they see him at work in Jesus and they say it is Satan. They are unchangeably fixed in calling good evil.

Tuesday- 3rd Week in Ordinary Time Mk 3: 31-35

Jesus' mother Mary and his brothers came to see Jesus. How do we explain, then, the Church's teaching that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life? The so-called brothers (and sisters) of Jesus are relatives of his but they are not children of Mary. These "brothers" are never called the children of Mary, although she is called the mother of Jesus (Jn 2:1). Two of these "brothers", James and Joseph, are sons of a different Mary (Mt 27:56; Mk 15:40). The fact that Jesus entrusted his mother to John from the cross, implies that he had no siblings to care for her.

Since the Hebrew did not have a word for cousin, it was customary to use "brother" in the Bible for relationships other than blood brothers. In the Greek Old Testament, a brother may be a close cousin (1 Chron 23: 21-22), a remote relative (Deut 23: 7; 2Kgs 10: 13-14), an uncle or a nephew (Gen 13:8). The New Testament in a similar way uses "brother" in this wider sense (see Ignatius Catholic Study Bible footnote to Mt 12:46).

Those seated around Jesus told him that his mother and brothers were outside asking for him. There were evidently too many people in the house for them to go inside. Jesus then used the opportunity to make a brief point about life in the Kingdom of God. In response, he asked the question, "who are my mother and my brother?" Answering his own question, He looked around at those seated in the circle and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother."

By this statement, Jesus is subordinating natural kinship to a higher spiritual kind: We become children of God through baptism and thus brothers and sisters of Jesus (Rom 8:29). Obedience to God's will maintains this relationship. Thus Jesus widens the scope of his family to include all his disciples as well as his mother and other relatives who join his spiritual family.

Wednesday- 3rd Week in Ordinary Time Mk 4: 1-20

What a lovely scene: Jesus sitting in a boat on the lake or Sea of Galilee teaching a large crowd gathered around him. He taught them at length in parables. In these parables, Jesus tells stories or makes comparisons between events or facts of everyday life and truths or mysteries of the Kingdom of God. In this way he illustrates the meaning of various truths of the Kingdom of God. In this scene he compares the word of God to a seed that falls on different kinds of soil. Some seed fell on the hardened soil of a pathway, another on rocky ground, others among thorns, and finally others on rich soil. These produced different results. The birds ate the seed that fell on the hardened path; the sun scorched the one that fell on rocky ground because of its shallowness; the seed among thorns was choked; only the one that fell on good ground produced a crop.

When Jesus' disciples asked him to explain the parable to them, he told them that the grace to understand the mystery of the Kingdom of God was granted to them. They are seeking the Kingdom and are interested in understanding it. They reflect upon the words and inquire further about what needs further clarification. Such seeking disposes them to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Other hearers of the word are too engrossed in the world to be interested in understanding the parables. They are indisposed for further enlightenment. The word is not able to penetrate their hearts and minds. Therefore conversion from sin and repentance do not take place. Because Jesus' disciples were well disposed and wanted to know more, Jesus explained the parable to them. The seed sown on the path picked up by birds represents the word which Satan immediately comes and takes away. Their minds are too cluttered with images and ideas for the word to be retained.

The seed on rocky ground represents the word falling on shallow ground. Trials and tribulations like the hot sun cause them to fall away. They do not persevere so the word does not bear fruit.

The seed among thorns represents those who hear the word but it is choked by worldly anxiety, the lure of riches and various cravings. They smother the word so that it bears no fruit.

The seed sown on rich soil are the ones who hear the word of God, accept and carry it out so that it bears abundant fruit: thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.

Thursday- 3rd Week in Ordinary Time Mk 4: 21-25

Jesus comes among us as the light of the world. Those who follow him will have the light of life (Jn 8:12). "In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (Jn 1:4 RSV). His presence in us illuminates our minds to supernatural truths.

The Canticle of Zechariah looked toward the Messiah's coming "when the day shall dawn upon us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness...and to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Lk 1: 78-79 RSV). Simeon's prophecy also speaks of Jesus as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Lk 2:32).

In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus told his disciples that they too are lights for the world. They had been enlightened by his grace and his teachings. Now they in turn must be lights to others. They may not keep all this grace and knowledge for themselves—they must shine it upon others: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others..."(Mt 5: 14-16).

At the present time, Jesus is explaining many things in private to his disciples. But they are being instructed and perfected in the truth so that they will be equipped to bring his teachings to others. Later on he is going to tell them, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." (Mt 28:19). That is what Jesus is saying: "For there is nothing hidden except to be made visible; nothing is secret except to come to light."

The original disciples and we ought to pay careful attention and listen well; for we are expected to transmit Jesus' teachings to others.

You will be successful and rewarded according to the extent that you have retained Jesus' message and handed it out to others. You will be inspired with even more insights. Grace will grow and multiply within you. The more you give the more you will receive. Be sure to share what you have. Otherwise, what you think you have will dwindle to nothing. You will lose it all. It will grow only if you share and in a sense give it away. Only then will it grow and multiply.

Friday- 3rd Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 4:26-34

Jesus continues to explain what the Kingdom of God is like. Here he compares its innate power for growth. A man broadcasts the seed on the ground and leaves it to itself. He goes to sleep and rises day after day. The seed on its own sprouts and grows. How this happens he really doesn't understand—it is a mysterious reality. First the blade is formed, and then the ear of grain begins to be formed. Finally the full grain in the ear is realized. Once it has ripened, it is then harvested with the sickle. We do not see all of this taking place. It's part of the mystery of the growth of an organism. Much of it is invisible. So too, on a supernatural level grace works unobserved within people. We gradually reach spiritual maturity as we cooperate with the divine influence affecting us in the form of grace. Through it we have become partakers in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).

We hope that each of us will have reached spiritual maturity at the end of our lives, ready to be harvested for eternal life. So too it will be for the whole world. It too, is in the process of growing to full maturity. The harvest will take place when Jesus returns in glory to judge the living and the dead. Those who had died before will be awakened to life for the final judgment when the resurrection of the dead will occur: "those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation" (Jn 5:29).

Jesus also compares the Kingdom of God to a small grain of mustard seed which grows into a very large shrub. The birds of the sky come to perch in its shade. This is to bring out how Jesus and his small band of followers will eventually grow to be world-wide. All the peoples of the nations will come to dwell in this kingdom, the Church.

"Now the Father's will is 'to raise up men to share in his own divine life'. He does this by gathering

men around his Son Jesus Christ. This gathering is the church, 'on earth the seed and beginning of that kingdom'" (CCC 541).

Saturday- 3rd Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 4: 35-41

St. Mark got his information from St. Peter who gives us an eye witness account of this event. After Jesus had finished speaking to the people in parables, he decided to leave immediately by boat for the other side of the lake. So Jesus left the crowd and got into the boat just as he was. They were accompanied by other boats. It was not unusual that the cold air from the mountains would be brought down to meet the warm air over the lake and would cause violent squalls. So it happened on this occasion. The wind was so strong it caused the waves to break over the boat. It began to be filled with water.

Jesus, however, was fast asleep on a cushion in the back of the boat. He was exhausted after speaking at length to the crowd. It took much energy to speak very loudly without the help of a microphone. He was probably very hungry as well. To be so soundly asleep in the midst of hurricane force winds splashing loudly against the boat indicates how tired Jesus must have been. The apostles in their fright must have shaken and shouted at him in order to awaken him: "Teacher", they exclaimed, "do you not care that we are perishing?" This desperate effort awakened Jesus. Then he rebuked the wind and commanded the sea to be quiet. To the amazement of everyone the wind stopped blowing and there came a great calm. The fact that the storm stopped so abruptly in response to Jesus' command was stark evidence to the beholders that a great miracle had taken place. Only God can command storms effectively so that they are forced to obey him.

"Lord, God of hosts, who is like you? Mighty Lord, your loyalty is always present. You rule

the raging sea; you still its swelling waves” (Ps 89: 9-10). But Jesus reprimanded his disciples for their lack of faith. Sufficient faith could have calmed the turbulent sea just as it could move a mountain (Mt 17:20). We cannot overestimate the power of persistent faith. The apostles were filled with awe at Jesus’ power and how he had calmed the angry sea. They were beginning to be disposed to understand that he must be endowed with divine power.

Monday-4th Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 5: 1-20

Jesus and the Apostles crossed the Sea of Galilee where there were many caves in the limestone rock, and many of these caves were used as tombs in which people were buried. This seems to have taken place in late evening or night time (Mk 4:35).

When they arrived they were met by a possessed man who lived among the tombs. He was a wild man into whom unclean spirits had entered. No one could subdue him. He would break the chains and shackles that held him. He was always crying out like a mad man. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he came to meet him running, and worshipped him. He begged Jesus not to torment him. For he had been saying, “Come out of the man”. When asked, he said his name was Legion because he was possessed by many demons. A Roman Legion consisted of 6000 men. But the devil is a liar so we do not know how many unclean spirits were in the man. We note that sometimes the man answered as one person and sometimes he answered as many.

He begged Jesus not to send him into the open country but into the large herd of swine feeding on the hillside. So Jesus gave them permission, and they entered the swine. There were about 2000 pigs which rushed down the steep bank into the sea where they drowned.

What a fearsome noise they must have made! The reality of the existence of demons is made evident by such an ugly scene. The stench of these dead animals would have infested the area for miles around. We sense the evil and corruption that takes place when the devil takes over people’s lives. But these animals were destroyed for the purpose of saving a human being and to demonstrate the horrible tragedy of departure from God by sin and handing oneself over to the evil one. As a result of Jesus’ powerful influence, the man was freed and at peace. He calmly sat there, clothed and in his right mind. The herdsmen described what happened to those who came to see as a result of the commotion they heard. These begged Jesus to leave the neighborhood. They could not appreciate the great good that Jesus had done by freeing the possessed man of the evil spirits and delivering the area of their disturbing presence.

The freed man asked Jesus to remain with him. But he refused. Instead, he told him: “Go home to your family and announce to them all what the Lord in his pity has done for you”.

The man did exactly that. He went about proclaiming along the ten cities (Decapolis) what Jesus had done for him. All were amazed. We must do the same: Take every opportunity that comes our way to tell what Jesus has done for us.

Tuesday-4th Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 5: 21-43

We see Jesus’ love and compassion attracting many people to himself. The sweetness of the divinity exuding from his Person kept drawing people to himself. Jairus, a synagogue official, came to Jesus and fell at his feet. He was in charge of the synagogue services: he assigned various duties and saw that they were properly carried out. He was one of the most important and respected men in the community. Whatever prejudices he may have had against Jesus were all forgotten as he saw Jesus

to be the only hope to save his dying daughter. He had heard of Jesus' healing power. So Jesus went off with him, followed by a large crowd who was pressing upon him. While on their way to Jairus' house, a woman in the crowd who was afflicted with hemorrhages for twelve years and could not be cured by the doctors—her condition only got worse—came up behind him and touched Jesus' cloak. She thought to herself that if she could only touch his clothes she would be healed. And so it happened! Immediately her flow of blood dried up. She felt in her body the healing as it took place. Jesus became aware at that moment that power had gone out of him. So he turned around and asked who had touched his clothes. The disciples wondered why he said this since a whole crowd of people had been pressing upon him. Jesus was looking around to see who had done it. The woman, realizing what had happened to her came up in fear and trembling. She fell at Jesus' feet and admitted the whole truth. It is understandable that she would have done this secretly because her condition made her legally unclean. Everything she touched became unclean. This would exclude her from full participation in the life of the people of God. Yet Jesus overcame her uncleanness and (he) himself was not made unclean. He explained to her that it was her faith that saved her. This is the spiritual power, the virtue of faith that enables us to contact Jesus in the sacraments to obtain healing.

Meanwhile some came to inform Jairus that his daughter had just died. Jesus encouraged him to maintain his faith in him and not to be afraid. When they arrived at the house, there was a great commotion of loud weeping and wailing. Jesus questioned their lamenting saying that the little girl was only sleeping. They knew better and made fun of him. So Jesus put them all out of the room and took with him Peter, James, and John, and the girl's parents. He proceeded to take the child by the hand saying, "Little girl, I say to you, arise!" The twelve year old girl arose immediately and walked around. They were all amazed. He told them not to tell what happened so the crowd would not interfere with his

spiritual mission of proclaiming the Kingdom and he told the parents to give their daughter something to eat.

Wednesday-4th Week in Ordinary

Time

Mk 6: 1-6

Jesus and his disciples came to Nazareth, his native place. We recall how he regularly went to the synagogue on the Sabbath (Lk 4:16). In his earlier years he was a lector there.

On this occasion he began to teach on the Sabbath, the day of rest and worship. We recall that the service on this occasion resembled our liturgy of the word. The early Christians simply added the liturgy of the Eucharist to the liturgy of the word inherited from their Jewish roots. This is what constitutes our Mass.

The people were astonished at Jesus and the wisdom which he expressed as he taught them. They wondered where he acquired all that knowledge since he was not schooled with the rabbis. He had apparently refrained from revealing that wisdom during his earlier years when he lived in Nazareth. At this time of public ministry he also performed miracles such as curing the man with the withered hand (Mk 3: 1-5).

This is the only place we learn that Jesus is a carpenter. In Matthew's gospel he is called the carpenter's son. Here Jesus is called the son of Mary. Usually he would be called the son of Joseph. Perhaps St. Mark is expressing his faith that Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus is called the brother of James and Joses. Actually these two so-called brothers of Jesus are the sons of another Mary (Mk 15:40). The other "brothers and sisters" are Jesus' cousins or more distant relatives. They are not siblings from the same Virgin Mother. The Semitic usage of brothers and sisters is applied not only to children of the

same parents, but to nephews, nieces, cousins, half-brothers and half-sisters. (See Gen 14:16; 29:15; Lv 10:4) (See also Wed of the 3rd Wk in Ordinary Time). The people thought they knew Jesus—but there is much about him that they did not know. They knew nothing of his virginal conception, his birth in Bethlehem and other facts revealed in St. Luke’s gospel that we know. What little they knew about Jesus prejudiced them from believing in him. Their limited knowledge prevented them from accepting his prophetic mission (compare Jn 6:14; Deut 18:15). Although Jesus cured a few sick people there by the laying on of hands, the lack of faith among his native villagers prevented him from performing other mighty deeds. He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Thursday-4th Week in Ordinary Time Mk 6: 7-13

Jesus had been preparing the twelve apostles. He first called them to make them fishers of men. They began to stay with him so they could come to know him personally.

They were in his presence as he taught the crowds. Then they would ask him questions about what they did not understand. In this way they came to know the facts about the Kingdom of God about which they were to preach. They also learned about the virtuous ways of behavior expected of them as members of the Kingdom of God. For example he taught them by his example the virtues of humility and love through service.

Now that they have somewhat been prepared, he summoned them together and then sent them out on a mission so they could learn through experience and critique on how they performed, Jesus gave them authority over demons, that is, unclean spirits contaminated by the sin of rebellion and disobedience to God.

The apostles needed mutual support for this mission, so Jesus sent them out in pairs. They were

also taught in this way to care for, accept, and love one another as they carried out their mission. Jesus instructed the apostles as they visited people to depend on divine providence for their needs, such as food and water. They were to take no provisions for themselves. They were to travel light with no extra baggage. He ordered them to remain in the same house as long as they were in that vicinity. This made for good order and peace.

When people were indisposed to receive them and were hostile to their message, they were not to worry or grieve over their rejection. They were simply to shake the dust off their feet as a symbolic act of judgment against them for rejecting the Kingdom of God being offered to them.

The apostles went off then and preached repentance as Jesus himself did, inviting the people to prepare themselves to enter the Kingdom of God being offered them. They drove out demons with their newly acquired power.

“They also anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them”. This manner of anointing the sick and prayer eventually became the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick about which St. James speaks in his epistle (Jms 5: 14-15).

Friday-4th Week in Ordinary Time Mk 6: 14-29

King Herod Antipas, the Son of King Herod the Great, who had tried to kill Jesus when he was only an infant, heard about Jesus. Jesus’ fame had become widespread. Some thought he was John the Baptist who had been raised from the dead; that was why they thought that such mighty powers were at work in him. Others thought that he might be Elijah who was expected to return. Still others thought he was simply a prophet. Herod himself thought that Jesus was John the Baptist who had been raised up. Herod’s conscience must have bothered him for he is the one who so unjustly had John

beheaded. The following scenario is how it all came about. Herod had John arrested and bound in prison. He did this to please Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Philip, whom he had married. John had told Herod that it was not lawful for him to live with his brother's wife. The Law of Moses forbade the marriage of a man with his brother's wife when the brother was still living (see Lev 18:16 and 20:21). Thus they were being reprimanded for their adulterous union. Herodias did not take this correction lightly. She became extremely angry with John for calling attention to their unlawful union. She hated the prophet enough to kill him. Herod, on the other hand, feared John because he knew him to be a righteous and holy man of God. So he simply kept him imprisoned. Herod actually liked to listen to John speak. Herodias, however, was waiting for an opportunity to get rid of John.

Her opportunity came on Herod's birthday. They gave a banquet and invited all the important people in his reign to be present. Herodias' daughter performed a dance that delighted Herod and his guests. He swore that he would give her whatever she asked. She was advised by her mother to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herod was too embarrassed to refuse her. So he promptly dispatched his executioner to behead the prophet in prison. So he brought the head of the prophet on a platter to the girl who gave it to her mother. We see how sin and hatred can harden hearts and consciences to the point of insensitivity. They killed this holy prophet about whom Jesus said, "I tell you, among those born of woman, no one is greater than John..." (Lk 7: 28). John's disciples came and took his body and buried it in a tomb with respect.

Saturday-4th Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 6: 30-34

The Apostles returned from their proclamation of the arrival of the kingdom. They reported to Jesus what they had done and taught. They had a glowing report about how

they had successfully cast out demons from people. Their reported success caused Jesus to rejoice in the Holy Spirit and praise the Father for revealing the mysteries of the kingdom to these lowly disciples (see Lk 10: 17-23). Jesus was very encouraging to them and reassured them that the power of God working through them would overcome the power of evil. Much of this power nowadays takes place in the confessional where sins are forgiven and the power of evil is thwarted through the effects of the saving passion of Jesus. Contact with the merciful Christ in this Easter sacrament of penance (Jn 20: 22-23) achieves an immense good and helps people respond to Jesus' call to "Repent" (Mk 1: 15) and live the life of the kingdom.

Jesus and the apostles were so busy ministering to the people that they did not even have the opportunity to eat. It is possible to maintain such intense activity for several hours or days, but sooner or later the body and psyche require rest. Even Jesus needed a break, along with the apostles. Both the physical and psychological as well as spiritual powers need respite and restoration. That is why Jesus would often go off alone to pray (Mk 1: 35; 6: 46). We need to restore our spiritual energies through prayer and meditation on God's word. The word of God activates our faith so that we can contact God and draw divine power for renewed vitality in the spiritual life.

Although Jesus and the apostles tried to escape in a boat to a deserted place, the people saw them leave and traveled on foot to arrive at the place they were going before them. Many of us would be terribly disappointed at seeing our plans totally frustrated. We would perhaps become angry or sad at the sight of these needy people interfering with our needed rest. Instead Jesus was moved with compassion for them. They proved to have a great desire and need for instruction, so he began to teach them many things about the spiritual life in the kingdom. He had enough reserved spiritual energy and boundless love to continue ministering to them.

Monday-5th Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 6:53-56

Jesus and the Apostles crossed over to the northwest of the Sea of Galilee, about five miles south-west of Capernaum. They tied up their boat there. The people immediately recognized Jesus as soon as he left the boat. Word got around quickly to the surrounding area that he was in their midst. So they hurried over to the place where he was, bringing their sick on mats that he might heal them.

These physical cures were a sign that the Kingdom of God was in their midst. The reign of God was in full force in Jesus. God was fully present and ruling every fiber of his being. His will was wholly given over to the Father. That is why he could work such marvelous cures. We pray that we can also surrender our wills completely to God and he can rule our lives also. Some of the saints were so closely united to God that they also were gifted with similar healing powers. The presence of God was so powerful in them.

In whatever villages and town Jesus passed through, people laid their sick in the marketplaces and begged Jesus to allow them to touch but the tassel of his cloak. And all who touched it were healed.

The tassel had a special meaning. The Lord had commanded Moses to order the Israelites to put tassels on the corners of their garments, fastening each corner tassel with a violet cord. The purpose of this was so that the sight of them would remind the people to keep all the commandments of the Lord (Num 15: 37-41).

Perhaps we could compare this practice to our sacramentals such as the lighted candle or crucifix. These are meant to stir our faith as these articles remind us of Jesus' presence as the light of the world or in his saving death on the cross for our salvation. This contact of faith with Jesus draws grace from him to strengthen us in virtue.

What happened through Jesus' clothing occurred also through St. Paul. The holiness of his being sanctified cloths that touched his skin. "So extraordinary were the mighty deeds God accomplished at the hands of Paul that when face cloths or aprons that touched his skin were applied to the sick, their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them" (Acts 19: 12).

Tuesday-5th Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 7:1-13

The Scribes and Pharisees made a religion of external practices. They had lost the heart of their Jewish faith. Their focus on ritual purity made them lose sight of the moral law, the Ten Commandments. Jesus did not pay attention to their ritual purifications which they added on to the law. They had lost their meaning. The religious authorities were continually on the watch to catch Jesus breaking their man-made laws.

In this instance they discovered that Jesus' disciples ate their meals with unclean hands, that is, they were ritually unclean. This was breaking the traditions of the elders. This tradition consisted of a body of detailed, unwritten, human laws regarded by the scribes and Pharisees to have the same binding force as that of the Mosaic Law. We can see why Jesus wanted to correct this error and re-focus on the moral law.

The gospel gives us examples of these ceremonial laws: when coming from the market place they had to purify themselves before eating; they had to purify cups, jugs and kettles. There were many more such requirements.

The scribes and Pharisees questioned Jesus about his disciples' non-observance. Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah 29: 13 in response. This passage brings out how religion was a mere external observance. But their hearts were not in it. That kind of worship is vain and empty. Their human customs had come to overshadow the divine law.

They disregarded God's commandments in favor of their human tradition.

Jesus went on to give an example of what he meant: The law said, "Honor your father and mother". However, these rulers of the people could say "any support you might have had from me is qorban; meaning dedicated to God. In this way they dedicated the offering to the temple, so that the giver might continue to use it for himself so it became unavailable for their parents, however needy they were. Thus they nullified the word of God in favor of tradition. This is just one example among many others.

Wednesday – 5th Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 7:14-23

Certain foods, such as pork, were considered to be unclean for the Jews (see Lev 11). They may not eat any of these. To do so would cause them to become unclean. Jesus is now doing away with this Old Testament law which separated the chosen people from the Gentile nations. These laws are not kept in the New Covenant Jesus is forming. They are mere physical requirements in the Old Covenant. Breaking them does not cause a person to be morally unclean. Foods do not cause a person to be morally unclean. That is why Gentile converts were not to observe Jewish dietary regulations. Moral defilement comes from the heart and mind.

Evil thoughts and desires come from the very center of our persons. When these come out of ourselves as first movements, they are not sins if we reject them. As long as they are involuntary they are not sinful. They become sinful only if we choose them voluntarily. They are forbidden by God because they are spiritually harmful to us. They separate us from God in a lesser or greater kind of way. At least they mar our relationship with him. They darken our lives and cause us misery and unhappiness.

Thursday – 5th Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 7:24-30

Tyre and Sidon are Phoenician cities on the Mediterranean coast in present day Lebanon. Jesus goes away from his regular ministry to concentrate on training his Apostles. One is given the impression that he loved to be near the sea coast. Most of the inhabitants of this area were pagans. "He entered a house and wanted no one to know about it." He needed privacy.

He is approached by this Syrophoenician woman. This woman is a descendant of the Canaanites. In the Old Testament, they were considered to be a sinful race. They embodied all that is wicked and godless, a race that is to be exterminated.

But she, a Gentile, comes to Jesus in great need, and she has faith in Jesus as the Messiah whom she calls "Son of David." She cries out to Jesus, "Have pity on me, Lord." She knows how to touch Jesus' compassionate heart. And she has a real need. Her daughter is "tormented by a demon." She pleaded with Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

Jesus explains to the woman, "Let the children be fed first." The Jews are God's children, the chosen race. Jesus was sent primarily to minister to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Only later he will charge the Apostles to preach the Gospel to pagan Gentiles (Mt 28:19).

Jesus proceeds to test the woman's faith and humility still further. He said, ... "it is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." The Jews often referred to pagans as "Gentile Dogs." It is a form of contempt for non-believers.

The woman's humility is not insulted. She takes the saying in stride and counters, "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's scraps. "In other words, the granting of her petition will not in any way interfere with his primary task, his mission to the chosen people. As a result

of her humility and persistence Jesus freed her daughter of the demon. (For further insights, see “Understanding the Sunday Gospels, Cycle A, Twentieth Sunday.)

Friday – 5th Week in Ordinary Time Mk 7:31-37

Jesus continued to travel and minister in Gentile territory. During this time in areas of significant Gentile population he performed miraculous cures.

The Decapolis is a federation of ten cities in New Testament Palestine. Kindly friends brought a deaf man with a speech impediment to Jesus. They begged Jesus to lay his hands on him. The laying of hands was a gesture indicating the transfer of power in a blessing. (Compare Gen 48:14-20.) We too must bring our friends to Jesus who seem deaf to God’s word and unable to speak his praises.

Jesus took the man off by himself away from the crowd. He did not like to show his miraculous powers. The crowds had a misconception of the role of the Messiah. They thought he would free them from Roman oppression. They did not understand the spiritual mission of the Messiah.

The gestures Jesus used in healing were kinds of sacramental signs disposing the man to faith in God for a healing of his hearing and speaking. They remind us of the signs used when we administer the sacraments. Jesus looked up to heaven to show his dependence and union with God, his Father. Perhaps his groaning shows that his human nature was being drained of power (Compare Mk 5:30). The divine power in Jesus healed the man so that he could hear and speak plainly. The people were amazed at this miracle. They spoke Jesus’ praises as an example for us.

Jesus’ command not to tell anyone was because he did not want the crowds to interfere with his spiritual mission of proclaiming the arrival of the kingdom of God.

(For further insights, see Understanding the Sunday Gospels, Cycle B, 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time.)

Saturday – 5th Week in Ordinary Time Mk 8:1-10

The great crowd was so caught up with the majesty of Jesus and his enlightening and consoling words, they found it hard to leave his presence. After three days they had run out of food! And Jesus’ compassionate heart could not allow them to leave in such a weakened condition. They would faint on their journey and some had come from a great distance. Such was the power of Jesus that drew them. The Apostles felt that it was impossible to find food in the desert to feed such a multitude. How could seven loaves of bread feed such a multitude? But with God all things are possible (Lk 1:37). This helps us to understand the hope we must have and faith in God when we find ourselves in an impossible predicament. Jesus proceeded to have the crowd sit on the ground for a heavenly banquet or picnic. He gave thanks to God for the food as we are reminded to do at every meal. He broke the bread with holy dependence on his Father to provide for his hungry children. He then gave the pieces to his disciples to distribute to the crowd, including a few fish, which Jesus also called upon his Father to bless. The power of God in Jesus caused the bread and fish to multiply to the extent that seven loaves and a few fish were able to feed and satisfy some four thousand people! And seven baskets of fragments remained after the miraculous feeding! Jesus then dismissed the crowd and continued his mission proclaiming the arrival of the kingdom of God. The miraculous feeding indicated the arrival of the kingdom of God on earth in Jesus. This miracle of the loaves foreshadows the feeding of the multitude of faithful followers by the gift of a superior living bread, the Holy Eucharist, when we receive the glorified body of the risen Jesus, the Lamb of God.

(For further insights, compare Jesus’ feeding of

the 5000 in Jn 6:1-15 explained in Understanding of the Sunday Gospels, Cycle B, Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time.)

Monday - 6th Week in Ordinary Time Mk 8:11-13

Jesus had already performed many signs which showed that he was endowed by the power of God and had been sent by him. He had cast out an unclean spirit with a word (Mk 1:25-26). He healed Simon's mother-in-law (Mk 1:30-31). He healed many sick with various diseases and cast out many demons (Mk 1:34). He touched and healed a leper (Mk 1:41) and healed a paralytic (Mk 2:10-12). He also healed a man who had a withered hand simply by a word of command (Mk 3:5). Jesus cured many others

(Mk 3:10). He even cast out a multitude of demons who possessed the Gerasene demoniac and raised Jairus' dead daughter back to life — and still the Scribes refused to believe in him. They demanded some other kind of spectacular sign in order to believe. But they were blinded by pride and self-centeredness. Nothing would satisfy them. They resisted God's will to the point of having hardened hearts. They were so blinded by their pride and willfulness they could not see the truth blatantly demonstrated before their very eyes (see Jn 9 the healing of the man born blind).

Because the Pharisees had proven themselves insincere and closed to the truth, Jesus refused to give them another sign — he had already given them many others. They were too blind to see the truth when he offered these signs to show that he came from God. He tried his best to enlighten them but they misinterpreted his actions. For example, they said that it was by the prince of demons that he drove out demons (Mk 3:22). Even if Jesus explained that it was only because he was more powerful than demons that he was able to cast them out, they still would not believe him (Mk 3:26-27). So Jesus left them and went off to the other shore.

Tuesday – 6th Week in Ordinary Time Mk 8:14-21

Jesus' disciples had forgotten to bring bread. Isn't that typically human? The close disciples were simple ordinary men. Any of us can be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus takes ordinary people and gradually transforms them into his image. Only one loaf shared among thirteen men will not go very far. Jesus tells them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod. The corruptive action of leaven was an apt symbol of the evil dispositions both of the Pharisees and of Herod toward Jesus. The disciples of Jesus are warned against sharing such rebellious attitudes toward Jesus (see NAB footnote).

The disciples did not understand Jesus' figurative language. The word leaven made them think he was referring to the bread they had forgotten. Jesus seemed to be disturbed that they did not catch on to what he was saying. He proceeded to ask them eight questions in succession. He seemed to be exasperated and annoyed at their slowness to understand what he was trying to communicate to them. So he attempted to explain as he chided them for failing to understand him. Is it because they have hardened hearts? They can't seem to see or hear — like the blind and the deaf he cured.

Why would they be concerned about the bread when Jesus fed the multitudes with plenty left over?

It was only after the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost that the disciples remembered and understood clearly what Jesus was trying to teach them all along.

We as they grow slowly in understanding the teachings of Jesus. We must keep on striving to understand. The more spiritually transformed we are in his image, the more we come to understand him. As Jesus said, "You belong to what is below, I belong to what is above. You belong to this world, but I do not belong to this world" (Jn 8:23). It takes time and effort to acquire the mind of Jesus.

Wednesday – 6th Week in Ordinary Time
Mk 8:22-26

Jesus and his disciples formed a small faith community. Whereas he preached to the multitudes, he stayed and mingled familiarly with his small band of close disciples. In this way, Jesus helps us to understand the ideal way of evangelizing. Jesus is the model for the small Come, Lord Jesus! groups. With this method, we can readily receive answers to the questions we have about his teachings.

People brought a blind man to Jesus so he could touch him. We bring people who are blind about matters of the kingdom of God to Jesus in our groups so he can enlighten them.

Jesus led this blind man outside the village so he could help him see again.

The signs of putting spittle on his eyes and laying his hands on him were meant to stir faith in the man in Jesus' power to make him see. At first he saw only vaguely. Jesus laid his hands on the man's eyes a second time which caused him to see clearly, distinctly. As the man's faith was strengthened by the signs Jesus worked on him, his sight gradually became clearer. That is how it happens to us. As we come to Jesus and allow him to work on us with words and signs our faith is increased and we gradually see the kingdom of God ever more clearly. This is what the word of God and the sacramentals and sacraments do for us.

We are so blessed that Jesus is still with us in our Catholic Church where we can meet him in the sacraments, especially as Living Bread in the Holy Eucharist and in the sacrament of Penance where we meet him as merciful Savior to hear our confessions and forgive our sins.

Jesus wanted the man to stay home and not go in to the village to talk about Jesus and his miracle. Jesus wanted his Messianic healing power to be kept

secret so he could be free to proclaim the spiritual kingdom and all the truths pertaining to it.

Thursday – 6th Week in Ordinary Time
Mk 8:27-33

Caesarea Philippi is located on the border of the extreme northeastern corner of Palestine. There Jesus could be alone with his disciples for this important moment of his self-revelation.

After inquiring what others believe about who Jesus is, Jesus asked his disciples who they believe him to be. Peter answers for the group as their leader.

“You are the Christ” he said. In other words, he believes that Jesus is the Messiah (Hebrew), the Christ (Greek), God's anointed (English) one.

Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him because people thought of the Messiah as a new David who would free them from political oppression — a kind of warring hero — worldly Messiah rather than a spiritual one as the true Messiah would be.

Immediately Jesus begins to explain what kind of Messiah he would be. He used his preferred term to describe himself: “The Son of Man.” He is a human being possessing a human nature, a man, but he comes upon the clouds and is divine (See Dan 7:13-14). Of course the disciples did not understand the full meaning of this term at the time — only later after Jesus' resurrection.

Jesus is emphasizing his human nature is going to suffer greatly. He is going to be a suffering Messiah as described by Isaiah in his Suffering Servant poems (See Is 42:1-4, 49:1-7, 50:4-11, 52:13, 53:12)

He is going to be rejected by the leaders of the Jewish people, and even killed! But on the third day he will rise from the dead.

The disciples were shocked to hear this! They could not believe what they were hearing Jesus say. They had a totally different understanding of what the Messiah would be and how he would save the Jewish nation. They had never heard of a suffering Messiah before!

So Peter took Jesus aside to set him straight. What Jesus had just described about himself just could not be! But Jesus rebuked Peter. He was tempting Jesus as Satan had done in the desert. He is opposing God's plan to save the world by his suffering and death. Peter is tempting Jesus to disobey God. Peter must get behind Jesus and follow him, the leader, in the way of the cross.

Human beings seek the soft and easy way. But the way to salvation calls for discipline and self-denial. Suffering is needed to purify and perfect human nature. (Compare 2 Cor 3:18 and 2 Cor 4.)

Friday – 6th Week in Ordinary Time Mk 8:34-9:1

Jesus explained to his special disciples that as Messiah he had to suffer and die and then rise again to bring about the salvation of the world. After his resurrection he explained to two of his disciples, "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter in his glory?" (Lk 24:26)

Jesus is the way to eternal salvation. To attain salvation, we must follow him in the way of the cross. To follow him we must deny our selfish tendencies so we can do God's will. Following our selfish tendencies is the way of the flesh and leads to damnation. Denying our selfish tendencies is the way of the spirit and leads to the fullness of life. Self indulgence leads to self destruction and misery; self denial leads to spiritual joy and a glorious new life.

To save one's life of the flesh is to forfeit the higher life of the spirit. To lose the life of the flesh by

dying to its sinful tendencies is to save one's higher life of the spirit.

Spending all of one's energies to attain possessions and prestige in this world while neglecting the life of the Spirit is to lose the divine life of the Spirit.

Our one life is all that we have. It is our all. It is more precious than the whole world. Our Savior died for it. We must live that we will preserve the sanctifying grace received at baptism so that we will attain eternal life.

It is by keeping Jesus' word urging us to deny our selfish tendencies that we will remain faithful to him. When he returns in glory he will acknowledge us as his faithful followers.

Some standing near Jesus experienced the kingdom of God come in power when they saw Jesus transfigured on the holy mountain. Peter, James and John saw Jesus transfigured in glory (Mk 9:2-3). Other disciples also experienced the coming of the Kingdom in power in seeing the risen Jesus as well as the outpouring of Jesus' glorious Spirit on Pentecost.

Saturday – 6th Week in Ordinary Time Mk 9:2-13

Jesus took his three closest friends among the apostles, Peter, James and John to witness his glorious transfiguration. He wanted them to experience his future glory in the resurrection to prepare them for his horrible sufferings and crucifixion. Elijah represents the prophets and Moses the Law. They were conversing amiably showing that Jesus is in harmony with them; he fulfills what the Old Testament was looking forward to. They disappeared and Jesus remained alone to initiate the New Covenant which will endure until Jesus returns in glory.

This dazzling glimpse of divine glory is enough to send the Apostles in to rapture; they are so

happy that Peter cannot contain his desire to prolong this experience. Peter is reminded of the joyful feast of Tabernacles at harvest time. Booths and tents are set up on that occasion. This celebration and rejoicing before God looks forward in hope to the restoration of the kingdom. The three tents are on the assumption that Moses and Elijah have come to stay and to herald Jesus in the establishment of his glorious kingdom.

In the Old Testament, the cloud covered the meeting tent, indicating the Lord's presence in the midst of his people. The bright cloud signifies the brilliant presence of God, bringing light and brightness into the Kingdom. The Father's voice is heard. He comes out of his eternal silence to acknowledge Jesus as his own dear Son with whom he is well pleased. The Father feels the need to identify Jesus as his divine Son. He is so humble, and has been speaking to Moses and Elijah about his passion and death as Suffering Servant. Just as the Father feels obligated to acknowledge Jesus as his Son at his baptism, when he identifies himself with sinners, so now, too, the Father is moved to point out Jesus as his Son who, in his passion, will be seen to become sin for us (2 Cor 5:21).

The Father charges the disciples to "Listen to him." He is God's son. He is deputed to establish the New Covenant.

Again Jesus wants to keep his identity as Messiah a secret so that he can be free to carry out his spiritual mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of Heaven.

The prophets foretold that Elijah would return before the coming of the Messiah. Christ identified Elijah as John the Baptist, that is, the "spirit" of Elijah rested upon John, who proclaimed the coming of Christ.

Monday of the 7th Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 9:14-29

Jesus and the three came down the mountain after the transfiguration experience. A large crowd was around the remaining disciples. The scribes were arguing with them. When the crowd saw Jesus they were "utterly amazed". Apparently, the glory of God was still somewhat glowing in his majestic face.

Jesus inquired as to why they were arguing. A man explained that he had brought his son possessed by a mute spirit. He asked the disciples to drive it out but they were unsuccessful. Jesus became disturbed with them because of their lack of faith.

He had the boy brought to him. The spirit immediately threw the boy into convulsions when he saw Jesus. He seemed to have fallen into an epileptic fit: he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth. In answering to Jesus' question, the man explained that this had been going on since childhood. The spirit often threw the boy into fire and into the water to kill him.

This reminds us of people who attempt suicide in such ways. Instead of condemning the boy, Jesus had compassion on him. These occurrences are mysterious and only God is all-knowing and in a position to judge such actions. Various kinds of medications, drugs and potions can affect people in drastic ways. Jesus went on to assure the father that "Everything is possible to one who has faith." Through faith we connect ourselves to God so that we wield power to influence situations around us. The man believed but prayed for still more faith.

Jesus proceeded to rebuke the unclean spirit and ordered it to come out of the boy and never return again. After shouting and throwing him into convulsions the spirit came out. The boy appeared to be dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him up. The boy stood up. The disciples

then inquired why they could not drive the spirit out. Jesus responded that this kind of spirit could be driven out only by one who is deeply united to God in prayer. Such prayer supposes a strong faith that is habitually exercised in continuous communion with God so that abundant power is drawn from him in this way.

Tuesday of the 7th Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 9:30-37

Jesus and his disciples were on a private journey through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know about it because he wanted the opportunity to teach his disciples. He felt the need to repeat to them what he had said before about his being a suffering servant kind of Messiah. He once more identified himself as the Son of Man spoken of by the prophet Daniel (7:13-14), yet at the same time he is going to be betrayed and handed over to evil men who will kill him. But after three days he will rise. However, they just could not understand how Jesus could be Messiah and suffer and die at the same time. They focused so much on this astonishing aspect that his rising escaped their attention. They were really confused and disturbed about this second announcement. They were greatly dismayed and perplexed. But they were afraid to question him about it. It just did not make any sense. The whole mystery of redemption through suffering was still hidden from them. They failed to understand the suffering servant songs of Isaiah (42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13—53:12). And how could this glorious Son of Man fit in with a suffering Messiah?

The disciples were totally out of it. The whole concept of what Jesus was trying to get across to them was missed. Only the Holy Spirit would be able to break through to them and this only after they will have suffered themselves through the ordeal of Jesus' passion and death. The fact that they were discussing among themselves who was the greatest accentuates even more their not grasping

Jesus' spirit. They were proving themselves to be spiritually coarse men. But this was a teachable moment for Jesus to explain to them what he and the spirit of the kingdom of God was all about. So he proceeded to explain it to them.

He sat down and called the Twelve together. He said to them, "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all."

Pride produces self-centeredness. Humility opens us to God and the love of others, and love is inclined to serve. A sense of our own lowliness moves us to lean on the all-powerful God; it prompts us to desire to do God's will; it also unites us to God who is love. And love is the greatest thing of all. Love of God and neighbor promotes us to first place.

Jesus took a child and lovingly embraced it as a symbol of the poor and lowly whom the disciples are called to serve. And when we serve them, we are actually serving Jesus. In this way they are receiving God himself—even as Abraham did (Gen 18:1-5).

Wednesday of the 7th Week in Ordinary time

Mk 9: 38-40

The Apostle John tried to prevent a man from driving out demons in Jesus' name "because he does not follow us". If this man was successfully exorcizing demons in Jesus' name, he must have been a believer. Apparently, however, he was not one of the twelve or a close disciple of Jesus. But he seemed to be a sincere person of good will. The situation with the sons of Sceva, a Jewish high priest, was quite different (see Acts 19: 13-16).

Jesus counsels the apostles to be tolerant of such people who "performs mighty deeds in my name". Such success indicates that they have a true love for Jesus (his name) and believe in him. Jesus

corrects John's tendency to be exclusive of those who do not belong to their group. Jesus advises openness and acceptance of outsiders who believe in him. Here we are reminded of Moses' disciple, Joshua, who wanted him to stop Eldad and Medad from prophesying because they were not present with the others when the spirit came to rest on them. Moses answered him, "are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets! Would that the Lord might bestow his spirit on them all!" (see Num 11: 24-30). Jesus then explains, "For whoever is not against us is for us". People of good will who love Jesus' name, even if they are not grouped with the disciples, who are his close followers, are really for Jesus. They are to be looked upon with favor. Their good works are truly acceptable. These clearly act in communion with Jesus. They are quite different from those Pharisees who sinned against the Holy Spirit in claiming that Jesus cast out devils by the Prince of Devils. Of these Jesus said, "whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." (see Mt 12: 22-30)

Thursday of the 7th Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 9: 41-50

Jesus makes an "Amen" statement to solemnly assure us that even a simple act of kindness for one of his disciples who belongs to him will be rewarded. Each act of love towards another gradually transforms us into the image of Christ. Moreover, "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers" (1 Jn 3:14). Such is the beneficent results of loving deeds. Causing any disciple who believes in Jesus to sin is so serious an evil, it would be better for such a person to be drowned with a great millstone put around his neck. This is a heavy stone slab used in grinding grain. Such a grave or mortal sin merits hell. Here Jesus begins to use hyperbole or exaggerated speech to emphasize that we must take extreme measures sometimes to avoid sin. The action required to avoid a certain sin may be so serious that it can be

compared to cutting off one of the members of our body. This may mean, for example, that we must break up a certain friendship that is an occasion of sin. Cutting off your hand is a figure of speech to say one must not turn on his computer or television because it has become an occasion of sin. Plucking out one's eye may simply mean avoid looking at sinful images. Gehenna is a deep ravine south of Jerusalem which served as a smoldering garbage dump where refuse burned continually. It became a symbol for hell, the place of final punishment. The bodies and souls of the wicked will suffer the pain of unquenchable fire for all eternity (see Mt 25:41, 46).

"their worm does not die" means endless torment. One's conscience would be forever blaming him like the maggots endlessly consuming corrupted flesh. The pain of separation from God, for whom our being craves, is like a fire that never goes out, ever painfully consuming us.

"Everyone will be salted with fire". This may mean that those who go to hell will suffer its fire as salt in a wound causes intense pain. It may refer to the fact that every Christian can expect to experience the fire of suffering and persecution in this life. A disciple must be like salt to his environment, that is, a preservative element. By word and example he influences others to keep high moral standards. By prayer and reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist he keeps his spiritual influence intense.

We keep Salt in ourselves by preserving our allegiance to Jesus. In this way we continue to share his glorious life and are thus able to live in communion with him and with one another (see Jn17:22-23).

Friday- 7th Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 10:1-12

People were attracted to Jesus. Crowds gathered around him to listen to his words. He spent much of his time teaching.

(10:2) On this occasion, a question from the Pharisees prompted Jesus to teach about marriage and divorce. Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife? This question was meant to test Jesus, to cause him to make a statement that would get him in trouble. We recall that John the Baptist was imprisoned and beheaded because he denounced Herod Antipas' divorce and remarriage to Herodias, his brother Philip's wife (see Mk 6:17-18). Jesus was now speaking in this very region which Herod ruled. The Pharisees were hoping to make Jesus make bold statements that would get him in trouble and eliminated.

Jesus then asked a question to the Pharisees regarding Moses' command regarding marriage and divorce. They replied that Moses permitted a husband to write a bill of divorce and dismiss her. Jesus then explained that it was because of the hardness of their hearts that he wrote this command permitting divorce and remarriage (see Deut 24:1-4). The tendencies of fallen human nature resist God's spiritual commands. The hardened heart contends such requirements. So Moses gave in and allowed divorce and remarriage.

But Jesus reinstates God's original institution by quoting what he said in Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. Jesus returns to the very beginning, before sin entered human relationships, to show what God intended marriage to be. The marriage covenant made them one flesh and into an indissoluble union. This was for the good of the spouses themselves so they could grow spiritually as they related and adjusted to each other's needs. This was also for the good of the children who needed the environment of a stable relationship of love and concord. For this union to persist, the couple must devote all of their energies to make this new marriage relationship work. They must blend their lives unto a unity of love. This blending of two becoming one will require a sacramental grace empowering sacrificial love and self-gift. No one must attempt to separate what God has joined together – it is a divine institution that cannot be broken. The fact that the individuals were joined

together assumes that each was free and able to give him or herself to the other. They were able to enter into an enduring covenant of love and a communion of life.

When Jesus and the disciples returned home, they asked him again about marriage and divorce. They wanted to make sure they understood this new teaching. Jesus reassured them in other words that if a husband divorces his wife and marries another he commits adultery against his original wife. And the same is true of the wife. If she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.

Saturday - 7th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 10:13-16

(See pg. 145 - Sat. of 19th Week - Mt 19: 13-15)

Monday-8th Week in Ordinary Time Mk 10:17-27

A man ran up and knelt down before Jesus. Surely it was the majesty of Jesus' Person that would have commanded such behavior.

He called Jesus "Good"—but as usual, Jesus in his human nature always referred everything to his Father as the source of all good.

In response to the man's question "What must I do to inherit eternal life", Jesus mentioned some of the Ten Commandments: 5, 6, 7, 8, and 4. The man replied that he had kept these since his youth. Jesus looked at him with love and said that he lacked only one thing.

He invited him to sell his possessions and give to the poor. In that way he would have treasure in heaven. Then Jesus said to come and follow him. But the man was too attached to his wealth to part with it; so, he became visibly distressed and was greatly saddened. He did not have the moral strength to part with his possessions.

Jesus then took the opportunity to teach how wealth can be an impediment to spiritual growth. Actually, wealth makes it difficult to enter the Kingdom of God.

Riches can cause much preoccupation to hold onto and accumulate more of it. Much energy and attentiveness is required to manage all the possessions wealth can acquire. The luxury and leisure which it makes possible tend to make people spiritually lax. St. Paul explains it this way, “Those who want to be rich are falling into temptation, into a trap, and into many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge them into ruin and destruction” (1 Tim 6:9).

The disciples were amazed at Jesus’ words because in the Old Testament wealth and material goods were considered a sign of God’s favor (Job 1:10; 42:10-12). But, it can inspire false security and bring about forgetfulness of God. Saying that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God is a way of expressing how difficult it is. But God’s grace can assist a wealthy person to use his wealth for works of charity, give alms, and live in moderation. Through prayer and dependency on God and the practice of self-restraint he can live in a way that is pleasing to God and thus attain the Kingdom of God.

Tuesday-8th Week in Ordinary Time Mk 10:28-31

The rich man was too encumbered with his possessions to follow Jesus. He went away sad. Peter, on the other hand, had left everything that got in the way of following Jesus. His boats and nets were still his, but he did not let them get in the way of following and serving Jesus. He used his boat to transport Jesus when it was needed—so too with his nets. They were there if needed. He also kept his house, but it became a place for Jesus to reside and to use as his headquarters. He still owned or possessed these things, but he used them in such a way that they did not get in his way of serving Jesus and the

Kingdom of God. He was detached from them even if he still owned them. We too must consider how we can detach ourselves from our possessions so they will not prevent us from spending our time and energies to serve God and his kingdom. In this way we will reap supernatural and eternal dividends. This detachment will make us more spiritual and dispose us to be more closely united to Jesus. In exchange we will possess the Kingdom of God. Our reward will be exceedingly great!

Unlike the rich man, Peter and the other disciples had left everything to follow Jesus. What about them? Jesus responded that all who have left family and property for the sake of the Gospel will receive a hundredfold more than they left behind—even in this age: brothers and sister, mothers and fathers, children and lands. What they left behind in natural, earthly relationships, they will regain on a supernatural, spiritual level. These will be multiplied immeasurably, like the grains of sand on the seashore or the stars in the sky (compare Gen 22:17).

The spiritually rich relationships in the Kingdom of God will be far greater than what was left behind. These rewards will take place in the present age. And besides that, those who follow Jesus in such a wholehearted fashion will be rewarded with the glorious, eternal life in heaven.

At the same time, however, Jesus’ disciples can expect to experience various forms of persecution. Those who love this world will be against those who proclaim the Gospel whose doctrine contradicts the beliefs of those who live only for the present age. Jesus’ disciples may be last now on a worldly level of thinking and living, but they will be first in the end. Truth will prevail.

Wednesday-8th Week in Ordinary Time Mk 10:32-45

Jesus leads his band of apostles to Jerusalem. He knows what is going to happen to him there yet he does not hesitate—that is why he became incarnate. He forges ahead.

He proceeds to tell his disciples for the third time. He explains quite clearly that he is going to be handed over to the Jewish leaders who will condemn him and hand him over to be executed by the Romans. They will mock him, spit upon him, scourge him and put him to death. But in three days he will rise.

It is remarkable that James and John chose to ask him to give them first place upon entering into his glory just after he announced his passion and death. They still did not understand the spiritual nature of the kingdom and the virtue needed to attain it. Jesus told them quite plainly that they did not know what they were asking.

Drinking the cup means accepting the destiny assigned them by God. In actual fact it refers to the suffering that Jesus was going to endure in place of sinners.

Jesus also asked James and John whether they were able to be baptized with the one he will endure. This signifies his immersion in trial and suffering. Jesus asserts that, yes they will drink the cup and share his baptism. Actually, James was martyred and John was exiled. But it was not Jesus' place to fulfill their request. It is for those for whom it was prepared by his Father. Again Jesus shows his complete dependence on the Father for such decisions.

The other apostles became very angry with these two brothers for trying to get ahead of them; which means that they were not any more virtuous than these two brothers who wanted first place. Jesus then taught them the kind of attitude required in his kingdom. It is totally different from the prideful manner of Gentile rulers who make their authority felt. In Jesus' kingdom those who are leaders must become the servant of the others, even as he, Jesus—although he the glorious Son of Man—came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for the many. That is, for the whole human race (compare Is 53:11).

Thursday of the 8th Week in Ordinary Time Mk 10:46-52

Besides Jesus' disciples, a sizable crowd traveled with him. They wanted to be near him. They must have sensed the divinity in him. His holiness drew them to him. His love and peacefulness attracted them.

A blind man named Bartimaeus sat by the roadside begging. He enquired what was happening when he heard the crowd coming by. He must have heard of Jesus' reputation for healing. When he realized that it was Jesus, he began to cry out, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me". Jesus is a descendant of King David. He is the long awaited Messiah. The blind man has more sight than those who can see. He recognizes who Jesus is. He is the heir to David's throne. That is what God promised to David through Nathan the Prophet (2 Sam 7:12-17). He cries out to the Messiah for pity. This would have touched Jesus' heart. He has a special love and concern for the poor, the lowly and those who are hurting. In him we have a listening ear for us when we are in need.

Many standing by told him to be quiet. But his need was too great. He kept on crying out all the more, "Son of David, have pity on me." This last cry got Jesus' attention. So Jesus stopped and said to call the blind man over. The bystanders told the man that Jesus was calling him. The blind man threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. He was recognized as a person. He was somebody after all. That gave him courage.

Jesus asked him what he wanted him to do for him. "Master", he said, "I want to see". Jesus responded to his need. "Go your way", he said, "Your faith has saved you". Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the way. His faith had made contact with the divine. It was effective. We, too, are blind. We do not see truth and the spiritual world. We must follow the blind man's example and cry out to Jesus to take pity on us. We are sitting along the way of life without any

significant effort to grow spiritually. Jesus will give us spiritual insight; we will take courage and begin to follow Jesus on the way of holiness.

Friday of the 8th Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 11:11-26

Jesus came to Jerusalem and went into the temple area. Since it was late, he went to Bethany with the Twelve. This was the village where Lazarus, Martha and Mary lived. Their home was just a couple of miles from Jerusalem. Jesus often went to stay with them.

The next day Jesus saw a fig tree and went to look for figs—he found none. The barren fig tree represents Israel. Jesus cursing the fig tree is a parable in action representing Jesus' judgment on barren Israel and the fate of Jerusalem for failing to receive his teaching. The withered and dead tree is a visible prophecy of the doom that awaits Jerusalem for murdering the Messiah. The outer court of the Gentiles was made into a market place for exchanging money and buying and selling animals of sacrifice. It then became impossible for the Gentiles to pray and worship. But this commercialization of the court of the Gentiles conflicts with the Isaian prophecy which says, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Is 56: 7).

Jesus adds to the Isaian prophecy a passage from Jeremiah which he paraphrases, "But you have made it a den of thieves" (Jer 7:11). The people thought that they could commit sins and use the temple as a hideout to escape divine punishment. There is a parallel occurring here. Various abuses are taking place such as exorbitant pricing and so stealing from those trying to offer sacrifice. Jesus' cleansing of the temple is a sign of God's coming judgment upon Jerusalem. The chief priests and scribes who were ultimately responsible for allowing these abuses and enriching themselves from them were so furious with Jesus that they wanted to kill him. But they feared the crowd who were astonished at his teaching.

On the next day, the disciples noticed the withered fig tree. Jesus took the occasion to exhort his disciples to have faith in God. With a strong, persistent faith, he said that they could accomplish impossible things such as causing a mountain to be uplifted and thrown into the sea. This strong image symbolizes the efficacious power of faith expressed in prayer. It can accomplish seemingly impossible things. When we pray it is important that we forgive those who have offended us so that our heavenly Father will forgive us also.

Saturday of the 8th Week in Ordinary Time

Mk 11:27-33

Jesus was walking in the temple area when he was approached by the chief priests, the scribes and the elders. (These were the heads of the more important families who sat in the Jewish high court). They wanted to know by what authority Jesus was doing "these things". The latest episode they were referring to was Jesus' cleansing the temple of the abuses that were taking place there. But there was also his triumphant entry into Jerusalem while sitting on a colt. People welcomed him and shouted "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Was this not declaring openly that he was the Messiah? And then he also was teaching in the temple with authority—and all without their authorization! Jesus knew their insincerity. He knew they were out to get him. Thus he responds that he will answer their question if they respond to his. "Was John's baptism of heavenly or of human origin?" If they answered from heaven, that is, that John was a prophet commissioned by God, he would know that they were lying. For they were not converted by John's preaching. They did not have enough spirituality to discern that he had been sent by God. If they answered that John's baptism was of his own doing, they feared the crowd who considered him as one sent by God. So they answered that they did not know.

In this way they were admitting they were incompetent to judge Jesus' credentials to speak

with authority—just as they had been to judge those of John the Baptist.

Jesus concluded, then, that he had no obligation to tell them by what authority he did “these things”.

Monday of the 9th Week in Ordinary Time **Mk 12:1-12**

Jesus told a parable aimed at helping the leaders of the Jewish people to see themselves. He was trying to enlighten them and even shock them into seeing what they were doing.

The man who planted a vineyard is God. The vineyard represents Israel. Perhaps we could also say that the hedge around the vineyard is the walled city of Jerusalem and the tower is the Temple in the city. The tenant farmers signify the religious leaders of Israel. The servants that God sent to collect the produce were God’s messengers, the prophets. These servants of God were rejected by the leaders and persecuted. Their divine messages went unheeded and did not bear fruit. Repeatedly God sent messengers, the prophets. All in turn were rejected and treated harshly, even to murdering some of them.

God’s love and generosity are far beyond our understanding. As a last resort he even sent his Son, believing that surely they would respect his beloved Son.

But the tenants, instead, thought that this was their opportunity: they decided to kill him so that his inheritance could be theirs. And this is what they did. They seized and murdered him and then threw him out of the vineyard. This refers to the fact that Jesus was crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem.

God will then come to these tenants, put them to death and give his vineyard to the Gentiles. This came true in A.D. 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman army.

Jesus then quotes Psalm 118: 22-23 which signifies that the leaders (the builders) rejected their Messiah (the Stone); but God uses him as the most important Stone, (the Cornerstone) to build a new temple. All of this was according to God’s plan, all so astonishingly marvelous. These leaders realized that the parable was about them. They would have liked to arrest him but they feared the people; so they left Jesus and went away.

Tuesday of the 9th Week in Ordinary Time **Mk 12:13-17**

The leaders of the people sent some Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to get him in trouble through certain statements he might make. These two groups were usually opposed to each other. The Pharisees were against the Roman rule and occupation of Palestine. The Herodians, on the other hand, were sympathetic to the Roman government ruling Israel through the Herodian dynasty. Although politically they stood apart, they were close in their opposition to Jesus.

They began their conversation by praising Jesus for his truthfulness. He did not let other people’s opinion influence him. He did not allow a person’s high position in society to affect his teaching. He simply taught the truth. By these words they were setting Jesus up to make bold statements that could get him in trouble with the Roman government. Then they posed this question: “Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?”

Peoples subject to Roman rule were obliged to pay a poll tax to the Roman emperor. The tax was highly unpopular. This was a tax of a fixed amount per person levied on adults. Some Jews flatly refused to pay it. For them, payment was an admission of Roman right to rule them. If Jesus said that they should pay the tax, the Pharisees would denounce him to the people as disloyal to his country. If he said that they should not pay the tax, the Herodians would report him to the Roman governor and he would be executed

for treason. Thus Jesus seemed trapped with whatever he would say.

Jesus then called for a denarius (the common Roman coin) for him to look at. He then asked whose image and inscription was on it. “Caesar” was the reply. Because Caesar’s likeness is stamped on the coin for the tax, it should be given back to him as his rightful property. On the other side of the coin there was an inscription that identified him. Thus Jesus said, “Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar”. And since humans are made in the image of God, they must repay God what is God’s by devoting their whole lives to him. For, they belong to him.

Although these men were utterly amazed at Jesus, their hardened hearts would not believe in him.

Wednesday of the 9th Week in Ordinary Time **Mk 12:18-27**

This time it is the Sadducees who approach Jesus with a question. These were the priestly aristocratic party, centered in Jerusalem. They accepted as Scripture only the first five books of the Old Testament, followed only the letter of the law, rejected the oral legal traditions, and were opposed to teachings not found in the Pentateuch, such as the resurrection of the dead. (see New American Bible footnote at Mt 4:7).

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They call Jesus’ attention to the Levirate law of Deut 25: 5-6 which stipulates that if someone’s brother dies, leaving a wife but no child, his brother must take the wife and raise up descendants for his brother. In this way the family name would be carried on in Israel. The Sadducees considered this legislation inconsistent with a belief in bodily resurrection, since the widow’s numerous marriages would only lead to confusion if all her husbands were raised.

There were seven brothers, and they all married the same woman—whose wife will she be?

The question is meant to ridicule belief in the resurrection.

Jesus proceeded to explain to these Sadducees that they did not know the Scriptures or the power of God. In the resurrection there are no marriages. The number of people chosen by God to exist is complete. There is no more need for the begetting of children or sexual relations. God is enough for everyone. Their life is complete in union with him. People are transformed into spiritual beings and immortal like the resurrected Jesus—they are like angels (see 1 Cor 15: 42-44).

Since the Sadducees believed only in the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch) Jesus deliberately chose a passage from Ex 3:6. In this passage, God reveals himself to Moses in the burning bush as the God of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This implies that they are very much alive and are in a living relationship with God. This also hints at the future resurrection of their bodies (Compare Is 26:19).

Thursday of the 9th Week in Ordinary Time **Mk 12:28-34**

Unlike Jesus’ former questioners this scribe seems to be one of good will. He was not attempting to trap Jesus or embarrass him in any way.

In asking which the first of all the commandments is, perhaps he was trying to clarify and single out one of the many commandments in the old law. They were divided into 613 precepts, and these were considered either heavy or light. So the question was a legitimate one.

Jesus quotes the book of Deuteronomy 6:4 to answer. It is known as the Shema from the first word of the passage “Hear” in the Hebrew language. That is the way the pious Jew expressed his faith by reciting it every morning and evening. Every synagogue service begins with its recitation even to this day. It reads thus: “Hear, O Israel!

The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength”. There can only be one God containing all perfections in himself. “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). He deserves and we owe him total love and devotion. He sustains us in life from moment to moment as well as having called us into being.

Jesus combined this first greatest commandment with a second one which he joined to it from Leviticus 19:18. He made the two of them into one. Love is the fulfillment of the law. The first three of the Ten Commandments are joined to the last seven in this one great command of love of God and neighbor.

The scribe takes the matter a step farther and states that the moral laws of God are superior to the sacrificial laws of the Temple. The prophet Hosea states, “For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than holocausts” (Hos 6:6). Jesus commended the scribe for his response. He was not far from the Kingdom of God. He was very near to Jesus’ thinking and teaching.

Friday of the 9th Week in Ordinary Time **Mk 12:35-37**

We again see Jesus teaching in the temple area. Teaching was an important part of his ministry. That is how he imparted the truth and prepared the people for the coming Kingdom of God. An important part of our faith life is to absorb the truth that he taught by reading his words and meditating upon them. We draw holiness from these words because they contain the very righteousness of God (Rom 1: 16-17). Jesus explained that this is one of the ways whereby we consecrate ourselves to God. Jesus said, “Consecrate them in the truth, your word is truth” (Jn 17:17). We set ourselves apart for God who is the Truth through his word, by absorbing its content.

While teaching in the temple Jesus brought up the subject of the Messiah. The scribes claim that the Messiah is the son of David. This rightful claim can be seen from various scripture texts. For example, “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; As king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, Israel shall dwell in security. This is the name they gave him: ‘The Lord our justice’” (Jer 23:5-6). When the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary at the Annunciation he said that “the Lord God will give him [her Son] the throne of David his father” (Lk 1:32).

So Jesus asks his audience, how can the Messiah be the son of David when David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit said, “The Lord said to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I place your enemies under your feet?’ David himself calls him ‘lord’; so how is he his son? (see Ps 110:1). We know now that Jesus is far more than the son of David. He is son of David according to his human nature. But he is also Son of God. The angel said to Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Lk 1:35). Jesus’ audience did not know this at the time. It took time and divine revelation to enable us to answer Jesus’ question.

Saturday of the 9th Week in Ordinary Time **Mk 12:38-44**

While Jesus was teaching he called the people’s attention to the scribes. They liked to call attention to themselves by the way they dressed and were on the lookout to be greeted in the marketplaces. This greeting consisted of a deep ceremonial bow in recognition of their superior position in the community as experts in the law. They pride-fully sought the seats of honor in synagogues and at banquets. They tended to glory in themselves and before the people. They themselves were the center of

their existence instead of God. They used religion for their own self-aggrandizement.

Jesus condemned the behavior of the scribes still further by remarking that they devoured the houses of widows as they impressed them by reciting lengthy prayers. As lawyers, these scribes could serve as trustees of a widow's estate. They collected their fees by taking a share of the widow's estate. Their pretended piety gave them a better chance of being sought out to be trustees.

Jesus sat down opposite the treasure and observed how the crowd put money into the treasure. The temple treasury usually means the cells where the valuables were stored. In this passage it may mean the women's court around whose walls were placed thirteen trumpet shaped chests for offerings.

Jesus could see that many rich people put in large sums. That is praiseworthy. Possibly they were giving ten per cent of their income. This is an excellent way of disciplining ourselves so that we will not become overly attached to wealth. Such self-restraint is spiritually healthy. We may think, however, that giving large sums is more virtuous than those who put very little. Jesus makes it clear that the poor widow who put two small coins put in more than all the others. This is true in that the others gave from their surplus. She gave from her want which costs her so much more by way of self-sacrifice. She gave her all. This must have reminded Jesus of the total self-gift he was soon to be making of himself on Calvary.

Monday of the 10th Week in Ordinary Time

Mt 5: 1-12

Huge crowds came to Jesus to hear the gospel of the Kingdom and to be healed of their diseases and many afflictions and disabilities. When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain. After he had sat down his disciples came to him and he began to teach

them as well as the crowd (see Mt 7: 28). This first part of his Sermon on the Mount is known as the beatitudes. Jesus, like a new Moses on the mountain, delivers the new law, the Gospel. He begins by stating how blessed are those who possess certain virtuous qualities or attitudes.

The poor in spirit experience their helplessness and poverty of being. They depend on him for everything and already possess the Kingdom of God.

They who mourn suffer because of their allegiance to God. They grieve over lawlessness, the sins of humanity including their own, and the lack of respect for God their Creator and Redeemer. God will comfort them. They are blessed because their sorrows turned them toward God.

The meek suffer adversity with self-possession, while keeping anger under control. They humbly submit their wills to God. This self-mastery under duress purifies their passions so that they become very gentle. In this way they inherit the land, the Kingdom of God. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness have experienced God and can never get enough of him. They seek him in prayer, the Eucharist, the word of God and live in close union with him by always doing his will. And, God satisfies their hunger and thirst for him.

The merciful are compassionate toward others and readily forgive them. They pass on to others the mercy they have received from God. Showing such mercy disposes them to receive more mercy from God.

The clean of heart let nothing come between them and God. This single-hearted devotion to God renders them pure of heart and disposes them to see or know the indwelling God.

Peacemakers promote harmony and reconciliation. They bring about understanding and unity. They are true children of God who is peace (Jgs 6: 24).

Those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, that is, for being right with God, have already attained the Kingdom of God. They suffer ridicule and persecution because of their fidelity to God. Their reward will be great.

Tuesday of the 10th Week in Ordinary Time **Mt 5: 13-16**

Salt is used as a preservative to keep food from spoiling. Salt also gives flavor to food. The disciple, Jesus is saying, must be like salt for the society he lives in. His works of love, his patience, his peacefulness, his self-sacrificing charity will be noticed by others who will want to imitate him. They will want to acquire his virtuous behavior.

Such a person will realize the power of God's word to preserve the faithfulness of a nation to God. He will readily share that word with others. He will perhaps need to write that word and read it or show it to his friends. This will help them to keep it in mind and live it out. An example of such a word is the following passage:

“This is a nation that does not listen to the voice of the Lord, its God, or take correction. Faithfulness has disappeared; the word itself is banished from their speech” (Jer 7:28). They would proceed to discuss the meaning of this passage and perhaps begin to read that word. This is also a good example of how we can evangelize others in a discreet way. If we are not strong in our faith life we will be worthless and merit to be thrown underfoot, that is, fail to be honored and held in esteem by others—to say the least.

Jesus is the light of the world (Jn 8:12). He communicates that light to us, his followers. That light was infused into us by the grace of baptism. We receive it as the light of truth through the word of God and teachings of his Church. We must let that light shine by our good works and by sharing the word of God with others in our conversations.

The knowledge that our faith gives us is precious. It opens people to a relationship with God. It gives them eternal life. That knowledge must be communicated to others. We must share our joy in possessing it. We cannot keep it to ourselves. It is wrong to hide it. People are in such need of it! It gives them hope. It helps them realize the value of accepted suffering. You've got to start talking and sharing your faith knowledge. You cannot keep it hidden any longer. Jesus commands you to let your light shine!

Wednesday of the 10th Week in Ordinary Time **Mt 5: 17-19**

The law and the prophets here refer to the whole Old Testament. In general the whole law is good and to be kept and prayed over. But Jesus came to perfect it and bring it to completion. He will draw out its implications and show what it was meant to be in its ultimate perfection. So the Old Testament writings are still valid and to be kept, for they remain the inspired word of God. But Jesus, as Messiah, gives them their final definitive meaning. Moreover, he speaks as God with far greater authority than Moses: “You have heard that it was said....But I say to you....” (Mt 5: 27-28). In a way Jesus was saying that the old law was imperfect and unfinished. He will perfect and finish it. It is the finished and perfect Law that will endure forever. The Law will not pass away until it has been finished and brought to perfection by the interpretation that Jesus as Messiah will give it. The Law therefore, that the disciples are to follow and teach is the one complete and perfect Law that Jesus will finish. Insofar as Jesus, the Son of God, gives the Law its final, definitive interpretation with his divine authority, every part of it, to the least detail, must be observed. That is how every single person will be able to arrive at saintly perfection. To become great in the Kingdom of God one must keep the Law as Jesus brought it to perfection.

Thursday of the 10th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 5: 20-26

The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees consisted mainly in being right with the external letter of the law. This left the interior of the heart unaffected. Such a way of living did not bring about the transformation of one's heart. The core of one's being was still indisposed for God. For example, the fact that one did not steal may well have left one's heart still coveting another's possessions.

In order to enter into Jesus' spiritual kingdom one's heart must be cleansed and free from all disordered desire. This calls for detachment from all sinful desires. Such passions displace the spiritual yearnings we ought to have for God whom we must love with all our hearts. By renouncing these desires that are contrary to those belonging to genuine children of God, we have clean hearts ready to receive the Spirit who communicates the divine presence and the Kingdom of God to us. The Fifth Commandment forbids us to kill a fellow man and goes no further. Jesus commands that our hearts be free from murderous anger. The desire to kill another is already a serious sin, even if it does not end in taking another's life. Such an angry disposition will be severely judged. Disrespecting others with abusive words is likewise condemnable. Calling another a fool, with hate in one's heart, calls for divine punishment. Gehenna is a valley in southwest Jerusalem which served as a dumping ground. It burned continuously and became a symbol of the fires of hell. It is extremely important that we remain at peace with each other. Love must be our dominant attitude. We must seek to be reconciled with anyone who may have something against us. We need to be reconciled in order to be properly disposed to offer our gifts to God.

It is important that we settle matters with them while on the way to judgment. Otherwise, if we stand before the Judge still unreconciled, we will

be punished with imprisonment. And, we will not be released until we are thoroughly purified. Is this not an allusion to purgatory? This passage says the person's punishment will end, but punishment in hell has no end.

Friday of the 10th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 5: 27-32

The Sixth Commandment says, "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex 21:14). Adultery is a sexual disorder, a lack of sexual control, as well as a sin of unfaithfulness to one's spouse.

Again Jesus goes to the very root cause of the sin. It arises because of uncontrolled sexual desire. This desire is meant to be put into action within the context of a marriage with one's spouse. If conception occurs and a child is born it takes place within a stable society where it can receive care and education due each human being. We can see from this why adultery is a serious sin against God's commandment. Serious harm takes place when this command is not observed. The individuals involved in this sin break their relationship with God by serious disobedience. They are harmed subsequently by an inability to live in continuous communion with God. Such a serious sin calls for drastic means to avoid it. If one's eyes are the cause, then one must do everything possible to avoid the sight that stirs such desires in him or her. Serious prayer is needed for the moral strength required to keep oneself away from such occasions of sin. Jesus uses strong language such as plucking out one's eyes or cutting off one's hand to avoid the causes of temptation and sin. It is better to cut out these occasions of sin no matter how costly, than to end up in the eternal fires of hell.

Divorce was permitted in the Old Law for very light reasons. Jesus forbids divorce and remarriage and restores God's original plan of two becoming one flesh, joined as they are by God and inseparable (see Mt 19: 4-6). If the marriage is unlawful in the first place, "divorce" (separation) is allowable

(v 32). But divorce of a marriage and remarriage brings about an adulterous relationship.

So much harm comes about for the married couple who divorces as well as for their children. Everything possible must be done for the couple to be reconciled and brought to harmony again. Serious counseling must be sought and every effort must be made to restore a marital relationship.

Saturday of the 10th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 5: 33-37

When we swear we call upon God to witness that we are telling the truth. That's why the word of God says, "You shall not swear falsely by my name, thus profaning the name of your God" (Lev 19:12)."

To swear falsely is the grave sin of perjury. We would be calling God to come down to witness to a lie! That would be an insult to God. In saying, "...do not swear at all" Jesus is referring to private oaths made to individuals that should not be necessary. Simply giving our word should be sufficient.

Even using oath formularies to avoid using the divine name are out of place. Swearing by heaven, or earth, or Jerusalem is equivalent to swearing by God's name because all of these things sworn by are related to him. Private oaths such as these are completely unnecessary in a society which is truthful. Meaning what you say when you say "yes" or "no" is all that is needed in a truth speaking society.

Public oaths, however, by those who are entering into public office are good. Jesus says, "Make good to the Lord all that you vow" or swear you will do.

Judges, doctors, soldiers, politicians, and other professionals take oaths for public service. This is exacted of them so they will take their office

seriously and serve the people well. At the same time they call upon God to assist them in performing their duty. To violate their oath is to invite divine punishment.

God is truth. He is true to his promises. He keeps his covenant. He does not lie. So too, Jesus is the truth (Jn 14:6). He cannot deceive. You can depend on everything he says. Jesus sent us the Spirit of Truth (Jn 14: 16) to help us know and speak the truth. We must be true to his promptings and live the truth as well as speak it. Our word is sufficient; we need not swear to reinforce it.

Monday of the 11th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 5: 38-42

The desire for revenge can be so strong as to over-compensate for the injury done to oneself or a family member. The Old Testament sought to moderate such vengeance. We read, "Anyone who inflicts an injury on his neighbor shall receive the same in return. Limb for limb, eye for eye, tooth for tooth! The same injury that a man gives another shall be inflicted on him in return" (Lev 24: 19-20).

The commandment states that the punishments should not exceed the injury done.

But Jesus forbids even this proportionate retaliation, "But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil". The idea of offering no resistance is to avoid physical violence. This leaves us with the possibility of psychological or moral resistance to evil, such as by peaceful demonstrations as a means of protesting some injustice. We must not allow ourselves to be overcome by evil in such a way as to arouse us to undue anger and render evil for evil. Rather we must overcome evil with good (Rom 12: 19-21). So Jesus uses the expression to turn the other cheek as a way of continued love and patient endurance rather than violent reprisal. The goal is to shame the opponent into a change of heart or at least not to carry the violence any further, like Jesus during his passion. When

one of the guards unjustly struck Jesus during his trial, Jesus responded with, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?” (Jn 18: 22-23). Jesus also teaches us to avoid contention such as when someone wants to go to law over something we possess. He urges us to give them, over and above, what they want. We avoid fighting over possessions. This distracts us from focusing and seeking first the Kingdom of God. When someone compels us to do something, we must offer to do still more. This will open the doors of our heart to boundless divine love. Jesus urges us to give to the one who asks something of us. This forces us into still greater selflessness and generosity. This is an attack against the selfish self, and to open us to love which is the greatest thing of all (1 Cor 13:13).

Tuesday of the 11th Week in Ordinary Time **Mt 5: 43-48**

The Old Testament states, “Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your fellow countrymen. You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18).

Love, then, was restricted to one’s fellow Israelite. And since the Gentiles worshipped false gods the Jews were ordered to exterminate them so that Israel would not imitate their idolatry. In that sense, they were to be considered their enemies and they were to be hated (Ps 139: 19-22).

But times have changed. The situation is different now. And Jesus is challenging his followers to love all people, even their enemies—just as God loves both the good and the evil. For God is love (1Jn 4:16) and we his children must be like him.

How can we express love for those who hate us? We can begin by praying for them, asking God to bless them. And, we can do good to them by acts of kindness and generosity. That is how we melt their hearts and move them to regret their hateful deeds. Goodness is diffusive of itself; it

tends to attract others to want to be good. Praying for persecutors is likewise efficacious. Prayer contacts God who is infinitely powerful and can change the hearts of evil doers. As children of God we want to be like him. He causes his sun to rise upon the evil; he makes the rain fall upon them as well as the good.

Jesus is challenging us to go beyond the material or mere human behavior. He wants us to act supernaturally, on the level of grace and spirit—on a divine level. We must take the initiative to love, such as to greet our enemies whether they respond or not.

Because of the uniquely powerful grace and spiritual gifts of the New Testament, Jesus calls us to moral perfection. The heights of love expressed as mercy and compassion even to one’s enemies is what we are called to live out (see Lk 6: 36).

Wednesday of the 11th Week in Ordinary Time **Mt 6: 1-6, 16-18**

Jesus teaches us not to perform our good works of piety in order to be seen by others. This implies that we are looking for praise of those who see us rather than to please God. As a result we receive no reward from God. Instead we become puffed up with pride and self-exaltation. We become self-absorbed rather than more closely united to God.

Jesus goes on to give examples of such prideful acts of piety.

Giving alms to the needy is a praiseworthy act. But our intention in giving may spoil that good act if it is done out of vainglory and for show. Our intention thwarts our good work by turning it to self. Our motive for giving is undue self-exaltation. It is no longer for love of God and neighbor. We lose our heavenly reward. There was no contact with God through faith when we did that almsgiving. The attitude we ought to have is to hide our good deeds even from ourselves. It is so easy to become absorbed in ourselves and

become prideful. That is why it is good to do our good works secretly. God sees them and will reward us. And our sinful pride will not get in the way.

We must exercise the same care when we pray. Praying for others to see us at prayer spoils our intention which should be to honor God and express our needs. Private prayer is good but it should be done in such a way as to avoid demonstrating our piety. Our sole intention must be to please God. Our prayer will then be rewarded by him.

When we pray in public with others we must conduct ourselves like everyone else so we will not draw attention to ourselves. The same theme of guarding against pride is taken up regarding fasting. We must try not to show by our appearance that we are fasting. Our intention must be to please God and to purify ourselves from sin so that we will be more disposed for prayer and communion with God. We seek to overcome our sinful passions so we will become more loving toward God and others. We want to subdue our wild human nature and make it more submissive to God's grace. God will reward us by drawing us more closely in union with himself.

Thursday of the 11th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 6: 7-15

Jesus does not want our prayer to be like the pagans. They recited a long list of divine names hoping that one of them would move one of the gods to respond. We must not confuse this kind of babbling with a lengthy heart to heart prayer when we commune with God. We read that Jesus spent the whole night in prayer in preparation for his choice of the Apostles. At the Last Supper he prayed spontaneously for all of chapter seventeen of St. John's Gospel. Some of the inspired Psalms repeat at length the same words over and over. For example, Psalm 136 goes on for 26 verses, repeating the words, "God's love

endures forever" for all 26 verses. Jesus repeated the same prayer three times in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26: 39-44).

It is not the many words that are effective but a communion of love by which we are connected with God that results in the transformation of our person. Such a lengthy communion may require many words for continuous support for such sustained prayerful communion with God.

Jesus proceeds to demonstrate to the Apostles the ideal way to pray.

We address God as our Father. We are his children expressing our intimate communion with him. We are aware of our solidarity with all our brothers and sisters as we pray. We are conscious of the exalted nature of God who is above all and is over all.

We desire that he and his name be respected. At the same time we would like to see him express his majesty and power in our midst so all will have respect for him.

We petition God to assert his rule among us. We would want his presence to fill everyone. For this to happen we pray that his will be done by everyone on earth as his will is done in heaven by the angels and saints. We also ask that our Father provide us with the nourishment we need for our body and soul—just as he fed his hungry children in the desert with manna. We include in this petition that he likewise provide us with that spiritual food, the Holy Eucharist. We pray that God will forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

We pray to be spared from the severe trials at the end times and that God would deliver us from the evil one, Satan himself. We are warned about the necessity of forgiving others. If we refuse to forgive them, God will not forgive us.

Friday of the 11th Week in Ordinary Time

Mt 6: 19-23

Storing up earthly treasures requires focus and energy. The attentiveness needed to maintain and increase earthly treasures drains the energies we need to love God with our whole heart or to seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness. These stored up goods last only for a time and depreciate in value very quickly. They deteriorate or can be lost. They are also subject to be stolen. All the effort to acquire them will be in vain. And, we must leave them all when we die. We do need a certain amount to maintain life. Money is needed for food, housing, education, health, etc. It is good to give away some such as 10% so we can keep our desire for it under control according to God's will for us. Giving some away also helps us to be generous and detached.

Our efforts ought to be directed toward storing spiritual goods that endure forever. They do not deteriorate and no one can steal them from us.

Your heart will be where your treasure is. If you store up earthly treasure, your heart will go there. It will be unable to rise to God and rest in him. It will be stuck on earth. If you store up spiritual treasures, your heart will go there. Your heart will rest peacefully in God where your treasure will be safely kept. Actually you yourself will be the treasure. Detachment from earthly treasures for the sake of attaching yourself to God will gradually transform you into the image of God which is Christ. Each new degree of holiness will bring you to a new degree of union with God until you will be totally transformed into God-likeness and united to the indwelling God.

“The lamp of the body is the eye”. This refers to the intention with which you view things. If your intention is pure, if you are single-mindedly directed toward God, your whole being will be filled with spiritual light. But if your intention is bad or evil, your whole being will be filled with

darkness. “God is light and in him there is no darkness” (1 Jn 1:5). Your heart must be totally directed toward God and pleasing him. This opens you to union with God who fills you with his presence. That is why it is so important that God becomes the main or total object of your desires and quest.

Saturday of the 11th Week in Ordinary Time

Mt 6:24-34

To accept someone as our master, implies that we are his slave. We belong to him. We are submissive to him and serve him with total devotion. God is our Creator and Sustainer. “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). He deserves, and we owe him, complete devotion and service.

Mammon (money and wealth) tends to demand our complete attention and mental energies to tend to it. In that sense it demands our servitude. We can become its slaves. Daily meditation on God's word and a serious prayer life will keep us close to God and help us to be prudent and self-controlled in our managing mammon so that it does not become our master. Giving away ten percent of it is one way to assert our mastery over it.

Jesus commands us not to worry. Worry stresses us with anxiety and separates us from communion with God. We are called, instead, to entrust our concerns to God who will take care of them in due time. Our prayerful communion with him will draw power to bear patiently with the difficulty we are experiencing. If God takes care of lower creation, all the more will his providence care for us, his beloved children.

Jesus commands us “to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given you besides”. God and his rule over us deserve preferential treatment in our lives. We must give Jesus and his divine teachings priority over everything else. If we

do, then everything else will fall in place. Our lives must revolve around God and his will. This implies that we give prayer with God's word a first priority. All else is to take second place and ordered accordingly.

Monday of the 12th Week in Ordinary Time **Matthew 7:1-5**

Jesus commands us to stop judging harshly and condemning others (compare Luke 6:37). It is normal and okay to evaluate a person's actions and decide (judge), for example, that these particular actions are objectively wrong. But we do not know a person's conscience. Therefore we do not know that he is guilty of sin. Only God knows that. We are called to be merciful in our judgments. We must be compassionate the way Jesus was (compare Luke 15). Our holy Catholic faith requires that our thoughts and actions be permeated with love.

We need to focus and be aware of our own sins and faults and make efforts to root them out. We need to compare ourselves with God's word and Jesus' character and behavior to measure our own. Our defects of character and sins might be greater than those of our neighbor. Only after we have strenuously worked at reforming our own lives will we, perhaps, be in a position to evaluate others. Treating others with compassion and mercy will prompt God to judge us mercifully.

Tuesday of the 12th Week in Ordinary Time **Mt 7:6, 12-14**

Dogs and swine were Jewish terms of contempt for Gentiles. Since Jesus commands us to proclaim the Gospel to all nations (Gentiles) (Mt 28:19), this saying would apply to anyone, including Christians, who are obstinately opposed to the Gospel and a holy way of life. The book of Proverbs says, "Speak not for the fool's hearing; he will despise the wisdom

of your words" (23:9). We reserve precious spiritual insights for fellow devout believers who appreciate them.

"Do to others whatever you would have them do to you" is known as the Golden Rule. This statement summarizes the way of love contained in the Law of Moses and the prophets. The book of Tobit puts the saying in this way, "Do to no one what you yourself dislike" (4:15). This rule shows us how to treat others with love, the way we want to be treated.

The narrow gate that leads to the blessed spiritual life of Jesus requires self-restraint in order to enter. Jesus is the gate (Jn 10:7). He said, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23). This graced way of life requires effort and self-discipline. Few accept the challenge to follow Jesus who is the way and the truth (Jn 14:6) to the fullness of life (Jn 10:10). The majority prefer the soft and easy way of following the line of least resistance. They give in to fallen human nature's tendency to self-destruction. We must practice the virtues of temperance and fortitude to follow Jesus' way. "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires (Gal 5:24). We must resist our sinful tendencies and starve them to death. In this way the spirit will prevail so that we will be disposed for union with God and enjoy the highest life.

Wednesday of the 12th Week in Ordinary Time **Mt 7:15-20**

A prophet is one who speaks for God. A false prophet is one who only claims to speak for God. Outwardly he pretends to be a friend of God and have direct contact with him. But he speaks only what people like to hear, rather than confront their worldly ways. He may claim to know the day and the time the world will end but his prediction will be proven false. Eventually his faltering ways will be shown to be hypocritical. He pretends to be what he is

not. Such false prophets are “ravenous wolves”. They deceive the people by their pleasant and suave words and manners to captivate and enrich themselves. They promise them prosperity but they are not able to carry through their false promises. On the contrary, Jesus says, “Blessed are you poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours” (Lk 6: 20).

Jesus explains how we can discern whether a prophet is true or not. He says, “By their fruits you will know them”. We can tell whether they are true prophets by the kind of life they lead. Just as a good tree bears good fruit, such as a fig tree, so a true prophet produces a virtuous life. For example, St. Paul says, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5: 22-23). Just as a thorn bush cannot produce grapes so a false prophet cannot produce these virtuous qualities.

It is important that we read and meditate everyday on God’s word so we can know the truth. We will be able to discern, then, when a false prophet communicates a message that is not in accord with the truth. Jesus threatens to cut down a tree and prophet who does not produce good fruit.

Thursday of the 12th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 7:21-29

Speaking a slew of words to God unaccompanied by a heart full of faith, hope and love is ineffective. Such words are spoken in vain. Prayer supposes that we are united to God in love. This union of love is demonstrated by habitually doing God’s will in our lives. One may speak about God or accomplish impressive projects and still be separated from God because his heart is embroiled in serious sin. Such a person will be condemned because he never surrendered his heart to God in intimate love and obedience to his will.

Hearing God’s word stirs faith which unites us to God. We can then say, “My strength and my courage is the Lord, and he has been my savior” (Is 12: 2). Sustained faith maintained by continuous prayerful union with God empowers us to overcome all the difficulties and challenges of life. We may then live in direct communion with God through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. God himself becomes our strength to shield us from the evils of the world.

Receiving God’s word and relishing it prayerfully moves us to obey that word and do God’s will. A loving receptivity of the word empowers us to carry it out. The word enlightens and wisens us to see its value. We are then motivated and committed to keep it, even when harshly persecuted. Our connection with God effected by the word becomes a protective bulwark against the temptations that besiege us.

One who hears God’s word but does not take it to heart and cherish it is left to himself to struggle against the surrounding evils. The unattended word does not stir faith to connect him to God. He is left without the divine strength to withstand the soliciting evils innate to our secular culture. He is necessarily overwhelmed by them. His weak human nature is not complemented by divine grace so that it collapses from the strenuous difficulties that life presents. The magnificence of Jesus’ divine personality shown through his teaching and kept the crowd spellbound.

Friday of the 12th Week of Ordinary Time Matthew 8:1-4

Jesus came down from the mountain after completing his Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1—7:29). He is the new Moses (compare Exodus 19) proclaiming the New Law of the Gospel. The leper did homage to Jesus by some form of bow or prostration. In this way he

manifests his deep respect for Jesus as we do just before we receive Jesus in Holy Communion. This reverence is inspired by our faith in Jesus' divinity. The leper would have sensed the majesty of Jesus' person which prompted him to pay him special homage. He believed that Jesus had the ability to heal him of the disease of leprosy. It is his faith that contacted the divine healing power in Jesus that caused the leprosy to disappear. Jesus responded to his faith and commanded that the man be cured of his leprosy. The power of Jesus' word and electrifying touch brought about an immediate cure. This resembles the interior spiritual healing that takes place when we receive Jesus with faith in Holy Communion. We are cleansed from the leprosy of our minor sins and made clean again.

Jesus forbade the man to publicize the miracle because he did not want an excited crowd seeking miracles to interfere with his spiritual mission of preaching the arrival of the kingdom of God. His miracles, however, were signs of its arrival in himself.

The healed leper needed to show himself to the priest whose duty it was to examine him and write a declaration that he was healed and free to mingle in society again. We are reminded of our need to go and show ourselves to the priest to receive the sacrament of Penance to be cleansed of the leprosy of serious sin. The Catholic priest, through the laying on of hands by the bishop, is directly connected to the apostles to whom Jesus declared, "whose sins you forgive are forgiven them" (Jn 20:23).

Saturday of the 12th Week in Ordinary Time Matthew 8:5-17

A centurion is a military officer in command of a hundred men. He presents his need to Jesus regarding his paralyzed servant suffering dreadfully. When

Jesus offered to go and cure him, the centurion expressed his humble unworthiness for Jesus to visit his home—for he is a Gentile. Jews were not allowed to enter the house of a Gentile under penalty of incurring ritual uncleanness. (The church has us repeat the centurion's words just before we receive Communion to express our unworthiness to receive Jesus.) The centurion then proceeded to express his faith in the power of Jesus' word of command to heal his servant at a distance. Jesus expressed amazement at such faith. At this, Jesus foresees the entry of the Gentiles into the Kingdom of God, ("Heaven" is substituted for God because of a reverent hesitancy to utter his name) – whereas, many of the Jews will be excluded because of their lack of faith in Jesus. This final condemnation will cause great anguish to those children of Abraham who had originally been chosen. Their lack of faith in Jesus as Messiah caused them to be indisposed and excluded from the Kingdom of God. The centurion's faith was the medium through which Jesus healed his servant.

Peter's house seems to have been the center for Jesus' ministry in Capernaum. We see him spontaneously healing Peter's mother-in-law who was sick with fever. She immediately and miraculously rose to wait on Jesus. Something similar happens to us when we are healed of our fevered self-centeredness. We rise to wait on others and serve them. We see the power of Jesus' word manifested again as he cures all the sick as well as drives out demons. This shows us how important it is for us to take God's word in by reading and meditation. It gives us power over evil in our lives.

The various cures and exorcisms fulfill the prophet Isaiah's words, "He took away our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Is 53:4). St. Matthew sees Jesus as the Suffering Servant who takes away our sins and diseases by his sufferings.

Monday of the 13th Week in Ordinary Time
Mt 8:18-22

After Jesus finished ministering to the needy in the crowd, he gave orders to the apostles to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. The Scribe who spoke to Jesus was a man learned in the written law of Moses and oral tradition. In addressing Jesus as “Teacher,” the Scribe shows himself to be well-disposed toward him. But it also reveals that he has an inadequate recognition of who Jesus is. And yet he seems to be super impressed with Jesus. For he makes the passionate statement, “I will follow you wherever you go”. People were amazed and enthralled with Jesus’ Person: at the way he spoke (Lk 4:22), or calmed the storm and turbulent waters (Mk 4:41), at his power over demons (Mk 1:27)... People were attracted to Jesus and wanted to be with him; they did not want to lose sight of him. The more we get to know Jesus, the more we want to be with him also. Jesus, however, warns us and the Scribe that we must prepare ourselves for hard times and be detached from conveniences and all things to be able to follow him—for he had “nowhere to rest his head”.

Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man. That was his favorite title for himself. It means that he is truly human yet, if we look to Daniel 7:13 that Son of Man is “coming on the clouds of heaven” — he is divine.

One of Jesus’ disciples, upon Jesus’ invitation to follow him (see Lk 9:59), wanted to wait until his aging father died before following him. But Jesus explained that the proclamation of the kingdom of God is so urgent and important, the disciple needs to place this mission even before family ties. It cannot wait until everything is taken care of before carrying it out. There’s an immediacy demanded here which cannot wait. Too many people need to be enlightened and prepared for eternity! And so Jesus says, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead”.

Tuesday of the 13th Week in Ordinary Time
Matthew 8:23-27

Jesus takes the lead in getting into the boat and his disciples follow him. After an exhausting day of ministering to the crowd, he desperately needed to rest. Meanwhile his disciples managed the boat. Jesus quickly fell asleep. He trusted in the disciples, who were experienced fishermen, to row them across the sea. However, a violent storm suddenly arose so that the boat was being swamped by waves. Nevertheless, Jesus continued to sleep through all this turmoil. He must have been awfully tired and sleepy! This reminds us of when things go wrong in our lives and we are left all alone to cope—but the situation appears hopeless. Our boat is about to sink! What are we to do? The only thing that remains to be done in our desperation is to call upon the Lord to save us. This is exactly what the disciples did. “They came and woke him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We are perishing!’” We notice here that they call Jesus, “Lord”. They have begun to believe in him. But they still are unaware that Jesus is divine. They will realize this fully only after the resurrection. But they do realize after seeing him perform miracles that he is very close to God.

Jesus responds to their trauma with, “Why are you terrified, O you of little faith?” Is he not trying to teach them absolute trust in God—no matter what the circumstances are? These disciples believed in God, Jesus’ Father, but they did not experience the kind of absolute trust that Jesus had in him. This kind of trust he would show them even as he was dying on the cross.

Jesus then “got up, rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was great calm”. This stupendous act on Jesus’ part amazed his disciples. This gives them further insight as to who Jesus really is. Only God can tame such a turbulent storm and angry sea! This event must have reminded the disciples of Psalm 107:28-29, “In their distress they cried to the Lord, who brought them out of their peril,

Hushed the storm to a murmur; the waves of the sea were stilled.” Other psalms such as 89:9-10 proclaim God’s power over the sea: “Lord God of hosts, who is like you? Mighty Lord, your loyalty is always present. You rule the raging sea; you still its swelling waves.” The amazed disciples asked themselves, “What sort of man is this, whom even the winds and the sea obey?” “Could our beloved Master really be God?” they must have thought. It would take Jesus’ resurrection from the dead to confirm definitively their wonderment.

Wednesday of the 13th Week of Ordinary Time Matthew 8:28-34

The “territory of the Gadarenes” to which Jesus arrived on the other side of the Sea of Galilee is located near the town of Gadara about six miles southeast of the Sea. The two demoniacs who met Jesus were possessed by devils. The fact that they were living among the tombs tells us that they were associated with death. These men were so savage “no one could travel by that road”. No one could subdue them. They would smash the shackles and chains that people used to restrain them (Mark 5:3-4). These demoniacs show us how those who live in mortal sin and are ruled by the devil live in restless torment. Such separation from God is the beginning of hell on earth.

The demons sense the goodness and power in Jesus and want nothing to do with him. They address him as Son of God. They are not able to fathom the mystery of his Person, but they sense his closeness to God. They fear him. His very presence torments them. Perhaps he will send them back to hell “before the appointed time”, that is, before judgment day.

The presence of the herd of swine indicates that this area is Gentile territory. The Jews considered pigs unclean (Leviticus 11:6-7). The demons pleaded with Jesus to send them into the herd of

swine. So Jesus acceded to their request saying, “Go then!” So they entered the swine. But even the pigs cannot tolerate the demons. “The whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea where they drowned.” There is no place for the devils except in hell. And for the Jew, the death of the pigs, unclean animals, is good riddance. This happy ending, when these two men, who were possessed by demons, were finally freed from their horrible experience—and in fact the whole area has been liberated from these fearsome, tormented demoniacs—nonetheless, ends with a sad conclusion. The whole town came out to meet Jesus – but when they saw him, they begged him to leave their district. What does that say about them? Is it that they believe a man with such power over demons is dangerous? Might it be that the evil in them incites them to keep their distance from him? How is it that they do not appreciate the peace and freedom of the two men who were delivered from being possessed by such evil? Their pigs meant more to them than the salvation of these two fellow human beings?

Thursday of the 13th Week in Ordinary Time Matthew 9: 1-8

Jesus came into his own town that is Capernaum, which he had made his mission headquarters. As we see a paralyzed man being brought to Jesus lying on a stretcher, we might see ourselves in him—for we too are paralyzed insofar as we are helpless to overcome certain weaknesses. We may find ourselves totally incapable of practicing a certain virtue or conquering a particular vice. We need to be brought to Jesus to heal us and break the hold of sin on us.

Jesus was impressed with the faith of those who carried the paralytic. Faith draws power from Jesus. He was moved to forgive the man’s sins. But the scribes learned in the Law of Moses believed that Jesus was blaspheming, that is, insulting God—since only God can forgive sins. “Jesus is

acting as if he were God”, they are thinking within themselves. They are correct—but they think he is only a human being.

But Jesus knew what they were thinking. So, he gives them a sign that he has the power to forgive sins by curing the paralyzed man. They may not be able to see that the paralyzed man’s sin has been forgiven. But they can see the miraculous cure of the paralyzed man as his limbs healed and he is able to stand up on his own, pick up his stretcher and go home.

The people glorified God who gave such authority to human beings. This indicates that the Church already believed that Jesus had truly given the power to his priests to forgive sins (see Jn 20: 23; Jms 5: 14-15).

Friday of the 13th Week in Ordinary Time **Matthew 9:9-13**

Matthew was a tax collector. Jesus told him to follow him as he was passing by. Unexpectedly, since you would expect a tax collector to be too attached to his profession and his money to leave and follow Jesus. But only Jesus knew his heart and how ready he was to leave that profession that so many hated. Jesus’ word is powerful and creative. It laid hold of Matthew and moved him to follow Jesus. Jesus’ very person attracted Matthew. There was something magnetic about him. He was difficult to resist.

Apparently Matthew wanted to celebrate his decision and wanted his friends to join him. He wanted them to meet Jesus. The Pharisees considered these to be sinners. They were ritually unclean. They wanted to know why Jesus associated—even ate—with such people. They refer to Jesus as “teacher” which shows how inadequate is their knowledge of who he is. In his answer Jesus compared himself to a physician ministering to the sick. He came to heal people

of the sickness of ignorance of God and sin. His mission was to reconcile sinners to God. He came to show sinners how merciful God is. In his response Jesus tells the Pharisees to go and learn the meaning of the words “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (see Hos 6: 6). In other words, if mercy is superior to temple sacrifices, how much more is the mercy he is showing the so-called sinners’ who have contracted ritual impurity. Our passage ends with “I did not come to call the righteous but sinners”. Contact with Jesus makes sinners right with God. He calls sinners so that they may become righteous. The Pharisees in their smugness think they are righteous. But their prideful judging of others seems to indicate that they are self-righteous instead. Perhaps they need Jesus more than these other so-called sinners.

Saturday of the 13th Week in Ordinary Time **Matthew 9:14-17**

The disciples of John the Baptist, that is, his followers, learned the importance of fasting from their master; they were concerned that Jesus’ disciples did not fast. So a delegation came to Jesus to find out why. Jesus explained that fasting is a sign of mourning and sadness. But he compares his brief stay among them as a time of joy. For he is the heavenly bridegroom who has come to be united to his bride, the Church (compare Is 62:4-5).

Jesus’ explanation refers to a statement John the Baptist made when he identified Jesus as the bridegroom (the Messiah) and himself as the best man (Jn 3:28-29). John’s disciples in imitation of him fasted in preparation for the Messiah. Now that he has arrived they are called to feast and celebrate. When the bridegroom is betrayed and taken away to be crucified, then the disciples will be called to fast as a sign of their grief. They will also need to fast in preparation for his return in glory. This holy exercise will spiritually strengthen them to avoid sin and practice virtue.

Jesus goes on to further explain that the old and the new don't mix. Patching an old cloak with new cloth does not work. Jesus' teaching is not a patching of Judaism. The Gospel cannot be contained within the limits of the Mosaic Law. The two are incompatible. The Gospel is as new as was the revelation of the law through Moses. It is new and far beyond it. Judaism is not able to contain the form that the Gospel takes. The new teaching of Jesus requires an entirely new setting and economy.

Jesus is in the process of introducing a radical newness. A new salvation is dawning. The old law cannot contain the superabundant outpouring of grace affected by Jesus' paschal mystery when he suffers, dies and is glorified and sends the Holy Spirit who is the new law written in the hearts of believers. The old law as an old wine skin is not able to contain the explosive power of the new wine given by Jesus.

Monday of the 14th Week in Ordinary Time

Mt 9:18-26

The official who came up to Jesus, according to Mark's gospel, was "the president of one of the synagogues" (Mk 5:22). His kneeling before Jesus manifests his deep respect for Jesus—our knowing that Jesus is divine would have us have even deeper reverence when we go to receive Jesus in Holy Communion. The official asks Jesus to go and lay his hand on his daughter who had just died. The divine power in Jesus, it was believed, would then flow from him through the connection of touch and revive the little girl who had just died. The power of touch also communicates love and has a healing, reviving effect. The love-touch brings about interpersonal communion and fellowship in the Spirit.

Meanwhile, a woman who was suffering from uncontrollable bleeding from the blood vessels believed that if she but touched the tassel of Jesus'

cloak she would be healed. And that's really what happened: "Immediately her flow of blood dried up. She felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction" (Mk 5:29). And Jesus told her that it was faith that connected her to him and brought about healing. Faith is a theological virtue, which, when activated, unites us to God himself. This is what happens when we pray. We enter into communion with God through which we draw healing power to heal our defects of character.

The flute players and the crowd were professional mourners who were carrying on. Since the resurrection of Jesus anticipated our own, death is less tragic and saddening. We mourn our departed more peacefully.

The child had actually died, but, for Jesus, death from which he can easily awaken us is like sleep. Jesus proves his point by simply taking the girl by the hand and raising her up, restoring her life. Seeing how simple it is for Jesus to overcome death makes death so much easier to accept.

Jesus assures us that he is the resurrection and the life (Jn 11:25). Death is just a temporary state from which he will awaken us.

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Tuesday of the 14th Week in Ordinary Time

Mt 9:32-38

A demoniac is a human who is possessed by a devil. The demon takes over a person and controls his actions, such as his speech. This particular demoniac was mute: the devil prevented him from speaking. It was only after the devil was expelled by Jesus' superior power that the possessed person was able to speak. The people were amazed at Jesus and his power over evil. We must flee to Jesus when confronted by evil desires or have actually sinned. He will give us the power to overcome our spiritual enemies. Jesus gave our bishops and priests special power

to forgive our sins in the sacrament of penance (Jn 20: 21-23).

The Pharisees were strict followers of the Law of Moses and most of them were completely opposed to Jesus and his teachings. They even attributed Jesus' ability to cast out demons to the devil himself, which, of course, was completely false. They simply refused to admit the truth about Jesus' power for good and his teachings. They had gone astray in interpreting the Mosaic Law and were too proud to accept correction from Jesus who is The Truth. Their pride and anger blinded them. Let us hope that when we are corrected we have the humility to accept the truth and thank the person who pointed it out to us.

Jesus toured the towns and villages and visited the Jewish Synagogues where they met to pray and hear the word of God. There he taught them about the Kingdom of God. God's reign was arriving in his Person. He manifested God's power for good and his presence by curing the people's sickness and disease. Jesus' heart, which was so full of divine love, was moved with compassion for the people because there was no one to teach them the truth. The Pharisees had added so many unnecessary details to the Law of Moses that it was impossible for the ordinary people to carry it out. They did not understand or interpret correctly the ordinary burdens of life, such as the value of the cross. Jesus wanted so much to enlighten the people. He needed others, disciples, to help him teach them the truth. Jesus explained the need to pray for God to send disciples to follow and learn from him. Thus, they would be able to help him enlighten the people and free them with the truth of the gospel.

Wednesday of the 14th Week in Ordinary Time

Mt 10:1-7

Jesus needed help, and to multiply himself, he chose certain men to proclaim the arrival of the kingdom of God. He gave them certain

powers to effectively carry out their mission: they could expel unclean (evil) spirits and cure sickness and disease of every kind.

These healing powers gave evidence that the goodness of God was present in the kingdom that the disciples were proclaiming. The reign of God proved itself more powerful than the evil spirits and the evil effects of sin. These followers of Jesus were being sent by him to continue his mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God. Therefore, they were called apostles: men sent by Jesus. He chose twelve of them representing the twelve tribes as the new Israel. Jesus will perfect the Old Covenant by establishing a new one. These twelve are likened to the twelve patriarchs in the Old Covenant. Thus the Church becomes the restored Israel, continuing the tradition of the twelve sons of Israel (Jacob) (see Genesis 35:23-26).

Each time these twelve apostles are named as a group, Simon Peter is always first (see Mt 10:2-4; Mk 3:16-19; Lk 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). That is because Jesus chose Peter to be their head and leader (see Mt 16:18). Jesus later confirmed his choice of Peter after his resurrection (see Jn 21:15-17). Sometimes Bartholomew is called Nathaniel in John's Gospel (Jn 1:45-49; 21:2). Thaddeus in Matthew and Mark is called Judas the son of James in Luke and Acts.

Just as Jesus usually limited himself to ministering to the Jews, so too, he tells the apostles not to visit pagan territory among non-believers. His primary focus during his earthly ministry was the chosen people. They were given the first opportunity to hear the good news in fulfillment of God's promise of a new covenant (see Jeremiah 31:31-34). Jesus commanded the apostles to make this proclamation: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." God's rule was arriving in Jesus; it will be fully given at Pentecost and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit.

**Thursday of the 14th Week in
Ordinary Time
Mt 10:7-15**

As the apostles proclaimed the nearness of God's rule, they were endowed with special powers to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and drive out demons. They were to administer these without cost, for these powers had been given to them free of charge. They were not to bring any money or provisions or extra clothing. All of their needs would be supplied by the people to whom they ministered. They were to remain in the same house that they were received. In this way they could keep their focus on their mission. They were to communicate peace through their presence and words. If that peace was received it would remain to be a blessing—otherwise that peace would return to them. That peace contained the blessings of the kingdom being proclaimed—the very presence of God. To reject it is equivalent to rejecting the grace of the kingdom. The one who rejected it will surely feel the adverse effects of its absence.

Shaking the dust off their feet was a sign of complete disassociation from such unbelievers. The Jews would shake off the dust from their sandals when leaving Gentile territory and reentering the Holy Land. It was a sign of rejection of the uncleanness of Gentile pagans. Jesus commands the same kind of gesture to signify judgment on those who reject the gospel. This was an act of solemn warning to them. The gospel shows us how to live in a way that is pleasing to God. It teaches us how to be like Jesus. To refuse the gospel and to continue to live godless lives is to incur the wrath of God.

Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed when burning sulphur rained down upon these two cities because of their sinfulness (Gen 19:24-25). The people who heard the good news of the kingdom were even more accountable because they rejected the gospel of Jesus, the Son of God. They preferred their sinful life-style to that of the children of God

**Friday of the 14th Week in Ordinary
Time
Mt 10:16-23**

The disciples are in a hostile environment. Therefore, they must be on guard (prudent) and aware of those who might attack them. At the same time they must be as simple and innocent as doves. Jesus warns his disciples and us that we will be harassed for our belief in him. His followers must prepare themselves for persecution. But being led before courts and various authorities will provide opportunities to witness that Jesus is Messiah and Son of God.

They must not worry about what to say—the Holy Spirit will enlighten and inspire them to say the right words. Jewish family members will be divided against each other, even to the point of handing one another to be put to death. The disciple can expect to be hated for his or her belief in Jesus. The one who keeps his faith even unto death will be saved and pass through death to the glory of heaven. When the disciples are persecuted in one town they must flee to the next. They must not give themselves up rashly. The proclamation of the gospel is their first duty. If they are prevented from speaking about the gospel in one place, they must move on to the next. Jesus' saying that the disciples will not finish going to the various towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes seems to refer to his coming in judgment against unbelieving Israel. In A.D. 70 the Romans destroyed the Temple and leveled it to the ground. Son of Man was Jesus favorite way of describing himself: he comes as a human being on the clouds of heaven. He comes as king and judge (see Dan 7:13-14).

**Saturday of the 14th Week of
Ordinary Time
Mt 10:24-33**

We are called to become more and more like Jesus. He is the ideal image of God: he reflects his virtuous perfections. If we behave like Jesus, we can be sure that those

who do not will persecute us. Persecution is a good sign that we are living according to the truth like Jesus and that we are living according to his word. If Jesus' enemies call him Beelzebul, how much more will they malign us, Jesus' followers. Beelzebul means the prince of demons and refers to Satan.

Jesus tells us not to be afraid of our persecutors. The most they can do is harm us physically—they cannot touch our soul. Even if they kill the body, our soul will escape and ascend to God. The secrets of the kingdom that Jesus revealed to his disciples must be made known to everyone. We must not be afraid to speak the truth learned from Jesus. This truth about spiritual realities in the kingdom will free many from ignorance and their enslavement to sin. God is the one we must fear above all. Sinning against him will bring about eternal separation from him in hell. Gehenna was a symbol for hell and eternal punishment. It was a valley near Jerusalem where trash was dumped and burned continually. God's divine providence cares for little sparrows and their lives come to an end only when he allows it. We are much more valuable to God than they. Surely he will take care of us and keep us from harm. An extra incentive to stand up for Jesus and his teachings is the fact that Jesus will acknowledge on judgment day that we stood up for him. But if we fail to witness him before others, he will also fail to take our part before his heavenly Father. We will be left undefended to be condemned.

Monday of the 15th Week of Ordinary Time

Mt 10:34—11:1

At the Last Supper Jesus conferred his peace upon the Apostles (Jn 14:27). He explained that he was going to the Father but he and the Father would send the Holy Spirit upon them to be their comfort and guide. Through him the Father and the Son would dwell in them (see Jn 14:15-27, 23). Nothing, except serious sin, could take away their presence and the peace that issues from them.

Thus, in the gospel today, when Jesus says he did not come to bring peace but the sword, he is speaking of the exterior conflict that his followers will experience with the world. He explained that the disciples would have peace in him, but “In the world you will have trouble” (Jn 16:33). And he added, “but take courage, I have conquered the world”. Thus, even within certain families some would be for Jesus and others against him as well as their family members who were for him. Since Jesus is God he rightly demands total allegiance to himself—even before one's parents or children.

Total commitment to Jesus requires that we are ready to die rather than be separated from him. To take up the cross and follow Jesus means that we are ready to suffer and die for him. Since Jesus is divine, it is proper that we go to such extremes to remain faithful to him. Whoever “finds his life” by selfishly seeking his own will and pampering his natural life, will lose it. Self-indulgence causes personal disintegration. But whoever “loses his life” for Jesus' sake will find it. We lose our natural life by self-denial in order to find it again purified, strengthened, and heightened by spirit dominance.

Receiving or welcoming Jesus' disciple is really receiving Jesus and his Father. A prophet is one who speaks God's word. A righteous person is one who is in the state of grace and right with God. Receiving them will also merit a reward from God. Even giving a cup of cool water to a disciple will merit a reward from God.

Jesus went from town to town to teach and preach such good news to all he could reach. An important moment was occurring in the history of humankind.

Tuesday of the 15th Week of Ordinary Time

Mt 11:20-24

Jesus backed the authenticity of his Person and message by miraculous cures, even to raising people from the dead. Surely this would have led people to believe in him so that they would regret their sins, overcome their sinful habits, and

begin to live holy lives. But such conversions did not take place in Chorazin and Bethsaida, two cities north of the Sea of Galilee located about five miles from Jesus' headquarters in Capernaum. Surely, one would expect that the very presence of the Son of God, his powerful preaching, and marvelous deeds would convince these people. But his efforts proved unsuccessful. They were so deeply entrenched in their vices that they refused to budge. Their passions blinded them from clearly seeing the truth of Jesus' actions. They were so addicted to their sinful pleasures that they failed to cede to Jesus' grace-filled words and deeds. They preferred to suffer the pains of eternal damnation to giving up their selfish, sinful lifestyles. Jesus lashed out at them in anger in an effort to move them to repentance.

He assured them that on the Day of Judgment they will be condemned more severely than the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon, located north of Palestine on the coast of Phoenicia. These pagan towns would have expressed their sorrow for sin by wearing sackcloth and ashes if they had enjoyed the privilege of hearing Jesus. But these Jewish towns had received so much from Jesus, yet were totally unresponsive. Jesus leveled the same condemnation on the people of Capernaum who likewise failed to repent. They will be thrust down to Sheol/Hades, or the netherworld, away from God and eternal punishment.

As sinful as the people of Sodom were, even they would have repented and been spared of destruction had they experienced Jesus and his works. Capernaum will be judged more severely than those notorious sinners. Jesus used such scathing language in an attempt to shake them out of their plightful, sinful condition.

Wednesday of the 15th Week of Ordinary Time Mt 11:25-27

It was on the occasion when the seventy-two disciples returned from their successful mission that this gospel event took place. In

jubilant they reported that even the demons were subject to them in his name (Lk 10:21). This moved Jesus to break out in spontaneous praise of his Father who hid these things from the conceited and worldly wise and revealed them to little ones, that is, his humble and lowly disciples. The proud are too self-centered to be open to receive the revelation of who Jesus is and the kingdom of God. These disciples lean on God and look to him for salvation. Jesus was enraptured with his Father and his will. He always wanted to carry out every detail of his Father's plan and will (compare Mt 3:13-15).

Jesus was aware that the Father handed everything over to him. All that the Father has belongs to Jesus (Jn 16:15). They both possess the divine nature. At the Last Supper Jesus prayed, "...everything of mine is yours and everything of yours is mine" (Jn 17:10).

Jesus noted in his prayer that "No one knows the Son except the Father" because the depth of his Person is infinite. The divine Son can be fully known only by the Father. Similarly, "no one knows the Father except the Son" because only he is divine and shares equally with the Father in the one divine nature. And the Son may reveal the Father to anyone he chooses. This he is in the process of doing to his simple and lowly disciples. This revelation is taking place even now during their apostolic mission from which they are returning. It is a unique experience to witness Jesus praying to his Father. We see how intimate he is in relating to his Father. He is so totally one with the Father. The Father's will is Jesus' will. They are together in everything. Jesus responds perfectly to the Father's will. He finds great joy in everything the Father wants. That is how we would want to be, in perfect conformity with God's will at all times. Such union of wills brings about an habitual union with God. This is what we pray for, "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven".

Thursday of the 15th Week of Ordinary Time
Mt 11:28-30

Jesus invites us to come to him. We come to him through faith. Faith is a virtue or spiritual power received in baptism that attains God. That's what happens when we pray: we exercise our faith and contact God. In that way we can enjoy interpersonal communion with the divine Jesus. We draw spiritual enrichment by being in prayerful communion with him.

Jesus was speaking to those who were overly burdened with the Law of Moses as interpreted by the Scribes and Pharisees. They multiplied many obligations relating to the law which made it very difficult or impossible to carry out. The new law of the kingdom of God that Jesus was proclaiming made no such impossible demands. Rather it helped the people relate to God in love and enabled them to keep the basic Ten Commandments. In this way they could rest peacefully in God and fulfill their deepest spiritual aspirations.

Jesus invites us and his audience to take up his yoke, that is, the obligations that come from obeying the law of the gospel. It is a yoke that requires our submitting to God's will. This submission brings out the highest spiritual qualities in us and unites us to God. In this way we learn from Jesus who shows us by his example how submissive he was to his Father's will. His new law shows us how to be like him. We learn the meekness and humility of Jesus by humbly accepting the burdens of life. Rather than rebel against God's will, we meekly submit ourselves to the demands life places upon us. This purifies our prideful human nature and disposes us for union with God. It is in this way we find rest—in him. With this proper attitude, we are flooded with God's grace that makes Jesus' yoke easy or comfortable, and his burden light and un-burdensome.

Friday of the 15th Week of Ordinary Time
Mt 12:1-8

The field of grain that Jesus and his disciples were going through was probably wheat. They would rub the grains in their hands to free them from the outer shell so they could eat them. They did this on the Sabbath which was the day of rest. The Pharisees were always on the watch to find something to condemn Jesus. They pointed out to him that his disciples were breaking the Sabbath day of rest by their actions: "...on the seventh day you must rest even during the seasons of plowing and harvesting" (Ex 34:21). They were overly strict when they considered the disciples to be harvesting the wheat. The law also said, "When you go through your neighbor's grain field, you may pluck some of the ears with your hands, but do not put a sickle to your neighbor's grain" (Deut 23:26). We must be careful not to be overly strict in interpreting God's laws. Having compassion for others' needs is also important. That is also a requirement of God's law: "Love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom 13:10).

In attempting to loosen up the Pharisees from being overly strict, Jesus pointed out to them an incident in King David's life when he and his men ate "the bread of offering" which only the priests could lawfully eat (1 Sam 21:1-7). This was allowable because David and his men were hungry—just as were Jesus' disciples. Jesus also pointed out that for a special reason the priests break the Sabbath law in order to minister in the temple. In doing this sacred work they were perfectly innocent of any wrongdoing. What did Jesus mean when he said, "...something greater than the Temple is here?" Jesus is the new and greater Temple of God (Jn 2:19). If the priests of the Old Testament could serve in the Temple on the Sabbath and remain guiltless, so can Jesus' disciples work with Jesus on the Sabbath and remain sinless.

External sacrifices are meaningless when the heart of a person is not in them. The sacrifice must be an expression of the heart's desire for it to have worth and be acceptable to God.

The Pharisees focused too much on the extra rules they added on to the law to the detriment of the respect and mercy due to persons. Jesus is saying that they need to start having merciful hearts for people and their human needs. They ought to focus their concern more in that direction than trying to catch them breaking the endless rules that they fabricated. They need to be more humane in their treatment of others. Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 to show that God's word supports his interpretation and reason for acting the way he did: God desires mercy.

As a Son of Man (who is also divine: Dan 7:13-14) Jesus has the authority to interpret the law: he interprets it in a merciful way. The Sabbath law does not oblige a person to go hungry in order to keep it.

Saturday of the 15th Week of Ordinary Time **Mt 12:14-21**

Jesus cured a man with a withered hand on a Sabbath. He compared his healing on a Sabbath to saving a sheep which had fallen into a pit. If it was permitted to rescue an animal on the Sabbath, all the more reason it is permissible to assist a human in distress. The Sabbath forbids servile works, not works of mercy. The pride of the Pharisees blinded them to the truth of Jesus' teaching. They became very angry with him and began planning to kill him. Their murderous intentions reveal how far removed they were from the love and compassion to which God's word calls us. Jesus became aware of their intentions and went to another area. He healed the many who came to him and ordered them not to make him known. His main mission was to reveal the arrival of the kingdom of God. The miracles were a sign of its arrival. He wanted to spend more time preaching and teaching about the kingdom.

At this point St. Matthew begins to quote Isaiah 42:1-4, the first of his four Suffering Servant Songs. He is showing how Jesus is fulfilling this prophecy. The word "servant" can also be

translated as "Son". The Father is seen as delighting in his Servant Son whom he loves so much. Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit at his baptism, and now he is being led by the Spirit, away from the attacks of the Pharisees. The time will come when Jesus will send his disciples to the Gentile nations.

Jesus, God's Servant, is seen as meek and humble. He moves away from contention. He is a gentle and compassionate person. He is not harsh with people. He is concerned about suffering people and alleviates their pain and cures their illnesses. After his brief life on earth, he will send his disciples out to enlighten the Gentiles, the nations beyond Israel. Through them he is going to bring "justice to victory": God's own righteousness will make these nations right with God. They will participate in the Servant-Son's own holiness. He will give them victory over sin and evil in their lives. The non-Jewish nations, the Gentiles, will look to him for salvation: they will hope in his name. The name represents the person, and Jesus means "Yahweh saves". We can already see God's righteousness in his Servant, giving people hope.

Monday of the 16th Week of Ordinary Time **Mt 12:38-42**

The Scribes and Pharisees wanted Jesus to perform a spectacular miracle for them as a sign that he truly was the Messiah. Jesus had already worked miracles such as cleansing a leper, healing the Centurion's servant, Peter's mother-in-law, and the paralytic; Jesus had cast out demons and enabled the possessed to speak and see again. But the Pharisees claimed that Jesus drove out demons by the prince of demons. They saw a good act performed by Jesus and attributed it to the devil. So no matter what Jesus did, he could not satisfy them. They saw evil in all his good acts. These men were truly evil and unfaithful to God. The sign that Jesus will give them is that of Jonah, which is Jesus' resurrection on the third day. On judgment day, the people of Nineveh (which is an ancient city in Assyria

where Jonah preached repentance) will condemn the people in his day who refused to accept him. These pagans repented at Jonah's preaching. They were sorry for their sins and asked God's forgiveness. But Jesus is far holier and greater than Jonah, for he is the Son of God. Yet these evil men refuse to accept him and his teaching.

The queen of the south, that is, of Sheba, the principal territory in what is now Yemen, heard of King Solomon's great wisdom. She was inspired to travel and visit him to experience it for herself. She marveled at what she heard and saw of the king—it was much greater than she had heard it to be (see 1 Kings 10:1-10). Jesus, the divine Son of God, is far greater than Solomon. Yet these adversaries of his fail to appreciate Jesus' great wisdom standing right in their midst. The Queen of Sheba will condemn these people on judgment day. Their hardened hearts were totally indisposed to see all that Jesus had to offer them. They missed the opportunity of a lifetime. They have only themselves to blame. They were closed to the truth because they were living a lie. Their self-centeredness blinded them to the truth.

Tuesday of the 16th Week of Ordinary Time **Mt 12:46-50**

Jesus' mother and brothers came to visit him. These "brothers" are actually relatives of Jesus—they are not Mary's children. Mary remained a virgin throughout her life. These brethren are never called the children of Mary—unlike Jesus. At least two of these brethren, James and Joseph, are sons of a different Mary (Mt 27:56). It is unlikely that Jesus would give his mother to John to care for her if she had other children (Jn 19:26-27). The word "brethren" has a broader meaning than blood brothers. The Hebrew language had no word for cousin. It was the custom to use brethren for relationships other than blood brothers: for example, cousin (1 Chron 23:21-22), remote kinsman (Deut 23:7; 2 Kgs 10:13-14), an uncle or nephew (Gen 13:8). Brethren is also used for unrelated Christians:

Rom 8:29; 12:1; Col 1:2; Heb 2:11; Jms 1:2; CCC 500), (see Ignatius Catholic Study Bible Mt 12:46).

When Jesus was told that his mother and brothers were asking to speak with him, he used the occasion to bring out an important truth. What is important to be able to be in relationship to Jesus is doing the will of God. Obedience to the Father's will creates relationships greater than natural family bonds. Such obedience unites us to God the Father and makes us brothers, sisters and mothers of Jesus. Mary herself became Jesus' mother when she obeyed God's will announced by the angel. Thus Mary is Jesus' mother on a physical level as well as on a spiritual level. Through obedience to God's will we all become members of one spiritual family. Union with God through obedience to his will is the all important factor that unites us into one family. Ordinarily this supposes baptism and the sanctifying grace that unites us to God and to one another. Obedience to God's will maintains this union, strengthens it and causes it to grow stronger.

Wednesday of the 16th Week of Ordinary Time **Mt 13:1-9**

Large crowds of people were attracted to Jesus; they gathered around him to hear him speak. His words captivated their attention. There were so many people pressing upon him to listen to him that he had to get into a boat to speak to them. His words are full of grace. They ought to command our attention too. They are spirit and life (Jn 6:63). We must be like the crowds who pressed upon Jesus to listen to his words. We can easily enter into his presence by activating the virtue and power of faith. We can take up the Bible and read/listen to his words. Jesus taught the people by means of parables. He told stories and made comparisons drawn from nature and human life in order to explain some aspect of the kingdom of God. In this way he kept the people's attention. He used the most ordinary things in daily life to shed light on the deepest supernatural mysteries.

These illustrations of Jesus would provoke curiosity among the audience, wondering what they signified. They would raise questions in people's minds causing them to want to know more. The descriptions imprinted themselves on the people's memories so that they could easily be retained. They would want to return to know more. The disciples were moved to approach Jesus privately for him to explain what he meant. This is what happened with this parable. Jesus will explain the meaning of this parable later this week (Friday).

In general we may say that the parable is about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom will come despite all obstacles—just as the harvest will reach maturity because of the power of the seed (which represents the word of God). The different kinds of soil (people who receive the word) may or may not be favorable to growth. But ultimately the Kingdom of God will be established. The word of God will find favorable recipients and produce an abundant harvest of holiness and saintly people.

Thursday of the 16th Week of Ordinary Time Mt 13:10-17

The disciples asked Jesus why he spoke in parables. Jesus explained that he used this method to teach the well-disposed the knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. Others are not interested. They are ill-disposed toward the Kingdom of God because they are too immersed in themselves and in the world. They are closed to the message of the Kingdom. They do not thirst or seek God and the things of the Spirit.

Jesus explained that “to anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich”. God gives grace through Jesus’ preaching. Those who respond to that grace will receive more grace. They will grow steadily in grace and holiness. On the other hand, “from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” Those who fail to respond to the

grace in Jesus’ word will lose the little they have. Because some refused to respond to Jesus’ word, they will lose the revelation leading to receive Jesus as Messiah.

Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah (6:9-10) to explain that the people have been resisting God’s word all along. Their hardened hearts have been made insensitive to God’s word and spiritual things. They will not respond and repent or regret their sinful lifestyle. Their willful resistance to God’s word and will has dulled their ability to understand spiritual realities. They cannot see or perceive anything but their gross material possessions and physical pleasures. Therefore they meet Jesus’ word with indifference or opposition and hostility.

Jesus is consoled by the receptive disposition of his disciples. He was encouraged to say, “Blessed are your eyes, because they see and your ears, because they hear.” Jesus praises the disciples for their docility to grace, their openness to recognize him as the Messiah, and their whole-hearted acceptance of his teaching. They are experiencing a wonderful moment in the history of salvation—a moment that prophets and holy people had been awaiting for centuries. At last the time has come, and his disciples are privileged to witness and receive it with joy.

Friday of the 16th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 13:18-23

Jesus now begins to explain the meaning of the parable of the sower. The seed sown on the path eaten by the birds represents those who hear God’s word without understanding it. They are not interested enough in it to apply themselves to study and meditate on it. They have other interests. They have been resisting God’s grace all along. They prefer to do their own will. They have hardened their hearts, their consciences towards God’s word and will, and the devil prevents them from remembering it.

The seed on rocky ground that is scorched by the sun and withers represents a person who lacks spiritual depth, commitment and fortitude. He does not keep the word when he is tested by trial. He keeps the word only when it is convenient. He abandons it whenever it calls for self-sacrifice. He would need to meditate on the word and form deep convictions about it. Prayer is needed for him to become more firmly united to God and his will. Then he would be strengthened to keep the word in times of trial.

The seed sown among thorns is the one which worldly anxiety and riches choke and prevent from bearing fruit. The word is smothered by earthly concerns. Business and pleasure seeking consume all time and energy. Nothing remains for reading the word of God and prayer. There is a desperate need for prayer with the word of God to gradually reestablish communion with God and restore him in his rightful first place. Strengthened by prayerful union with God, the person can then regulate his business affairs around God and begin to practice temperance and self-mastery in his pleasure appetite. Thus the life of the spirit can dominate life so that the word can produce spiritual fruitfulness.

The seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word of God, understands it, and bears an abundant yield. God's word is awfully powerful. His word empowers us to do God's will and achieve the end for which he sent it: our sanctification. We must take that word into our hearts and ponder it like Mary did (Lk 2:19, 51) so that it can sanctify us. Depending on success in this, some will bear spiritual fruit 30-fold, others 60-fold, and others 100-fold.

Saturday of the 16th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 13:24-30

Jesus continues to expose the nature of the Kingdom of God by comparing it to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While he

was sleeping, an enemy sowed weeds all through the wheat. The weeds grew and began to be noticed along with the wheat. The weeds could not be pulled up for fear of uprooting the wheat. Thus both were allowed to grow together until harvest time. Then the weeds would be collected and burned; the wheat would be gathered and placed in the barn. We must be vigilant to prevent harmful images and ideas presented by the media from entering into our minds. These distract and even tempt us to disobey God's word. If left unresisted, they lead us to sinful acts and produce a crop of vice. We must be on the alert to prevent these images from being planted in the field of our minds. Scripture says, "With closest custody guard your heart, for in it are the sources of life" (Prov 4:23). We must be careful about what we allow ourselves to view in movies, television or the internet, or the words we hear in songs. The parable teaches us that both good and evil people exist together in the Church, the Kingdom of God. That is the way things are. We must learn to be tolerant of others when they try our patience. Your patient endurance will cause you to grow in virtue and dependence on God as you call upon him to help you.

God tolerates these evil-doers with the hope that your good example will cause them to experience a conversion to goodness. We must not be surprised that there are sinners in the church who give bad example or lead others to sin. Jesus said that's the way it would be. Jesus tolerated Judas who regularly stole from the treasury (Jn 12:6). We must pray for the conversion of such sinners before their lives come to an end. The burning of the weeds in the parable symbolizes hell. The gathering of the wheat in the barn symbolizes heaven.

Monday of the 17th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 13:31-35

Jesus continues to describe various aspects of the Kingdom of God or heaven through parables. The first begins to compare it to a mustard seed that was sown in a field. It is a

very tiny seed but grows to be about ten feet tall. The kingdom that Jesus is establishing begins with him and his insignificantly small band of disciples. But it will become a world-wide church. It will become the Catholic or Universal Church, the Kingdom of God on earth.

The tiny mustard seed becomes a large shrub that birds come to nest in. The birds represent the Gentile nations that come to make their home in the Church.

The Kingdom of Heaven is also like yeast mixed with three measures of wheat flour. The yeast was put into about fifty pounds of flour which symbolizes the whole world. And yet that small amount of yeast will quietly permeate that whole dough and cause it to rise and nourish about one hundred people. It's like the grace of baptism that penetrates the whole person with the presence of the Holy Spirit transforming that person into the image of God. The grace of the Kingdom, like the secret activity of yeast, is hidden and unnoticeable but is very effective in its transforming power. That is how we must go about infiltrating the world around us with our grace-filled words and loving actions.

Jesus' preaching in the form of parables is something that was prophesied long before in Psalm 78:2. We are the privileged ones who are receiving the revelation of what had been hidden from the foundation of the world. Jesus is revealing that precious truth to us who are living in the fullness of time.

These deep secrets of God reserved for us are meant to sanctify us more rapidly than the Old Testament times. We understand so much more now. For example, Jesus submitted himself to the Father's will in suffering the horrible death of crucifixion through which he saved the whole world from sin and damnation. Now we see the value of accepted suffering—before our understanding of suffering was all negative and something to be absolutely avoided. Jesus has revealed that it is a great positive spiritual good.

Tuesday of the 17th Week in Ordinary Time **Mt 13:35-43**

At this point, Jesus shifted from preaching to the crowd, which he dismissed, so that he could privately teach his disciples the meaning of the parables. These disciples believed in Jesus and asked him to explain the parable of the weeds in the field. The others were simply left thinking about them. A pure parable usually has one main point to it. When each detail is given a symbolic meaning, it becomes an allegory. This is what is happening here. The sower is the Son of Man, that is, Jesus who comes as judge to separate the evil from the good. The field represents the world in which we live.

The good seed symbolizes the children of the Kingdom who follow Jesus and obey his word.

The weeds stand for the children of the evil one, the unfaithful members of the Church, who allow themselves to be influenced by the devil. They followed their own will instead of God. They made themselves the center of the universe instead of God.

The enemy is the devil himself, who pridefully vaunts himself against God.

The harvest refers to the end of time when Christ will appear to judge the world. The harvesters are the angels.

The weeds collected and burned with fire represent all who cause others to sin and all evildoers who will suffer the punishment of eternal separation from God.

The fiery furnace represents the punishment of hell.

The wailing and grinding of teeth is the pain and anguish resulting from separation from God for whom we were made and for whom our whole being craves. Thus their deepest yearnings for their creator, who alone can satisfy them, will never be realized.

The righteous, however, those who lived in union with God and did his will, will be glorified and shine like the sun in heavenly glory for all eternity.

Jesus' words, "whoever has ears ought to hear" is a warning that it is supremely important that we hear and carry out his message. He is preparing us for eternal life. If we follow his teaching, we will attain eternal glory. If we do not, we will spend eternity in anguish, pain and misery: a living death that will never end.

Wednesday of the 17th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 13:44-46

Jesus describes another truth about the Kingdom of Heaven. He compares it to treasure buried in a field. A person unexpectedly stumbles upon it. He hides it again in great joy. It is so valuable that he sells all that he has and buys that field. The Kingdom is so supremely valuable that a person gladly gives up everything he has in order to obtain it. He thinks nothing of parting with all of his possessions in order to obtain the Kingdom. For the Kingdom has a personal element. In possessing the Kingdom, we receive the King, God himself. We enter into an interpersonal relationship with him. And in that personal communion with him we begin to participate in his own divine life. This fills us with an immense joy. Our human life is elevated to a heightened degree, beyond anything earthly. This gives us an experience of heavenly joy; but, the price to obtain all of this demands that we leave these earthly attachments of ours.

Jesus describes another aspect of the Kingdom of Heaven in saying that it is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. And he actually finds a valuable pearl. In order to acquire it, he must sell all that he has. It is that valuable. So he goes and sells all that he has and buys it. The reason why he found this valuable pearl is because he spent time and energy searching for it. It was not by accident that he found it. He worked for it. Jesus says, "...seek and you will find" (Mt 7:7). He also

says, "...seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness..." (Mt 6:33).

In expending energy and effort in order to search, the discipline involved spiritualizes us and disposes us to find that precious pearl of great price: It is the very presence of God hidden in the center, the deepest part of our soul, called spirit. In this discovery we find something far greater and better than anything we have ever experienced in this earth. It is worth everything we've got to acquire it.

Thursday of the 17th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 13:47-53

This parable makes the point that in the kingdom there will, at the end of the age, be a separation of the good from the bad. This time Jesus uses images that this fishing community would understand very well. The fishermen use a net which they cast into the sea. In this way they collect all kinds of fish, some good, some worthless. The good are put into buckets, but the bad they throw away. These perish on the beach in the hot sun.

This resembles the way the angels will separate the wicked from the righteous people at the end of the world. The wicked will be thrown into the fiery furnace which is an image of hell. The wailing and grinding of teeth express the crying and anguish as a result of the eternal damnation suffered by the wicked. We are reminded again that in the kingdom we must expect to find both the good and the bad. We must not be surprised to see serious sinners in the Catholic Church giving bad example and leading others astray. That's what Jesus taught us to expect and guard against.

Jesus wanted to know if his disciples truly understood what he was explaining to them. They assured him that they did. The apostles themselves, whom Jesus was instructing, are considered to be scribes. Jesus is equipping them

to proclaim the gospel and to explain its contents in greater detail. In their treasury of learning they have the knowledge of the Old Covenant, the Law and the prophets, and what is new in the gospels. Now they can show how the old is brought to completion and fulfilled in the new.

The Scribe in the Jewish religion was a religious teacher, a specialist in sacred scripture and its application in life. Now Jesus uses the word to refer to the apostles in their role of teachers in the Church. Each of us, also, has the duty to pass on that knowledge to others. That is why it is so important that we understand the scriptures so we can explain it to others. The first and third of the Sunday readings are very helpful to show us how the Old Testament is fulfilled in the new.

Friday of the 17th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 13:54-58

Jesus often taught the people in the synagogues or meeting places. The people in his native place were astonished at the wisdom that came from him. This helps us to realize that Jesus had lived a really hidden life. People, up to this time, did not know him. He kept that knowledge to himself. Only his mother knew him. Joseph, his foster father, would have known him too. Since he is not mentioned during Jesus' public life, Joseph is believed to have already died. We recall here when Jesus was a youth and had stayed behind in the Temple "sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions...All who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers" (Lk 2:46-47). But in Nazareth he kept all of his wisdom and knowledge to himself. People simply knew Jesus as "the carpenter's son". They knew his kinfolk, mentioned as his brothers and sisters (see Tuesday of the 16th Week in Ordinary Time for a more complete explanation in Mt 12:46-50 of Jesus' brothers and sisters). Because the people knew Jesus' relatives and the kind of work he did they figured he couldn't amount to much. He never went away to study so that he could become a Rabbi. So "they took offense at him".

"He's just a big show off, pretending he knows all these things. He's not any better than the rest of us. Who does he think he is?" they must have thought. The knowledge that they did have of Jesus as a local resident on a natural level blinded them to the wisdom that was hidden in him as the Son of God. That is why a prophet is not accepted in his native place.

The people are not aware of the divine calling of a person and the divine revelation secretly communicated to him for his mission. Because the people lacked faith in Jesus he did not work many miracles there. Faith is the virtue that attains God through which miracles can be performed.

Saturday of the 17th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 14:1-12

The Herod in this passage is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. He is called Herod the Tetrarch which means "ruler of a fourth part", since he received a quarter of his father's domain. He governed Galilee and Perea from 4 BC until AD 39. His conscience must have been bothering him for having beheaded John the Baptist, for he thought that Jesus' miracles could only be by John who had risen from the dead.

St. Matthew explains how John eventually was ordered to be beheaded. He dared to tell Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch (also called king in this passage), "It is not lawful for you to have her." He had taken his half-brother Philip's wife to himself. The Mosaic Law forbids the union of a man with his brother's wife if his brother is still alive (Lev 18:16; 20:21). Herod became so angry with John for having publicly denounced him that he wanted to kill John. But he feared the people who believed John to be a prophet. So he seized John, bound him and put him in prison. On the occasion of his birthday, Herodias' daughter so moved Herod with her dancing, he told her he would give her whatever she asked. He even made

an oath to that effect. Prompted by her mother she asked for John the Baptist's head on a platter.

See to what an extreme degree of degradation, how blinded, hardened and insensitive that habitual sin, coupled with seething, vengeful anger can reduce a person. Such was the horrifying state Herodias had reached: She advised her own daughter to ask that the bloody head of John the Baptist be brought into their midst on a platter! Instead of explaining that to carry out such an oath would be sinful, Herod ordered that John be beheaded. His pride and the pressure of his honored guests coerced him to carry out his illicit oath. We pray that we can have John's courage and boldness to speak the truth and confront the evils of our day.

Monday of the 18th Week in Ordinary Time **Mt 14:13-21**

When Jesus received the news of John's death he felt a need to withdraw to a deserted place. John was Jesus' relative, and it must have made him reflect upon his own upcoming violent death. But when he arrived, a vast crowd was awaiting him. He overcame his own need for solitude and disembarked from the boat. His compassion for the crowd and their needs made him forget his own. He then proceeded to cure their sick.

As it was getting late in the evening Jesus' disciples wanted him to dismiss the crowds so they could go to the villages and buy food for themselves. But Jesus had other ideas. He wanted to feed the people himself. There were only five loaves and two fish available. He ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Jesus then took the five loaves and two fish and said the blessing, that is, he praised and thanked his Father for them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples for them to give them to the crowds.

The multiplication of the loaves was occurring through Jesus' hands. But he feeds the multitude through the hands of the Apostles.

Their intermediary role looks forward to the time after the Last Supper when they will feed the multitudes with the Bread of Life, the Holy Eucharist. St. Matthew hints at the connection of this multiplication of the loaves with the Last Supper: "the taking, saying the blessing, breaking and giving" to the disciples correspond to the very words and actions of Jesus over the bread at the Last Supper (Mt 26:26).

This is a Messianic sign: Jesus is the Messiah. It will be fulfilled in the Eucharistic Banquet.

The twelve baskets left over is a sign that the twelve Apostles will have enough to feed the multitudes with the Bread of Life.

Picking up the fragments shows us that we must not waste any food.

Tuesday of the 18th Week in Ordinary Time **Mt 14:22-36**

After Jesus had taken care of the needs of the crowds, he could now depart from them and care for his spiritual needs. So he went up to the mountain by himself to pray. He fulfilled his need to re-immers himself in God by giving him exclusive attention in prayer. We must learn from him to do the same.

The Apostles had been battling strong head winds since they parted from Jesus. It was about three in the morning and they seemed to make little progress. Then they saw Jesus walking toward them on the lake. They thought it was a ghost so they became fearful and cried out. So Jesus hastened to reassure them by uttering the divine name, "I Am",

translated “It is I”. His presence helped them to quieten down. Peter wanted to be like Jesus and walk on water. So Jesus commanded him to come. Jesus gave him the power to walk on water. This hints at the special gifts Jesus will give Peter to lead the Church. But then he got distracted by the strong wind, and, I suppose, the disturbed waters. They caused him to take his attention off Jesus and begin to sink. Then he cried out, “Lord, save me!” If we are close friends of Jesus, we spontaneously call upon him when we are in danger. This is what happened to Peter. We are reassured here that faith contacts Jesus who comes to our assistance. Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him.

Jesus explained that it is because Peter began to doubt in Jesus’ power to sustain him that he began to sink. Only a sustained faith in Jesus maintained by continuous prayerful communion with him will enable us to live on a supernatural level symbolized here as walking on water. The wind died down when they got into the boat. The Apostles, realizing that only God can tame an angry sea, did Jesus homage and proclaimed him to be the Son of God.

When they finally crossed the lake, people spread the news of Jesus’ arrival. They brought their sick to him so they could at least touch the tassel on his cloak; all who touched it were healed. We contact Jesus through faith and attain spiritual healing.

Wednesday of the 18th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 15:21-28

Tyre and Sidon are Gentile cities along the Mediterranean Sea. By withdrawing there, perhaps in this way, Jesus could find some solitude and privacy. St. Mark tells us that “he entered a house and wanted no

one to know about it, but he could not escape notice” (Mk 7:24). His reputation had spread beyond Palestine. The Gentile woman who came to Jesus was a Canaanite. This can be said because Sidon was the first-born of Canaan (Gen 10:15).

This woman believed in Jesus, so she boldly approached him. Her motherly instinct and her serious concern for her daughter’s condition made her overcome all obstacles. She pleads with Jesus for pity. Her daughter is tormented by a demon. She addresses Jesus as “Lord, Son of David”. This title seems to indicate that she believes he is the Messiah. But Jesus did not answer her.

The woman was causing such a ruckus, his disciples even got involved. “Send her away,” they pleaded, “for she keeps calling out after us.” She was desperate, and made herself heard. They wanted Jesus to fulfill her request so they could get rid of her. But Jesus is hesitant: his mission is “only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” the Jews. The woman came up to Jesus again. She expressed her deep respect for him by an act of homage, saying, “Lord, help me.” She was persistent. Again Jesus defers, saying “It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.” The “children” refers to the chosen people, the Jews. “Dogs” was a term the Jews called non-believing Gentiles. But the word that Jesus uses softens the seeming insult: little dogs or puppies.

But the woman comes right back at Jesus with, “Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters”. This reply got the best of Jesus. He healed her daughter immediately, saying, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done as you wish.” This whole episode encourages us to be bold and persistent in expressing our faith and serious needs.

Thursday of the 18th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 16:13-23

Caesarea Philippi was an entirely Gentile community located about 20 miles north of Galilee. It was founded by Philip the Tetrarch, brother of Herod Antipas, and named after Tiberius Caesar and Philip himself.

Jesus is referring to himself by the title “Son of Man” – his favorite. He got it from the book of Daniel to describe both his human and divine nature (Daniel 7:13-14). The majority opinion erroneously believed Jesus to be John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. These were expected to return to prepare Israel for the final manifestation of God’s kingdom.

It was Simon Peter who correctly expressed Jesus’ true identity: the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus quickly explained that flesh and blood (human nature or Simon’s own ingenuity) has not revealed this to him. The Father in heaven is the one who enlightened him with that insight. Jesus then proceeds to give Simon a new name to symbolize his role in the history of salvation—just as God changed Abram’s name to Abraham (Gen 17:5), and Jacob to Israel (Gen 32:28). The new name Jesus gives Simon in Aramaic (transliterated into Greek) is Kephias or Cephas, in English, Rock. Jesus’ statement would have been, “You are Rock (Kephias) and upon this rock (Kephias) I will build my Church.” Kephias denotes a sizeable rock. Thus Simon is himself the rock or foundation stone upon which Jesus will build his Church, the new covenant community. Thus we see that where Peter is, there is the Church that Jesus founded. Pope Francis is the last of an unbroken line of Popes to succeed Peter.

The gates of the nether world, that is, the power of death and deception will not overcome the

Church or lead it astray. Peter’s special charism, and that of his successors, will keep it from error and self-destruction.

The keys of the kingdom is a symbol of the teaching authority given to Peter as the chief teacher in the Church. His office will continue through his successors.

“Whatever you bind or loose on earth will be bound or loosed in heaven” indicates the authority given to Peter (and his successors) to make decisions and impose obligations, or to remove such obligations on members of the Church. Thus the Pope has the authority to impose or change the laws of fast and abstinence in the Church; he has the power to excommunicate members for certain serious sins.

Jesus strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Messiah in order to carry out his role as spiritual Messiah. The people’s idea of a political messiah would cause excitement and disturb his mission.

Friday of the 18th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 16:24-28

To come after Jesus and become a follower of his demands that we deny whatever we find in ourselves that is contrary to God’s will. Our human nature has been damaged by original sin. We have sinful inclinations that are opposed to God’s commands. We must go against these sinful inclinations by denying them, and refusing to fulfill them. This calls us to control our selfish desires. For example, the virtue of love would have us share with family members rather than keep all for ourselves as selfishness would incline us. To practice the virtue of love we must deny our selfish desires.

That means we must take up the cross like Jesus

and crucify our wayward human nature. We must put to death whatever remains of selfishness in us. We must refuse to follow these sinful desires so that they will die unfulfilled. That requires suffering. But that suffering will purify us; it will transform our earthly desires into heavenly ones; our desires will be for God and his will.

“Whoever wishes to save his life” by self-gratification will end in destroying himself. Self-indulgence leads to self-disintegration through various forms of physical ailments.

Whoever loses his life for Jesus’ sake will find it. Denying one’s selfish desires to follow Jesus’ word and way will enable that which is highest and immortal in us to dominate our human lives. In this way we will find our true and best selves. We will experience ourselves as children of God and temples of his indwelling presence.

To gain the whole world and destroy ourselves in the process is losing everything. Life is so precious; it had to be redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus. Following his words and way in obedience to the Father’s will that won for him eternal glory is also the way we must go. When Jesus returns in glory at the end of time he will reward us for following him. Some living at that time will not die before they see Jesus, the Son of Man, coming in his kingdom, when he rises from the dead in his glorious resurrection.

Saturday of the 18th Week in Ordinary Time

Mt 17:14-20

Jesus’ presence inspired reverence. The man came to Jesus and knelt down before him. He asked Jesus to have pity on his son. His son was considered to be a lunatic and suffered severely. The symptoms of the boy’s illness point to epilepsy, and attacks of this were thought to be caused by phases of the moon. He would fall into

fire and often in the water. The disciples of Jesus were unable to cure him.

“O faithless and perverse generation” are the words that came from Jesus. His human nature was often burdened and severely tested by the continuous needs of the people. Jesus then proceeded to rebuke the devil in the man’s son, and the demon came out of him. From that hour the boy was cured.

The disciples approached Jesus privately and wanted to know why they could not drive the demon out. His response was, “Because of your little faith.” Faith is the power, the theological virtue, that connects us to God. Through it we can then draw divine power to accomplish marvels. Ideally, faith, perfected by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, puts us in continuous communion with God. Then all of our actions would proceed from God and we would be endowed with marvelous power to do the works of God. But with little faith and without continuous contact with God we have little power. We try to act on our own with little effect. The devil remains unmoved by our words and actions, as we see when the disciples were ineffective in casting the demon from the boy. Even a small amount of faith could accomplish marvels. In saying to a mountain with faith the size of a mustard seed, “Move from here to there, it will move,” Jesus is using a figure of speech to show how marvelous the virtue of faith is. It causes seemingly impossible things to happen. God intervenes and causes hearts, minds, and situations to unexpectedly change. Our connection to God and belief in him with strong petitions, will cause him to intervene, act, and bring out what we asked. In this way nothing will be impossible for us.

Monday of the 19th Week in Ordinary Time

Mt 17:22-27

Jesus informs his disciples for the second time (Mt 16:21-23) of his coming death and resurrection. They are overwhelmed with grief. St. Mark tells us that they did not understand (Mk 9:32). The whole mystery of the need for Jesus to suffer and die to redeem man's sins and then rise to give us new life was hidden from them. We are so blessed to be living in these times when the paschal mystery has been fully revealed to us.

Jesus had apparently made Peter's home in Capernaum his mission headquarters. Peter's being approached by the temple tax collectors shows that he is already recognized as the leader and spokesman of the group of Apostles. All male Jews over 20 years of age were required to pay a half-shekel annually for the upkeep of the temple.

Peter's answer to Jesus' question was correct: it is the foreigners who were obliged to pay taxes. The subjects ("sons") living in their own country were not. Rome at this period did not tax Roman citizens—they taxed citizens of other countries subject to Rome, such as the Jews.

Just as subjects (sons) are not bound by laws applying to foreigners, neither are Jesus and his disciples, who belong to the kingdom of heaven, bound by the duty of paying the temple tax; it is imposed on those who are not of the kingdom.

Though Jesus and his disciples are exempt from paying the tax, he does not want to give offense. Therefore, the tax is to be paid in order to maintain good relations. In the early Church believers maintained certain Old Covenant practices to avoid giving offense to the Jews in the hope of winning some to the gospel.

Jesus foresees that the first fish that Peter will catch will have a coin or Greek stater worth two double drachmas. These were equal to the Jewish shekel and the tax was half-shekel. Thus it will pay the tax for both Jesus and Peter.

This whole scenario in today's gospel helps us to understand that we must do our best to maintain good relations with our fellow citizens. For this we go beyond the call of duty.

Tuesday of the 19th Week in Ordinary Time

Mt 18:1-5, 10, 12-14

Peter is singled out by Jesus to be the rock on which he will build his Church. Jesus takes Peter, James and John to be with him on the Mount of Transfiguration, leaving the others behind. What about the others? Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of God? Jesus takes a child and places him in their midst to make his point. We must become like children, even to enter the kingdom of God, as well as to be great. We must "turn" and be converted and develop a childlike attitude toward God to be great in the kingdom. This requires that we live in constant communion and dependence on God. We are helpless without him—like a child who relies on his parents for everything. This dependent communion with God opens us to an unending, copious outpouring of grace to sanctify us. This attitude is the opposite of a prideful independence that orients itself against God. We therefore need to humble ourselves before God as sinners, and acquire a lowly estimation of ourselves. Children in Jesus' day were nobodies; they were without any legal rights. Such a humble, childlike disposition brings about union with God and causes us to become divinized. Even if we have no distinguished office or position in society that makes us stand out; in God's eyes we are the greatest. Such was the situation with St. Therese in her community. To receive and welcome

a child or lowly disciple with such a humble disposition is to receive Jesus, who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

However helpless these little ones (children or disciples) are, we must be sure not to despise or hurt them. The fact that their angels stand before God to intercede for them shows you their high worth. Children as well as all of us have guardian angels. The angel Raphael guided Tobiah, and presented Tobit and Sarah's prayer to God (Tobit 12:11-15). (See Acts 12:15 regarding Peter's guardian angel.) Each little one (child or disciple) is precious to God. He desires that none should perish; should one go astray, it is his desire that we leave those who are safe to search, find and bring him back to safety away from the evils in the world and the evil one himself.

Wednesday of the 19th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 18:15-20

How are we to deal with a fellow Christian who sins and yet remains within the community? We, first of all, need to approach the person and point out his sin. This should be done positively and confidentially. In that way we will win him over to the truth, and he will appreciate our loving concern with gratitude. But if the person does not accept our correction, we need to approach him with one or two witnesses so that he can see the seriousness of his sin (see Deut 19:15). If this fails, the matter is to be brought before the local assembled community (the Church). And if the sinner refuses to accept the correction of the Church, he is to be expelled or excommunicated. Just as the observant Jew avoided the company of Gentiles and tax collectors, so must the congregation separate itself from the arrogantly sinful member who refuses to repent even when convicted of his sin by the whole local Church. Such a one is to be set outside the fellowship of the community

(compare 1 Cor 5:1-13). The Church's judgment will be ratified in heaven.

In Matthew 16:19, Peter is given the authority over the whole Church to bind and to loose, to teach authoritatively and to lift or impose the ban of excommunication. The promise of the keys is given to Peter alone. He is invested with Christ's authority as the visible head of the whole Church. Here in Matthew 18:18, the authority is given to the other apostles as they administer their particular area of authority, subordinately to Peter's universal authority. Jesus explains how powerful even just a few people praying together is. He says that if two people agree on anything for which they pray, the heavenly Father will grant it. In this way he seems to be encouraging group prayer. When several people pray together, it is more powerful than when one prays alone.

Then Jesus explains why such united prayer is so powerful. It is because they are gathered in Jesus' name. They come together in love to be with him. They are drawn and attracted to him personally, and he does not disappoint them. He comes to join them. He also wants to be with them. He does not let us down. It is he who attracted us in the first place so he would have the opportunity to fulfill his desire to love and grace us with his presence, pray and intercede for and with us.

Thursday of the 19th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 18:21—19:1

Peter asked Jesus how often he needed to forgive someone—what should be the limit of forgiving, seven times? Jesus said, rather, we must forgive seventy-seven times (seventy times seven, RSV). This is in contrast to Lamech who avenged himself seventy-sevenfold (Gen 4:24). In other words, limitless forgiveness is required of Jesus' disciples. In this way we are left free for communion with God, and free for

love. We must allow nothing to come between us and God.

Unforgiveness and preoccupation with hurt, insult, or injury would take us away from God. Anger and revenge would take their emotional toll on us. Forgiveness enables us to let go of these hurtful feelings and free us for God. "It is human to err and divine to forgive," so we must ask the Lord to help us forgive. We may not be able to forget the hurt but we can forgive the injury anew and commend the person who injured us to the mercy of God through which we will grow more rapidly in love and holiness. Thus our becoming more and more like Jesus will be expedited.

Jesus then began to tell a parable to bring out the supreme importance of forgiveness. He tells a parable about a king who was moved with compassion for one of his servants. The servant owed him the huge amount of ten thousand talents, about 20 years' wages for a laborer. When threatened to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property in payment of the debt, the servant fell on his knees and begged for time to pay him back. The king had pity on him and forgave him the whole debt.

This servant found a fellow servant who owed him the much smaller amount of a hundred denarii, about a hundred days' wages. The fellow servant begged for patience and he would pay him back. But he refused and had him put in prison until he paid back the debt. When the master heard of this, he called in the wicked, unforgiving servant, and was extremely angry with him. He who had been forgiven the huge entire debt should have been merciful to his fellow servant for far less. He was then handed over to the torturers until he should pay the debt. But since the debt was so great as to be unpayable, the punishment will be endless. The heavenly Father will do the same for us unless we forgive our brothers from our hearts. We who have been forgiven an eternal debt of sin should readily forgive others of much smaller debts.

Friday of the 19th Week in Ordinary Time Mt 19:3-12

The Pharisees often tested Jesus to try and find fault with him. So they asked him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?" In answer, Jesus quotes the book of Genesis to reinstate the indissolubility of marriage (Gen 2:24). God joined male and female together so that they become one flesh. They leave their parents to form a new unit in society. "Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate." "Since God forges the indissoluble bond that unites a married couple, it follows that no civil or religious authority has the power to break it" (Ignatius Catholic Study Bible).

The Pharisees object to Jesus' absolute prohibition of divorce by saying that Moses permitted it (see Deut 24:1). Jesus responds that Moses allowed men to divorce their wives because of the hardness of their hearts; they continually resisted God's grace. But in the beginning divorce was not envisaged or permitted. So Jesus concludes by saying that whoever divorces his wife in a valid marriage and marries another commits adultery. Of course, in the case of an unlawful union, such as simple cohabitation, divorce would be permissible and even encouraged.

The disciples remark that if separation is not allowable, then it is better not to marry. That is why a holy courtship, giving the couple enough time to experience how compatible they are is so important. It takes time and relating to each other under normal everyday dealings and varied circumstances to understand how compatible a couple is. Some are not capable of marriage because they are not able to perform the marriage act.

The Apostles state that the rule of no divorce is so strict maybe it would be better not to marry!

Yet some are called to the married state. But some are given the grace to renounce marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, in order to devote themselves, like Jesus, entirely to its service. They are leaders who are entrusted with the care of Christ's bride, the Church on earth. They thus embrace consecrated virginity and live by anticipation the life of heaven.

Saturday of the 19th Week in Ordinary Time

Mt 19:13-15

Jesus had a special love for children. We've already seen how he called a child over to be in the midst of his disciples to teach them the lowliness required to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Parents recognized Jesus' love for children: they brought them to him so he could lay his hands on them and pray over them. The laying on of hands and praying is a way of communicating grace upon others. The power of touch also communicates love to other persons. We humans have a need of relating lovingly with one another in that way. Touch is a powerful way for parents to love and affirm their children.

Jesus' disciples felt that these parents were bothering Jesus by bringing their children to him. They thought their master had too many other more important matters to occupy him. But Jesus reprimanded them for trying to keep the children from coming to him, "Let the children come to me" he said, "and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

This passage helps us to understand why the Catholic Church baptizes children and infants. Jesus told Nicodemus that it is necessary to be born of water and the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God (Jn 3:5). In the gospel today Jesus blesses children as legitimate members of the kingdom. Thus he is laying a foundation for infant baptism. The early Church baptized young

children as well as adults. Peter told the people on Pentecost, "Repent and be baptized every one of you....For the promise is to you and to your children..." (Acts 2:38-39).

"The practice of infant Baptism is an immemorial tradition of the Church. There is explicit testimony to their practice from the second century on, and it is quite possible that from the beginning of the Apostolic preaching, when whole "households" received baptism, infants may also have been baptized" (CCC 1252).

Early Church Fathers, such as Origen, trace infant baptism to apostolic tradition. The Council of Trent (1547) later confirmed and promoted the practice. From early on the baptismal liturgy included Jesus' words "do not prevent them". To exclude any age of human beings from baptism would not meet the universal need for salvation.

Monday of the 20th Week in Ordinary Time

Mt 19:16-22

The man who comes to Jesus sincerely wants to know what good he must do to gain eternal life. Jesus questions the young man as to why he is asking him about the good since God alone is good. Perhaps he sees God in Jesus and believes he can answer his question. He approaches the subject from the perspective of what he must do. Jesus responds that in order to enter into eternal life he must keep the commandments. The questioner asks, "Which ones?" Jesus quotes the first five commandments relating to our dealing with others. He adds, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" to summarize and confirm what the others are about. It is interesting that Jesus places the fourth commandment last rather than first in order where it normally belongs. Might it be because Jesus knows that the young man is weak in that area, that is, in caring for his aging parents?

However, he answers that he has kept all these commands. What else does he need to do? Jesus gives the unexpected answer—To be perfect, sell what you have, give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then you will be free to follow Jesus.

But the young man is not there yet. He has not reached that point of spiritual development that he can accept the invitation and challenge. The leap from keeping the commandments to stripping himself of everything to be free to follow Jesus is too great for him. This is not something that he can do. This is a work of grace. It is beyond the natural man. He is too attached to his possessions and a comfortable life. He has not experienced sufficiently the person of Jesus and the life of the Spirit like the apostles to be able to break away from the hold that the senses have on him. He has not yet discovered the valuable treasure of the kingdom of God and the pearl of great price to joyfully leave all in order to acquire the kingdom that Jesus offers and is. So he goes away sad. He needs to start searching and gradually strip away little by little those material attachments that keep him bound to this earth. Thus his heart will open to the spiritual riches of the kingdom Jesus brings. Then in great joy he will be able to embrace the spiritual treasure Jesus is offering him.

Tuesday of the 20th Week in Ordinary Time

Mt 19:23-30

The young man in yesterday's gospel could not choose to strive for perfection and enjoy more completely the spiritual riches of the kingdom of God because he was attached to his many possessions. With good reason then, Jesus says that it is difficult for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom is a spiritual reality but the pleasures and luxury that riches give us tend to make us live on the level of sense. The senses that are gratified prevent us

from being able to savor and enjoy the spiritual joys of the kingdom. These sense pleasures keep us in bondage to such an extent that Jesus says "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

The disciples were greatly astonished at this because in the Old Testament wealth and material goods are considered to be a sign of God's favor. Jesus' teaching seems to contradict this. Wealth gives a false sense of security and independence of God; it preoccupies our minds and distracts us from God; leisure and luxury tempt us to self-gratification and make us indisposed for prayer and self-discipline. It preoccupies us so that no time remains for silence, solitude, sacred reading and contemplation.

To the Apostles' exclamation, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus responded with, "For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible." Only God's grace can empower us to live in the midst of plenty, and, through prayer and self-discipline, remain sufficiently detached to enter and enjoy the kingdom of God. Strengthened by meditating on the word of God and the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist we are made spiritually strong to resist the temptations of wealth. Unlike the rich young man, the Apostles gave up everything to follow Jesus. Peter wants to know, "What will there be for us?" Jesus responds that in the new age, that is, after the resurrection, the twelve will sit on thrones and govern (judge) the twelve tribes of the new Israel, the Church. It may also refer to the final judgment. The Apostles will be seated on twelve thrones and join Jesus in judging or governing the people of Israel.

And everyone who gives up family and possessions to follow Jesus will receive a hundred times more in this life and inherit eternal life. Those who are first in the things of this world will end up last; and the last, Jesus' disciples, will end up first.

Wednesday of the 20th Week in Ordinary Time

Mt 20:1-16

Jesus tells another parable to explain some aspect of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom is like a landowner who hired workers for his vineyard. The first group was hired for the usual daily wage, one denarius, and began working at dawn or about 6 a.m. The second group was hired and began to work at 9 a.m. Still more workers were needed, so at about noon, more were hired to work. He went out again around 3 o'clock and hired still more workers. He said to these as he had said to the others that he would give them what was just for their work. There was still a need, so the landowner found other workers standing idle at about 5 p.m. Then at the end of the day, about 6 p.m., the owner had the foreman call the laborers to give them their pay. He began paying the last workers first, ending with the first. The latest 5 p.m. workers received a denarius, the usual daily wage.

When the first to begin work came, they thought that they would receive more—since they had worked much longer. But they received the same amount as the latecomers, the usual wage agreed upon. They grumbled against the landowner. They had worked all day and got the same pay that the others got who had worked much less, even for only an hour. But they received for themselves the agreed upon wage. They were not being treated unfairly. It's just that they were envious of those who got the same pay as they for having worked about eleven hours less. The landowner had a right to pay the latecomers as much as the first workers. He was exceedingly generous.

The Jews were the first ones called by God to belong to his kingdom. The Gentiles were called much later. But they were admitted on an equal standing with the Jews. The same may be said about converts who come much later into the

Church. They are admitted into full participation even as those who were Catholics for many years. The kingdom of God does not become the property of those who first became its members, even if they are officers.

The Jews were the first to be called, but they are the last to accept Jesus as Messiah. Although the Gentiles were the last to be called, they were the first as a people to accept Jesus as Messiah.

Thursday of the 20th Week in Ordinary Time

Mt 22:1-14

Jesus tells another parable to explain the kingdom of heaven. It is like a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. This implies that there is an element of joy and celebration in the kingdom. There is feasting and fellowship. The servants sent to summon the invited guests may be the prophets. But the guests refuse to attend. Other servants are sent to announce that everything was ready for the feast, urging the guests to come. But these also ignored the invitation and went away to their farm and business. The others mistreated the servants, who may be the apostles, even killing some of them. The enraged king sent his troops who destroyed those murderers and burned their city. This may well refer to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman army.

The feast was ready but there was no one worthy to attend. So again the king sent other servants to gather in from the streets all they found. This may imply that the Gentiles are included at this time. There were both good and bad in this group collected from all over. Again we see a mixture of good and bad in the kingdom.

The appearance of the king who then judges those worthy implies the final judgment when the separation of good and bad occur. One

of the invited guests did not have a wedding garment. When questioned about it, he had no excuse. The wedding garment symbolizes righteousness and living according to God's will. This one is still unrepentant. He has not changed his sinful lifestyle. The king then orders his attendants to bind the man's hands and feet. He is restricted and loses his freedom. They cast him into the darkness outside where there is wailing and grinding of teeth. His punishment consists in separation from those who are worthy. In the fearsome darkness he experiences anguish and sorrow for being unworthy to remain in the joyful company of the saints. The Gentiles who are graciously invited must be worthy to participate in the wedding banquet or they too will be rejected and suffer eternal punishment. Those who are in the Church are warned to take their call to the kingdom seriously. Many or all are called but only the few who ready themselves will be chosen.

Friday of the 20th Week in Ordinary Time
Mt 22:34-40

The Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees. They tried to make the resurrection of the dead look ridiculous with the case of seven brothers who married the same woman to produce offspring for the first brother who died. The woman outlived all of them, and then finally she died. The Sadducees wanted to know whose wife she would be at the resurrection.

Jesus turned the case around on them and explained that at the resurrection there will be no marrying or husband and wife living in marriage as they did before the resurrection of the body. After the resurrection their glorified bodies will require that they relate as the angels do. Jesus went on to show them from the book

of Exodus 3:6, which they accepted as inspired, that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has an ongoing living relationship with them. He is a God of the living: he relates to these patriarchs as living beings. They are still alive. At the general resurrection they will also rise. Jesus shows the Sadducees to be mistaken in their denial of the resurrection of the body. He proved them wrong from scripture. So now the Pharisees get together and got one of their best scholars of the law to test Jesus. They were always trying to embarrass and disgrace him before the people. Instead they were the ones who ended up being embarrassed. The question asked Jesus is, "Which commandment in the law is the greatest?" The rabbis counted 613 distinct commandments in the law. 248 were positive, and 365 were prohibitions. Furthermore, the commandments were distinguished as "light" and "heavy," depending on the seriousness of the subject. In light of these facts we can see how Jesus was being put on the spot. Of all these commandments, which is the greatest? Jesus responds by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 which forms part of the Shema, that is, the Jewish profession of faith. So Jesus says, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment." And then Jesus quoted Leviticus 19:18 saying, "The second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself." He concludes, "The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments." This reminds us of the Ten Commandments: the first three direct us to love God; the last seven direct us to love our neighbor. The whole Bible is about love of God and neighbor.

God has first loved us. We must love him in return. We owe him everything we are. Love for him must inform all of our actions, every breath we take. We also express our love for him through loving our neighbor.

Saturday of the 20th Week in Ordinary Time

Mt 23:1-12

The scribes and Pharisees sat on the chair of Moses. This was an actual chair in the synagogue or a phrase that stood for their teaching authority. They were the legitimate teachers of the Law of Moses. Therefore, the people should obey their teaching but should not follow their bad example. The teachers of the law did not practice what they preached. The heavy burdens they laid on people's shoulders were their rigoristic and severely harsh and inhumane interpretation of the law that they imposed on people. They did nothing, "not lift a finger," to help carry that load. The good works that they did were performed to be seen, for show. The phylacteries were small leather boxes containing scripture verses from Deuteronomy 6:8 and 11:18. These were tied to their forearm and forehead when praying. They made them particularly broad to show off their piety to the public. The tassels were worn on the corners of their garments as called for in Numbers 15:38 to remind them to follow God's commandments. The scribes and Pharisees widened these to parade their piety.

They fed into their pride and vanity by seeking places of honor at banquets and in the synagogues. They sought to be honored in market places by lengthy greetings that flattered their pride. The title Rabbi, meaning my master or my great one, was meant to be a title of respect for teachers and leaders. But these men used it for their own self-aggrandizement. In light of the fact that these teachers of the law were misusing these honorary titles for their own glory, Jesus forbids such usage if they are to be used in this prideful manner. All are brothers and sisters. There is one Father, God; and one teacher, the Messiah. Normally, however, these titles such as mother, father, teacher are quite acceptable and may be used (compare Heb 12:7-11; 1 Cor 4:15; Philemon 10).

"The greatest among you must be your servant." The greatest is the one with the most love and humility which prompts humble service to others. God alone deserves to be exalted. All others derive their goodness and virtue from him. It is improper, untrue, and sinful to usurp his place. That is why "he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree" (Lk 1:52 RSV). Humility disposes us for God to lift us up.

Monday of the 21st Week in Ordinary Time

Mt 23: 13-22

The Scribes were learned in the Law of Moses. They were the official authorities on the written law and oral traditions. They interpreted the Scriptures. Jesus condemned them for their burdensome additions to the divine law.

The Pharisees were a religious sect of the Jews. They sought to preserve the Jews from the contamination of foreign religion; they insisted upon strict separation from the Gentiles. They also maintained a strict loyalty to the Scriptures and to the traditions of the Rabbis. Jesus rebuked their insincerity.

Jesus warns the Scribes and Pharisees that ruinous calamity awaits them. He expresses this in seven woes. They obstruct others from entering the kingdom of heaven just as they themselves do not enter. They are hypocrites, pretending to be pious and lovers of God but are not. They were zealous in seeking Gentile converts to Judaism. Once they were converted and accepted circumcision and the requirements of the Mosaic Law, they became children of hell, even worse than the Pharisees themselves.

They were supposed to be guides who were leading others to God, but were blinded to the truth by

their pride, and really unfit to lead others. For example, they said that some oaths were binding and others were not. They erroneously said that to swear by the temple meant nothing, whereas to swear by the gold of the temple was binding. Similarly they said that to swear by the altar meant nothing, but to swear by the gift on the altar was binding. They were too blind to see that the temple was more important than the gold, or that the altar was more important than the gift made sacred by the altar.

Jesus explains that when one swears by the altar, he swears by it and all that is upon it; to swear by the temple one swears by it and by him who dwells in it; one who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who is seated on it.

The distinction by the Pharisees which made some oaths binding and others not were an abuse and devalued the sacredness of valid oaths.

The purpose of an oath was to guarantee truthfulness by calling upon God to witness it. Such public oaths are valid and encourage truthfulness. However, in private life, a simple statement of truth should be sufficient, and there should be no need to support it by an oath (see Mt 5: 33-37).

Tuesday of the 21st Week in Ordinary Time **Mt 23:23-26**

Mint and dill and cumin were small seasoning herbs. The Mosaic Law ordered tithing (one tenth) of the produce of the land (Lev 27:30; Dt 14:22-23). The scribal tradition is said here to have extended this law to even the smallest herbs. This shows the Pharisees' preoccupation with matters of less importance while they neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment (justice), mercy and fidelity. They were preoccupied with tiny, insignificant matters while leaving unattended

the most important: love for God, his will, and a pursuit of righteousness, having true compassion for people and their needs, and fidelity to the more important aspects of the Law of Moses, such as the love for the poor and deprived.

Jesus continues to point out how ridiculous the Scribes and Pharisees had gotten when they focused on tiny, insignificant matters while neglecting the more serious aspects of the law: they "strain out the gnat and swallow the camel". Leviticus 11:41-45 forbids the eating of any swarming creature. The Pharisees went to a lot of trouble to strain out through a cloth any foreign matter before drinking. They wanted to be sure they were not swallowing a gnat or mosquito. At the same time that they were preoccupied with such insignificant matters of the law, they failed to attend to weightier ones: they swallowed the camel! The camel was the largest unclean animal in Palestine (Lev 11:4).

Exaggerated attentiveness to these small and insignificant issues of the law, with all their energies spent in that direction, made the Scribes and Pharisees forget the more serious commandments that lead to salvation. Love and compassion for others lost out to harsh criticism and disdain for those who were incapable of following the burdensome rules set by these religious leaders, beyond what the Law of Moses actually called for.

Wednesday of the 21st Week in Ordinary Time **Mt 23: 27-32**

The tombs were white-washed to make them more visible. Even inadvertent contact with dead bodies caused ritual impurity (Num 19: 11-22). The visibility would help avoid such contact. Jesus compares the Scribes and Pharisees to these white-washed tombs. They appear beautiful on the outside but inside they are full of corruption. They

are overly concerned with externals to the neglect of what is inside. They are meticulous about carrying certain external details of the law, but their hearts are far from God: they were self-centered and used their positions to promote themselves. They pretended to be holy but they were prideful and sought the praise of people. They sought their own glory rather than the glory of God. All but one of the seven woes accuse the Scribes and Pharisees of hypocrisy. They pretend to be someone other than they are. They appear to be good but they really are full of deceit. Jesus could read their thoughts and knew their hearts. Each successive woe contains a condemnation. The seventh woe is the most serious of all. The Scribes and Pharisees claimed that if they had lived at the time of their ancestors they would not have shed the prophets' blood. But the fact that they built the tombs of the prophets show, on the contrary, that they are the children of those who murdered the prophets. Their sinful manner of conducting themselves including the way they constantly are attacking Jesus bear witness that they are like their ancestors who murdered the prophets. This, in fact, is what they want to do with Jesus. To "fill up what your ancestors measured out" means they will continue to kill the prophets just as their ancestors did, including Jesus himself who is the prophet who was to come in this world (Jn 6: 14; Deut 18: 15, 18).

Thursday of the 21st Week in Ordinary Time Mt 24:42-51

Jesus may return at any moment. We must always be ready to face him when he returns. That means we must lead morally good lives. We must avoid sin and go about doing God's will. We must be vigilant, ready at any moment to receive Jesus with joy. He will come for us when we least expect him. He will come in glory as the Son of Man. Jesus compares his coming to a thief who unexpectedly breaks into your house at night. There is no use speculating the precise time the Lord will return. Only the Father knows.

The faithful and prudent servant that the Master puts in charge of his household refers to those who are in leadership positions. They have been put in charge of others and are responsible for caring for them. If he fulfills his responsibility, when Jesus returns in glory, he will reward the servant by giving him a raise. He will be given an opportunity for greater intimacy with his Master. He will be honored by being put in charge of all his property. He will be raised to a higher position in the Kingdom. But if the servant proves to be irresponsible and abusive to his fellow servants he will be severely punished when the Master returns unexpectedly. Because the Master delays in coming, even for a long time, the servant gets the impression that he has a great deal of time to indulge his passions by eating and drinking profusely. Thus he is no longer able to be vigilant or fulfill his responsibilities. He will be caught off guard and totally unprepared when the Master suddenly returns. He will be severely punished. He will lose his position and be cast into the darkness away from the celebrating community. He will be grief stricken and in anguish for being eternally rejected.

Friday of the 21st Week in Ordinary Time Mt 25:1-13

"Then" refers to the time of Jesus' second coming. The scene is that of a wedding feast. The groom led the procession to bring his bride to their home. The celebration lasted one week long. Family and friends were present to celebrate the marriage feast.

Five of the bridesmaids were foolish in that they brought no oil along for their lamps. This represents their lack of good deeds. The wise ones brought oil for their lamps, that is, they prepared themselves with good works.

Since the bridegroom took so long in coming, the bridesmaids fell asleep. He finally arrived at midnight. A cry was made to announce his

arrival: “Come out to meet him!” So the maidens lit their lamps. But the foolish ones noticed that their lamps were already going out. They wanted to borrow oil from the wise ones, who declined to give their oil because they did not have a sufficient amount to last long enough for both. Preparedness is a disposition that is unique and personal. It cannot be shared or transferred. Only the individual is able to prepare for himself. So the foolish ones had to go to the merchants to buy some. Meanwhile, the groom arrived and those who were ready went to the wedding feast with him. Then the door was locked. When the foolish maidens arrived to join the others, they found that the heavy wooden doors had been locked. So they could not enter. They called out that the door be opened!

But the Lord himself answered, “I do not know you.” They had not met and encountered him in their neighbor by doing good deeds. He did not know them. He was a total stranger to them. They had not maintained a close personal relationship with him at all. He really did not know them. So they were left outside. Only those who know him intimately and are his friends will be able to enter the celebration when he returns.

“Stay awake” really means stay prepared. The oil of love must keep burning with good works so that we will be prepared whenever the Lord returns. We do not know when.

Saturday of the 21st Week in Ordinary Time Mt 25:14-30

Jesus continues to use parables to explain certain aspects of the kingdom of God. The talent is a unit of coinage of high value. The master who was going on a journey entrusted various sums of money to three of his servants: 5, 2 and 1 talent, depending on each one’s ability. The first two immediately got to work and traded

the sum and doubled the money. But the third buried the money. Again, in this parable also, the master takes a long time before returning to settle accounts with his servants. This represents the time after Jesus’ Ascension until his return in glory as judge.

The first one doubled the five talents he had received. Because of his fidelity and industry, he was rewarded by being given the opportunity to work more closely with his master and entrusted with greater responsibilities. The other servant who doubled his master’s money was likewise rewarded.

Both of these men took their responsibilities seriously and worked diligently to carry out their orders. They were faithful in performing their duties in lesser matters and proved themselves competent. And so they advanced in their field of responsibilities and were promoted to a higher position. That is how grace works in the supernatural order. One grace builds upon the other. The virtue required to fulfill one’s duty lays the foundation for the next grace. Thus we continue to grow in grace and in the likeness of Jesus.

The third servant who received the one talent failed to invest the money to make more. He was too lazy or fearful. He was unwilling to risk investing his master’s money. He tried to excuse himself by blaming the demanding disposition of the master. Such a lazy, irresponsible attitude was unacceptable. So the talent was taken from him and given to the one with ten who proved himself knowledgeable on how to invest it wisely.

The proper use of God’s gifts causes them to increase. Our not using them causes them to decrease so that we may lose them completely. Virtues grow through our exercising them. The servant who did nothing was considered useless. He was of no value to his master or even to himself. He was rejected and thrown into the

darkness outside where he will experience grief and anguish, all alone, away from the joy of his master and coworkers.

Monday of the 22nd Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 4:16-30

After Jesus had been baptized and endowed with power to begin his public mission, he was led into the desert to be tested by the devil. Fortified by his victory over Satan, he comes to Galilee where he begins his ministry in the power of the Spirit. His deep insights into truth made him a praiseworthy teacher.

He came to Nazareth where he grew up and went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he had been in the habit of doing. His faithfulness to public prayer and the study of God's word on the Sabbath is a good example for us to imitate. His reading on this occasion seems to indicate that this is something he did on a regular basis. He took an active part in the liturgy of the word. Jesus read from a scroll, a role of parchment or papyrus on which it was the custom to write. He located the particular passage he wished to read: Isaiah 61:1-2. This passage was appropriate to announce to his fellow townsmen the beginning of his public mission. Jesus had been anointed by the Holy Spirit when he was baptized by John the Baptist (Lk 3:21-22). This episode fulfilled the Isaian reading. Jesus is the promised Messiah who comes to bring glad tidings to the poor, that is, all human beings who are frail and needy in some way or other. He comes to free them from captivity to sin and various addictions. He comes to enlighten those who are blind to God and the spiritual world; he will free those who are oppressed by sin and evil. He announces that the time of liberation for all is now arrived: "Today", he said, "this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing". Everyone was amazed with what eloquence he spoke.

The common understanding among them was that Jesus was the son of Joseph--they knew nothing of his virginal conception and that God was his Father (Lk 1:35). This part of our passage seems to have occurred at another visit. For, the request that he do for them what he had done in Capernaum implies this. St. Luke seems to be combining two occasions. This would explain the drastic change in attitude of the people.

Jesus goes on to explain how prophets are not accepted in their native place. He explained that that is why Elijah was sent to pagan territory to a widow who had the faith and love to receive him and his miraculous gift of flour and oil during the three and a half years of draught. Elisha likewise cleansed a non-Jew, a Syrian, from leprosy because he obeyed him (2 Kgs 5:14) and washed seven times in the Jordan River.

The people became furious because Jesus dared to point out their lack of faith—even the Gentiles had more faith than they. So they drove him out of town and in their fury would have pushed him over the cliff. But Jesus passed through their midst untouched. God protected him.

Tuesday of the 22nd Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 4:31-37

Again we see Jesus in the synagogue on a Sabbath. He was teaching. The people were astonished at his teaching because he spoke with authority. The forcefulness of his Divine Person convinced his listeners of the truth he was proclaiming. He did not have to quote endless external sources to bolster his enunciation of truth. The unclean demon in the synagogue was intimidated by the holy presence of Jesus. He became severely distressed and cried out. How disturbed he was in the presence of such holiness! He had a sense of being before a power greater than he. He was thoroughly shaken and unnerved.

He became powerless before Jesus and began to fall apart, shrieking loudly, “I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”, attempting to have some kind of control over Jesus by identifying him and calling out his name. To name someone in the Bible is to have authority over him. But the divinity in Jesus renders the demon helpless.

Jesus then rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet! Come out of him!” Although the demon threw the man down, he came out of him without doing him any harm. We no longer see this kind of thing in our day, but something similar happens daily in the confessional in a quiet way. The power of Satan is broken by the absolution of the priest, and the person goes out free again. He can start living as a child of God, no longer obsessed by the powers of sin and evil.

The people are amazed at Jesus’ power over the devil. He cast him out effortlessly by a word of command. Jesus’ power for good is still accessible to all in the sacrament of Penance. He still is available to cast out the evil we contracted in sin; he fills us with his goodness again, empowering us to overcome evil in our lives. We must continue to spread that good news everywhere.

Wednesday of the 22nd Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 4:38-44**

After the Synagogue service, Jesus entered Simon Peter’s house. His mother-in-law was afflicted with a severe fever. So they asked Jesus to heal her. He rebuked the fever and caused it to leave. Normally it takes people a few days to regain their strength. In this case, however, the woman was miraculously so totally healed that she immediately began to serve those who had come to visit.

At sunset, since the Sabbath day of rest ended, the sick with various diseases were brought to Jesus. Again we see Jesus laying hands on each

one so that his power of healing could make contact with them. This caused the people to be healed. The demons could not endure to be near the holiness of Jesus. They would fly out from the people they possessed. They knew who Jesus was. So they cried out, “You are the Son of God”. They identified him as the Messiah. But Jesus made them stop because people had the wrong idea of the Messiah’s role.

Jesus was an early riser. He would awaken at daybreak to be alone in prayer with his Father (Mk 1:35). He respected his need for solitude, so he would go to a deserted place. There he could remain undisturbed to be able to give his Father his total attention and become absorbed in prayer. We who are less sensitive to our need to be alone with God ought to learn from Jesus and seek out our own solitude. The crowds went looking for Jesus. We also ought to seek Jesus out in the Tabernacles of our local Churches. We can contact him through faith.

The people tried to keep Jesus from leaving them. They sensed his nearness to God and wanted more of what he had to give. But Jesus had a sense of urgency. He felt the need to proclaim his gospel to others. In him the kingdom or rule of God was arising. This was his mission. He had to keep on moving to other places. So he went to the various synagogues in Judea. This word “Judea” is taken in the wider sense of the territory of the Jews.

Thursday of the 22nd Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 5:1-11**

“The crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to his word”. Isn’t that which we are called to do? He makes himself so easily available to us through his indwelling presence and by his presence in the Tabernacle. We have free access to him through faith.

Jesus was standing by the Lake Gennesaret (also called the Sea of Galilee or Tiberias). He could get away from the pressing crowd by getting into Simon's boat. He could then sit, which was the usual position for teaching. We notice that it was in Simon's boat that Jesus used. Already there is a special relationship developing between Jesus and Simon.

Jesus used Simon's boat to teach the people about the Kingdom of God. It was after he had finished speaking the word of God that Jesus told Simon to "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch". The word of God is like a net cast into the sea to gather people into the kingdom of grace and eternal life.

Simon was reluctant to start fishing again after an all night's failure—which is the best time to catch fish. Out of sheer obedience to Jesus' request Simon proceeded to lower his nets into the sea. To Simon's great surprise his nets were immediately filled with a huge catch of fish—so much so that his nets were beginning to tear. So he called for help from his fishing partners, James and John. There were so many fish the men filled both boats so that they were in danger of sinking.

This was such a stupendous miracle that Simon Peter fell to his knees before Jesus. The contrast of having worked hard all night and caught nothing, with simply putting out into deep water in broad day light and catching such an abundance of fish was clearly a miracle beyond all expectation. Peter was in shock! He experienced the holiness of Jesus and fell at his feet. He did not feel worthy to be in his presence. He became aware of his own sinfulness. Clearly, Jesus had to have divine knowledge for him to be able to direct the fishermen to make such an unbelievable catch. "Depart from me, Lord," Peter exclaimed, "for I am a sinful man". He and his partners were seized with awe and astonishment over their surprise catch.

This catch, Jesus explained in so many words, was symbolical of the people he would gather

into the Kingdom of salvation by his preaching (see Acts 2:41). We can see why these men, after experiencing something of the divine in Jesus, left everything to follow him.

Friday of the 22nd Week of Ordinary Time **Luke 5:33-39**

The disciples of John the Baptist, that is, his followers, learned the importance of fasting from their master; they were concerned that Jesus' disciples did not fast. So a delegation came to Jesus to find out why. Jesus explained that fasting is a sign of mourning and sadness. But he compares his brief stay among them as a time of joy. For he is the heavenly bridegroom who has come to be united to his bride, the Church (compare Is 62:4-5).

Jesus' explanation refers to a statement John the Baptist made when he identified Jesus as the bridegroom (the Messiah) and himself as the best man (Jn 3:28-29). John's disciples in imitation of him fasted in preparation for the Messiah. Now that he has arrived they are called to feast and celebrate. When the bridegroom is betrayed and taken away to be crucified, then the disciples will be called to fast as a sign of their grief. They will also need to fast in preparation for his return in glory. This holy exercise will spiritually strengthen them to avoid sin and practice virtue. Jesus goes on to further explain that the old and the new don't mix. Patching an old cloak with new cloth does not work. Jesus' teaching is not a patching of Judaism. The Gospel cannot be contained within the limits of the Mosaic Law. The two are incompatible. The Gospel is as new as was the revelation of the law through Moses. It is new and far beyond it. Judaism is not able to contain the form that the Gospel takes. The new teaching of Jesus requires an entirely new setting and economy.

Jesus is in the process of introducing a radical newness. A new salvation is dawning. The old law cannot contain the superabundant outpouring of grace effected by Jesus' paschal mystery when he suffers, dies and is glorified and sends the Holy Spirit who is the new law written in the hearts of believers. The old law as an old wine skin is not able to contain the explosive power of the new wine given by Jesus.

Saturday of the 22nd Week of Ordinary Time **Lk 6:1-5**

The field of grain that Jesus and his disciples were going through was probably wheat. They would rub the grains in their hands to free them from the outer shell so they could eat them. They did this on the Sabbath which was the day of rest. The Pharisees were always on the watch to find something to condemn Jesus. They pointed out to him that his disciples were breaking the Sabbath day of rest by their actions: "...on the seventh day you must rest even during the seasons of plowing and harvesting" (Ex 34:21). They were overly strict when they considered the disciples to be harvesting the wheat. The law also said, "When you go through your neighbor's grain field, you may pluck some of the ears with your hands, but do not put a sickle to your neighbor's grain" (Deut 23:26).

We must be careful not to be overly strict in interpreting God's laws. Having compassion for others' needs is also important. That is also a requirement of God's law: "Love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom 13:10). In attempting to loosen up the Pharisees from being overly strict, Jesus pointed out to them an incident in King David's life when he and his men ate "the bread of offering" which only the priests could lawfully eat (1 Sam 21:1-7). This was allowable because David and his men were hungry—just as were Jesus' disciples. Jesus also pointed out that for

a special reason the priests break the Sabbath law in order to minister in the temple. In doing this sacred work they were perfectly innocent of any wrongdoing. As Son of Man (who is also divine: Dan 7:13-14) Jesus has the authority to interpret the law: he interprets it in a merciful way. The Sabbath law does not oblige a person to go hungry in order to keep it.

Monday of the 23rd Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 6:6-11**

Jesus continued to visit the synagogues on the Sabbath where he found a waiting audience. This was a ready-made opportunity for him to teach about the arriving kingdom which the Old Testament had been awaiting for so long. On this occasion there was a man present with a withered right hand. The scribes and Pharisees were there to see if Jesus would cure on the Sabbath. Their overly strict interpretation of the Sabbath rest would surely clash with Jesus' understanding of the freedom to do works of mercy on the Sabbath. So Jesus dared to challenge them.

He, therefore, called the crippled man to come and stand before everyone so all could see. Jesus then proceeded to ask them, the scribes and Pharisees, whether it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath rather than evil, to save life rather than destroy it. For, all along these Jewish leaders had murderous thoughts toward Jesus. They were perpetrating evil while he was bent on doing good.

Jesus went on to command the man to stretch out his hand. He did so and his hand was restored immediately. These leaders became enraged and discussed what they might do with Jesus—instead of rejoicing in the cripple's restored hand. Surely God would not work evil on the Sabbath. "If God worked a miracle through this man," they might have thought, "perhaps we are wrong in our interpretation of the law." Besides, there are

exceptions to every rule: for example, the priests worked on the Sabbath to minister to the people.

But these leaders of the people were too hardened in their ways to be flexible in their thoughts. They were too deprived of love to be compassionate toward the crippled man.

Tuesday of the 23rd Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 6:12-19**

Jesus went off to the mountain alone where he spent the night in prayer. Spending some time in prayer was his way of preparing himself for important events. We also need to seek divine enlightenment for important undertakings. We tend to spend too little time in prayer. Jesus spent the whole night in prayer. This shows us what an important moment it was for Jesus.

Jesus chose twelve from among his followers to be his apostles. These represent the new Israel, the Church, similar to the twelve patriarchs of the Old Testament. He will give them his authority to preach and teach the Gospel. Peter is named first in this listing as he is also in the other three lists (Mt 10: 1-4; Mk 3: 13-19; Acts 1: 13). He is their leader. He is succeeded by an unbroken line of successors. Pope Francis is his 265th successor. Judas is always listed last as Jesus' betrayer.

These twelve are continually with Jesus so he can teach them more completely. They learn from him also by seeing how he lived. For example, they would see how often he would go off by himself to pray. Sometimes Jesus would take his disciples to be alone with them for further instruction. At other times the apostles heard him with the crowds or with other disciples.

The fact that people from Tyre and Sidon along the seacoast were present shows that Gentiles

also came to hear Jesus and to be healed by him. Unclean or evil spirits could not bear to be near the holiness of Jesus. He would command them to leave simply by word and they obeyed him. People realized Jesus' holiness. They simply would touch him to draw the power for good that was in him and they were all healed.

We are very fortunate to have such easy access to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. We can actually receive him, our glorified Lord. We also can be healed, especially of our spiritual ailments. He strengthens us to overcome our moral weaknesses. He nourishes us, builds up virtue in us so we can triumph over sin in our lives. We need to draw near him in the Tabernacle and make frequent Holy Hours to love and be loved by him.

Wednesday of the 23rd Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 6:20-26**

These verses are known as Jesus' "Sermon on the Plain": He "stood on a stretch of level ground" This can be compared to St. Matthew's "Sermon on the Mount". We are told that Jesus raised his eyes toward his disciples. Might this suggest that his eyes were previously lowered in prayerful recollection to be in communion with his Father?

In this sermon there are four blessings and four woes. Those blessed are fortunate and enjoy God's favor. Theirs is a graced condition. Rich rewards await them. But the woes express a condition of being disfavored by God. Misfortune will be their lot. They will experience distress, and suffering. Disaster awaits them. The poor are those who are lowly and depend on God for everything. They are detached from material possessions and so keep their focus on God. Therefore the Kingdom of God is theirs: God rules their hearts. Doing his will is their main concern.

The hungry are deprived of this world's goods. They look to God for their next meal. Perhaps they have little to eat so they are not slaves to their palates. Eating is a necessity to live but their primary hunger is for God. They are freed to hunger for God and his righteousness. The divine substance is their craving; that is what satisfies them. Those who weep are disenchanted with this world and all it has to offer. Their disillusionment has freed them from attachments to this world. So they turn to God for consolation. The discovery of the spiritual world will cause them to laugh with joy. This is but a foretaste of heaven that awaits them.

Being hated because of allegiance to Jesus and the love he engenders will be richly rewarded. Great strength and love to persevere cause sanctity to grow in leaps and bounds.

Great sorrow and distress await the rich who have succumbed to the pursuit of wealth and the luxury it provides. The consolation of their pleasures will die with their bankrupt lives. Those who live to eat and gorge themselves with earthly food instead of God cut themselves off from the spiritual nourishment which alone satisfies. Thus they are left to go hungry through all eternity. Laughter incited by earthly pleasures will die with them. Nothing remains but to grieve and weep as they perish.

Being spoken well of because we please people rather than God leaves us without any spiritual substance to support us. We have nothing to stand on before God. Only sorrow awaits us.

Thursday of the 23rd Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 6:27-38

The command to love our enemies must have been shocking to the Jews. They were simply commanded to love their fellow countrymen. Jesus says that our love must have

no boundaries; we must extend God's love in us even to our enemies, just as he does.

What does that love consist of? Jesus explains, do good to them; bless them by asking God's favor upon them; and then pray for them. Rather than seek revenge on one who strikes you, show kindness instead, without any rancor in your heart. Be generous still more toward those who take advantage of you. Give until it hurts or even until it hurts no more. Be like God who never stops giving. Allow others to take what is yours without demanding it back. Treat them the way you want them to treat you.

Loving others who love us is not any better than the way sinners love. We must do better than that! Jesus challenges us to be generous beyond measure, such as lending money without expecting any return. He repeats again the command to love our enemies and to do good to them. Such as lending, expecting nothing back. In this way we will be like our generous Father, God. We will then truly be his children who act like him. He does good even to the ungrateful and the wicked. We are to show unbounded love by being merciful to those who do not deserve it the way God, our Father does.

We need to evaluate others' actions which require a form of judging. But even if we determine that their acts were sinful, it is not for us to judge their consciences. Thus we must not condemn them. That is for God to do if they deserve it.

We must readily forgive others. Then God will forgive us our sins. The superabundance of God's grace poured out upon us through Jesus' suffering, death, resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit prompts us to give to God and to others without measure. In this way we open ourselves to receive limitless outpourings of love and grace, and many other gifts from God. The more spiritual we become by such loving selflessness, the more we will become one with God who is love.

Friday of the 23rd Week in Ordinary Time
Lk 6:39-42

We begin this passage with, “Can a blind person guide a blind person?” The answer is “no”! They will both fall into a pit. In other words, Jesus’ disciples must become enlightened by Jesus in order to be able to lead others. He must remove his own blindness or ignorance about the spiritual life of the Kingdom in order to be able to teach and lead others. He must also become aware of his own sins and selfish habits to be able to see clearly the faults of others to be able to help them.

Jesus’ disciples must learn from him and become like him to be effective leaders and teachers in the Kingdom. Jesus was divine yet he humbly walked the way of humans. Even when the disciples have become fully enlightened, they must be humble like their master and not lord it over others, or think themselves better or superior to those they minister.

A true disciple of Jesus must be conscious of his own lowliness and sinfulness. He must be aware of his own lack of virtue and generosity. He will realize how imperfect he is when he compares himself to Jesus’ sinlessness and generous love for others.

A true disciple examines himself, is aware of dominant faults and works at overcoming them. In that way he avoids seeing the defects of character in his neighbor while ignoring his own, or even being totally unaware that his sinful attitudes are even worse than those of his neighbor. He must first correct his own sinful habits before he will be in a position to help others correct theirs. The difficulty he experiences in the reformation of his own life will establish him in compassion and knowledge to be able to show commiseration for others. Humbled by self-knowledge he will approach the wounded with delicacy and compassion, realizing that he is himself wounded and in need of a deeper conversion.

Saturday of the 23rd Week in Ordinary Time
Lk 6:43-49

A person, who has been enlightened by Jesus and has worked with himself in cooperation with God’s grace to overcome his sinful tendencies, begins to live a virtuous life. The fruits of his life are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5: 22-23). He is like a good tree that bears good fruit. That is how you can tell a good person from an evil one: these salient virtues are absent in the latter. Instead, he will produce certain vices or evil habits. St. Paul calls them works of the flesh, such as fornication, impurity, jealousy, anger, quarrels, selfishness, drunkenness...(See Gal 5:19-21).

You can tell who a person is simply by observing his speech: “from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks”. Course speech and vulgarity will reveal his heart and mind. Harshness and unkindness show how shallow his love is. Impatience and anger demonstrate his lack of fortitude and so his defective union with God. These various vices are expressed in a person’s words charged with various emotions.

Calling upon God’s name in prayer is needful. This supposes that we try to do his will. Otherwise, our words mean nothing and are ineffective. Listening to Jesus’ words must lead us to carrying them out. Such efforts build moral strength in us. It’s like building our house on a rock foundation. The trials of life cannot destroy it. It is important, therefore, that we meditate on God’s word daily. That word will prompt us to carry it out in our daily lives through the practice of virtue.

But a casual listening, without the intent of carrying it out through virtuous living, will be ineffective. Our moral character will remain weak. We will be unable to resist the temptations of life. This will bring about our spiritual ruin.

Monday of the 24th Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 7:1-10

Jesus spent much of his time teaching. His very nature was to reveal the truth: “I am the Truth,” he said (Jn 14:6). There was an urgency within his very being to speak the words of eternal life. The people who lived in darkness had such a need to hear his enlightening words—just as we do. After he had finished his teaching he went to Capernaum.

There was a centurion there, a military officer commanding a hundred men; he was probably in the service of Herod Antipas. This centurion had a valuable slave who was about to die. He heard about Jesus. Let us hope that we do our part also to make him known. The centurion sent a delegation of Jewish elders to ask him to come and save the life of his slave. These interceded for the centurion to strongly urge Jesus to come to the aid of this deserving man. He had even built the synagogue for them—he had such a deep respect for the Jewish faith and nation.

So Jesus went with them. We see here the power of intercessory prayer. When Jesus was only a short distance from the centurion’s house, he sent friends to express to Jesus that he did not feel worthy to have him enter under his roof. He was truly a humble man; he may have also been aware that it was considered unclean for a Jew to enter the house of a Gentile. He explains to Jesus through his friends that he did not feel worthy to come to Jesus himself. This good man believed in the power of Jesus’ word; he had only to say it and his servant would be healed. The centurion was familiar with ordering his soldiers and they would obey him. He believed that Jesus had the authority to command the illness of his slave to leave and it would depart.

Jesus was astonished at the man’s faith—a faith greater than any he had experienced in Israel. When the messengers returned to the house, they

found the slave completely healed. Here we see the power of faith and how it caused the slave to be cured at a distance. This is what our faith does for us on a spiritual level when we go to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. We are reminded to have that same kind of humble faith when we pray, “Lord I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”

Tuesday of the 24th Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 7:11-17

The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible tells us that Nain is a “small Galilean village about six miles southeast of Nazareth”. Jesus was being accompanied by his disciples and a large crowd. As he drew near the gate of the city he met a funeral procession. The only son of a widowed mother was being carried out for burial. At the sight, Jesus’ heart was moved with pity. In losing her son, she was facing great hardship. He would have been her only means of support as she grew older. For her husband had already died. Now she would depend on the charity of others to survive (see Deut 26: 12). There was no social security otherwise. Besides the loss of her son, this mother had other reasons to mourn and shed tears. Jesus was saddened to experience her plight. Anticipating what he would do, he tells her not to weep. He then touched the stretcher on which the dead man was being carried. The bearers then came to a stop. Jesus then commanded the young man to arise. The dead man suddenly sat up and began to speak! Jesus then gave him to his mother. The people were astonished and filled with reverence for God.

Jesus does not become unclean by touching the bier; instead, he communicates life by his touch and life-giving word. This helps us to understand how important it is to draw near to Jesus and listen to his word.

We can see why St. Luke calls Jesus “Lord” in verse 13. This was the Old Testament Greek word to translate God’s personal name, “Yahweh”. Through this miracle, the creative life-giving power in Jesus is clearly seen. The people praised God in their amazement and exclaimed that “A great prophet has arisen in our midst”. This episode parallels Elijah’s resuscitation of the widow’s son in 1 Kgs 17: 17-24: the words “gave him to his mother” are quoted from this incident. We can see why the people see Jesus as a great prophet, a new Elijah has appeared in their midst. Because of such a miracle, Jesus’ reputation quickly spread throughout the surrounding area.

Wednesday of the 24th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 7:31-35**

“The people of this generation” refers to the scribes and Pharisees and their followers who rejected both John the Baptist and Jesus. It was impossible to satisfy them. Jesus compares them to children playing in the marketplace. One group complained to the other that they refused to cooperate with them. They played the flute as at a wedding feast, but they would not take part in the fun by dancing. They sang a mournful song as at a funeral, but again, they would not play with them by pretending to cry. This parallels the situation when John the Baptist came preaching the imminent arrival of divine judgment. He called for repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. They refused to accept his baptism as a sign that they had sinned and were sorry. Instead, they criticized John who was dressed in clothing made of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist. He came from the desert doing penance, following a very meager diet. They considered him to be a mad man or possessed by a demon. John was too serious and penitential for them. They rejected his approach and refused to repent in cooperation with God’s call.

On the other hand, Jesus came with a different style of ministry. He mingled with sinners, sharing their wine and meals. He proclaimed God’s mercy and forgiveness. The wedding feast was already beginning with the arrival of Jesus. The heavenly bridegroom had come to take his bride. This was a time of joy and celebration. The water turned wine at Cana and the other miracles were definite signs of the Messiah’s arrival. But again, the scribes and Pharisees refused to take part. They only knew how to criticize. They claimed Jesus was a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

“Wisdom is vindicated by all her children” means that God’s children recognize the wisdom expressed by John and Jesus. They realized that the kingdom of God was arriving through their preaching, and they gladly accepted the invitation to enter the kingdom of God.

Thursday of the 24th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 7:36-50**

It is interesting to note that Jesus accepted invitations to eat out. In those days instead of sitting at table as we do, people reclined on low couches near the floor to eat at banquets. They leaned upon a cushion on their left side and ate with their right hand. This explains how the woman stood at Jesus feet while also standing behind him.

We are not told what kind of a sinful woman she was; perhaps she was a prostitute. The conversion and overflowing love of such a person shows what power is contained in Jesus’ word. Perhaps she had heard him speak on another occasion. The woman became overwhelmed with grief for her sinful past after drawing so close to the Holy One of God. Her abundant tears fell on Jesus’ feet, so she began to wipe them with her hair. She kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment

from her alabaster flask (an elegant stone jar). The flowing ointment is like her grateful love being poured out upon Jesus in boundless gratitude for delivering her from her sinful bondage.

Since Jesus is divine he knew what Simon was thinking and had misgivings about the kind of woman he was allowing to touch him. So Jesus addressed Simon in the form of a parable. Two persons owed a lender, one 500 coins, the other 50. Neither could repay him so he forgave both of them. Which one, Jesus asked, would love him more? The answer: the one to whom he forgave more—which was correct.

Then Jesus began to praise the woman for being so gracious to him. She made up for Simon's lack of cordiality as a host. What he failed to do in duty as host she accomplished. Her washing Jesus' feet with her tears took the place of Simon's neglect to wash Jesus' feet in welcome; her continued kissing of his feet replaced the absence of his; her anointing Jesus' feet substituted for Simon's failure to anoint his head with oil.

All of these cordial acts were expressions of her grateful love to Jesus. Her great love shows that her many sins had been forgiven. Simon's impoverished love shows that little had been forgiven him. His lack of self-knowledge regarding his sinfulness rendered him unrepentant and indisposed for forgiveness.

Jesus assured the woman that her sins were forgiven, explaining that it was her faith in him that drew divine forgiveness from him. Jesus must truly be divine as evidenced by his freeing this woman from all her sins and filling her with love.

Friday of the 24th Week in Ordinary Time Lk 8:1-3

At first Jesus preached around Capernaum going from synagogue to synagogue where he found an awaiting audience. Now we see him going from one town and village to another—always proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The promised kingdom of God was arriving in himself. He was passionately engaged in making it known. He was rejuvenating the old stale law as it was taught by the scribes and Pharisees. His task in preaching was to bring it to perfection. The promised Spirit would be the soul to animate it. The twelve apostles stayed close to him and were constantly learning from his teaching as well as observing his virtuous actions.

To have women closely associated with him in ministry was something unusual in Jesus' day. We recall how his disciples were utterly surprised to see him talking to the woman at the well (Jn 4:27). Men were discouraged from associating with women in public. The urgency of Jesus' mission left no time for him and his disciples to settle for a trade. Thus it was a great assistance to Jesus and his mission that several women followed Jesus and provided for him and his apostles out of their means. These women felt very indebted to Jesus for having been freed from evil spirits and infirmities. Mary Magdalene was one of those from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons. She came from Magdala, a village from the west coast of the Sea of Galilee, just south of Capernaum. The reference to seven devils simply means that she was freed from a serious illness. Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward was another, along with Susanna. These women were faithful to Jesus to the end and saw him crucified (Lk 24:49). They were the ones also who visited Jesus' tomb on Easter Sunday. They met the angel at the empty tomb and went to announce the good news to the apostles (Lk 24:10).

Mary Magdalene lingered around the tomb so that the risen Jesus revealed himself to her. She went to the apostles and announced that she had seen Jesus who had risen from the dead. Her faithfulness was thus rewarded. The other women also received the privilege of seeing the risen Christ (Mt 28:8-10). They were told to go and evangelize the brothers with the good news of Jesus' resurrection.

Saturday of the 24th Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 8:4-15

Large crowds of people were attracted to Jesus; they gathered around him to hear him speak. His words captivated their attention. There were many people pressing upon him to listen to him. His words are full of grace. They ought to command our attention too. They are spirit and life (Jn 6:63). We must be like the crowds who pressed upon Jesus to listen to his words. We can easily enter into his presence by activating the virtue and power of faith. We can take up the Bible and read/listen to his words. Jesus taught the people by means of parables. He told stories and made comparisons drawn from nature and human life in order to explain some aspect of the kingdom of God. In this way he kept the people's attention. He used the most ordinary things in daily life to shed light on the deepest supernatural mysteries. The disciples asked Jesus to explain to them the meaning of the parable. Jesus was happy to explain to them the mysteries of the kingdom in greater detail. The rest of the people only heard the parable—they were not that interested and failed to ask for a further explanation. They heard what Jesus said but their lack of interest prevented them from understanding what Jesus meant by the parable.

Jesus now begins to explain to his enquiring disciples the meaning of the parable of the

sower. The seed sown on the path eaten by the birds represents those who hear God's word without understanding it. They are not interested enough in it to apply themselves to study and meditate on it. They have other interests. They have been resisting God's grace all along. They prefer to do their own will. They have hardened their hearts, their consciences towards God's word and will, and the devil prevents them from remembering it.

The seed on rocky ground that is scorched by the sun and withers represents a person who lacks spiritual depth, commitment and fortitude. He does not keep the word when he is tested by trial. He keeps the word only when it is convenient. He abandons it whenever it calls for self-sacrifice. He would need to meditate on the word and form deep convictions about it. Prayer is needed for him to become more firmly united to God and his will. Then he would be strengthened to keep the word in times of trial.

The seed sown among thorns is the one which worldly anxiety, riches, and pleasures of life choke and prevent from bearing fruit. The word is smothered by earthly concerns. Business and pleasure seeking consume all time and energy. Nothing remains for reading the word of God and prayer. There is a desperate need for prayer with the word of God to gradually reestablish communion with God and restore him in his rightful first place. Strengthened by prayerful union with God, the person can then regulate his business affairs around God and begin to practice temperance and self-mastery in his pleasure appetite. Thus the life of the spirit can dominate life so that the word can produce spiritual fruitfulness.

The seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word of God, understands it, and bears an abundant yield. God's word is awfully powerful. His word empowers us to do God's will and achieve the end for which he sent it: our sanctification. We

must take that word into our hearts and ponder it like Mary did (Lk 2:19, 51) so that it can sanctify us. Depending on success in this, some will bear spiritual fruit 30-fold, others 60-fold, and others 100-fold.

Monday of the 25th Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 8:16-18

Jesus is the light of the world (Jn 8:12). He is the “true light, which enlightens everyone” (Jn 1:9). “In him was life and the life was the light of men” (Jn 1:4). Baptism has plunged us into Christ. We have been informed by his life and are fully illuminated. We are glowing with the life of Christ, the life of God. That is why St. Paul can say, “you are light in the Lord” (Eph 5:8). And Jesus can say, “you are the light of the world.... Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father” (Mt 5:14, 16). Our very nature as children of God is to shine. Again St. Paul brings that out when he says, “All of you are children of the light and children of the day” (1 Thes 5:5).

We are called to enlighten our darkened world by our virtuous behavior and by our illuminating words. Jesus’ words must become so absorbed by us that we will speak his words on every occasion that calls for it. In that way we will overpower the darkness of error, sin and evil. When the light shines, darkness flees.

Jesus often spoke to the Apostles in private but now the time has come to speak that word in public. We must enlighten all those who are ignorant of Jesus’ illuminating wisdom and word.

We need to listen carefully to Jesus’ illuminating words and retain them. Once we have taken that word into ourselves it will continue to enlighten us ever more completely. This occurs when we

reflect and meditate on that word. It increases our understanding of mysteries of our faith.

But if that word is left unused and kept from shining on others, it eventually loses its power and dwindles to nothing. We lose it and completely forget it. It is taken from us and lost.

Tuesday of the 25th Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 8:19-21

Jesus’ mother Mary, and his brothers, attempted to visit with him. We remind you again, the term “brothers” were actually relatives of Jesus. Mary had no other children than Jesus. She remained a virgin throughout her life. These “brothers” are never called the children of Mary—only Jesus is. At least two of them, James and Joseph are sons of a different Mary in Matthew 27:36.

The fact that Jesus entrusted his Mother to the beloved disciple’s care as he was dying implies that she had no children other than Jesus to care for her (Jn 19:26-27). The word “brother” in Hebrew has a broader meaning than blood brother. Since Hebrew had no word for “cousin”, the Bible uses the word brother for relatives other than blood brothers. In the Greek Old Testament a brother can be a close cousin (1Chron 23:21-22), a more remote kinsman (Deut 23:7; 2 Kgs 10:13-14), an uncle or a nephew (Gen 13:8), or covenant relationship (2 Sam 1:26; cf 1 Sam 18:3). (See CCC 500.) These close relatives of Jesus came to see Jesus but were unable because of the crowd. Someone mentioned to Jesus that his Mother and brothers were standing outside wishing to see him. Jesus’ response was, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it”.

Jesus’ answer shows that he places primary importance on his spiritual family. At first it might

seem that he is not including his mother as part of his spiritual family. But upon further reflection we realize that Jesus is placing his mother as the one who heard God's word and kept it more perfectly than anyone else. She is the supreme example of a receptive hearer who was obedient to that word. We recall her response to the angel revealing God's will for her: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). "...and Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart" (Lk 2:19; 52). Moreover, Mary counseled others to "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5).

Wednesday of the 25th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 9:1-6**

Jesus summoned the twelve Apostles to send them on a mission. From where did he summon them? Had they returned momentarily to their homes? At any rate, he gave them his own authority and power over the demons and to cure diseases. These were signs that God himself and his rule or reign were arriving. His presence and power seen in these miracles gave evidence of this fact.

The grace of the Kingdom is an environment the devils cannot live in. The Kingdom proclaims the truth of God's love and forgiveness. The devils are liars by nature—they cannot speak the truth. The devils live in hate and are unable to love and forgive. Above all, the Apostles were sent to evangelize, to reveal the good news of the arrival of God's presence and forgiving love. The Kingdom was beginning to be given. It will be fully given and revealed in the paschal mystery. Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit will bring it to completion. We tend to take this wonderful gift of God for granted; or we keep it to ourselves. But we must be concerned about those who are not benefitting from its fruits. We need to make

known the Kingdom and the revelation of God's love and forgiveness, and the eternal life he gives—as far superior to our earthly goods. We must evangelize! Any degree of love in us calls us to this mission. This gospel is summoning you to engage in this apostolate. Jesus himself is calling you to this! On this occasion Jesus tells his Apostles to depend on God and the people they are evangelizing for their needs such as food and shelter and other provisions. He directs them to remain in one house to avoid distraction and competition. In times of peace and freedom from persecution that is how they are to conduct themselves. However, when they are in a hostile environment they must learn to provide for themselves and be on guard (see Lk 22:35-38).

The Apostles are to have a forward thrust in their mission. If someone rejects them and their message, they are to shake the dust from their feet as a sign of judgment and complete disassociation from these unbelievers. These will have to answer and face judgment for rejecting God's love. The Apostles, however, are to move on to other areas to proclaim the good news, that is, to evangelize with joy God's marvelous merciful love. This is what the Apostles did: they set out and went from village to village proclaiming the good news, giving evidence of God's special power and love present in them by curing diseases everywhere.

Thursday of the 25th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 9:7-9**

Our passage opens with Herod the Tetrarch hearing about and wondering who Jesus was. This is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who was ruling at the time when Jesus was born. Herod Antipas ruled over Galilee and Persia from 4BC to AD 39. His official title, Tetrarch, means "ruler of a quarter" of the territory his father ruled.

Herod was curious to know about Jesus concerning whom he was hearing so much. Let us hope that more of us would be curious to know more about Jesus. This would lead us to meditate at greater length on his words and actions. We would want to spend more time being with him present in the tabernacles in our churches.

Some thought that Jesus was actually John the Baptist who had risen from the dead. At one time Herod himself thought that Jesus might be John the Baptist whom he had beheaded but now risen from the dead (Mk 6:16). His conscience must have bothered him greatly for having executed that holy man. Herod was also superstitious.

Others thought that Jesus might be Elijah. God had promised through the prophet Malachi that he would send Elijah before the day of the Lord to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers (Mal 3:23-24). Jesus actually explained this passage by saying that Elijah had already come in John the Baptist but they did not recognize him and had done to him everything they wished (Mt 17:11-12).

Some people also thought that perhaps Jesus was one of the ancient prophets who had returned from the dead. Some thought that Jesus might be The Prophet that Moses spoke about. He said, "A prophet like me will the Lord your God, raise up for you from among your own kinsmen; to him you shall listen" (Deut 18:15).

Herod had reached the conclusion that Jesus was not John the Baptist. He had beheaded him: he was no longer around. So he was anxious to meet Jesus. He kept trying to see him. He was curious. His hardened heart was simply curious to see Jesus. One day he would get his chance, but Jesus kept silent and would not satisfy his curiosity (Lk 23:6-9).

Friday of the 25th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 9:18-22**

Jesus was praying in seclusion. He often prayed this way to maintain his spiritual strength. In this way, free from all distractions, he could enter into an exclusive communion with the Father. In this instance he was preparing himself to discuss his Messiahship with his disciples. They had a misconception of what his role was. They needed to understand that he was a spiritual messiah, not a military or political one. We too ought to prepare ourselves by prayer for the important events in our lives.

The disciples were often with Jesus so they could learn from him. He prepared them to be ministers of the kingdom when he would leave them. He would empower them with the gift of the Spirit obtained through his paschal mystery.

Jesus asked his disciples who the crowds say he was. Some thought he was John the Baptist returned from the dead. Others thought he was Elijah who was due to return to prepare people for the Day of the Lord, the Day of Judgment. Still others believed Jesus to be one of the prophets who had risen from the dead. These were all popular misconceptions. We are reminded by this not to believe or go along with the crowd. They are often misguided and mistaken. St. John goes so far as to say, "The whole world is under the power of the evil one" (1 Jn 5:19). And the evil one, the devil, is the father of lies (Jn 8:44). That is why St. John can say, "Do not love the world or the things of the world... For all that is in the world, sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life..." (1 Jn 2:15-16). This helps us to understand and explain where these immodest dress styles come from.

Peter was inspired by God with the correct answer to Jesus' question. He spoke for the twelve that Jesus was the Messiah. But because people

had the wrong idea of the role of the Messiah, Jesus directed his disciples not to tell anyone. He wanted to be free to carry out his spiritual mission of preaching about the kingdom and laying the foundation for this Church. (Compare Mt 16:18).

Saturday of the 25th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 9:43-45**

“All were astonished by the majesty of God” in Jesus. He had just cast out an evil spirit from a boy. The disciples had tried to do so but failed. The father of the boy pleaded with Jesus for his only child. When he was presented to Jesus the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy. The people were astonished at the power coming out of Jesus and they could see the majesty of God being manifested through him.

The disciples really never got used to Jesus’ powerful deeds. They were amazed at him. But there was a danger that they would think that Jesus would use that power to deliver his people from Roman domination. He could be a new David to overcome the political enemies of the people. With all this power at his command he was seen as invulnerable and invincible. That is why Jesus had to hasten to explain the kind of Messiah that he was.

Jesus had already preached to his disciples that he would be rejected by the leaders of the people, suffer greatly, be killed and on the third day be raised. He told the disciples this after they declared him to be the Messiah (Lk 9:22).

Now for the second time Jesus again tries to correct the misunderstanding of the role of the Messiah. He restates what he had said: “Pay attention to what I am telling you.” It is important that his disciples grasp what he is telling them: “The Son of Man is to be handed over to men.” But

they did not understand this saying; its meaning was hidden from them so that they should not understand it. They failed to understand, as also the rest of the people that Jesus’ spiritual Messiahship consisted of fulfilling the role of the Suffering Servant described in Isaiah, “a man of suffering... pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins, upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed” (Is 53:3, 5).

The disciples did not understand all of this, and they were afraid to ask Jesus about what he said. The whole mystery had to unfold before they could grasp it.

Monday of the 26th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 9:46-50**

The Apostles were still contaminated with worldly attitudes. They were arguing for first place with a prideful view of being more important and in a position to be served and honored. This would foster self-centeredness and egoism. In this way the sinful self would gain the center of attention and cause pride to be inflated to an even greater degree.

But Jesus came to teach us spiritual values: how to become more like God, and so restore the divine image. In order to demonstrate the proper attitude of a follower of his, Jesus took a child and placed it by his side. Then he explained that to receive such a child for Jesus’ sake is to receive Jesus himself, and at the same time it is to receive the Father—God himself—who sent Jesus.

As if to say, the Apostles need to be as free from ambition as this child. A child has no legal rights: he is a nobody before the law. The adult apostle must be so self-effaced that he is like this child. In this way the grace of God has the freedom to grow and produce sanctity in these apostles. Thus

the sinful arrogance in human nature must be totally subdued so that God-likeness can thrive in Jesus' followers. In that way "the one who is least among all of you is the one who is the greatest." He is the one in whom God's presence is strongest; he has the most love and the most humility; he is the one, therefore, who will serve the rest and be most like Jesus and God. There, sinful pride is non-existent. Humility at the service of love reigns. No obstacle to loving service remains. Love is free to reign.

The Apostle John saw someone casting out demons in Jesus' name. He tried to prevent him, because he was not one of the Apostles or one of Jesus' followers. John wanted to limit the right to use Jesus' power to cast out demons. But Jesus corrected that attitude. He explained that "whoever is not against you is for you." It is permissible, therefore, for others outside of the group to use his power for good.

Tuesday of the 26th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 9:51-56**

This section of St. Luke's Gospel begins as one long journey to Jerusalem where he will suffer, die, arise, and be taken up into glory. Looking towards accomplishing his great act of redemption in Jerusalem, Jesus determined to journey there. This determination reminds us of the Suffering Servant who "set my face like flint" to do God's will and accomplish his mission.

Jesus sent messengers ahead of him to prepare for his reception in a Samaritan village. But they would not welcome him there because his destination was Jerusalem. The Samaritans refused to accept Jesus because he was on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The Samaritans had their own sanctuary on Mt. Gerizim. This reminds us that there was animosity between the Jews and Samaritans. The

Samaritans were once part of the northern tribes of Israel. But their ancestors had intermarried with foreign immigrants and worshipped foreign gods (2 Kgs 17:24). They worshipped in their temple on Mt. Gerizim—not Jerusalem.

This rejection enraged James and John who wanted to send fire from heaven to consume them just as Elijah had done to the captain and the fifty men sent by King Ahaziah (2 Kgs 1:9-12). This episode helps us to understand why Jesus called James and John "sons of thunder" (Mk 3:17). But Jesus would not associate himself with Elijah's behavior. Just as he had preached tolerance, so here he responds with tolerance. Here we recall how Jesus cured ten lepers including one Samaritan. Jesus praised him as the only one who returned to give thanks and to have faith in Jesus.

This shows us how Jesus forgave readily and did not have resentment or hold a grudge. It is remarkable how Jesus made a Samaritan the hero in his parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37). Jesus rebuked and reprimanded James and John for being so intolerant. He simply made a detour and journeyed to another village. There is more than one way to accomplish a mission. If we find that one plan fails, it is always good to have a second one. A second or third option circumvents frustration and precludes undue anger.

Wednesday of the 26th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 9:57-62**

Jesus was very intently journeying to Jerusalem where he will be taken up in glory. He had a mission to complete for the Father. The Father's will for the salvation of the whole world was very important to Jesus. He would think of the multitude who would be blessed by the completion of his mission, the paschal mystery.

One person was so entranced by the beauty of Jesus' Person he exclaimed that he would follow Jesus wherever he went. There was something magnetic about him. It must have been the divinity in Jesus that people felt compelled to be with him and desired to follow him wherever he went. Jesus gave a warning response: foxes and birds have places to rest, but he had nowhere to rest his head. In other words, to be a follower of Jesus is demanding. Be prepared to face hardship and inconvenience if you wish to follow him. In that response Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man spoken of by Daniel (7:13-14). Although he is a lowly human being, he is coming on the clouds as the glorified Messiah.

Jesus invited one of his disciples to follow him: to join him in proclaiming the kingdom of God that was being revealed in Jesus. The disciple felt that he was not able to go just then. He needed to wait until his father died before he could follow Jesus. Jesus responded that the business of proclaiming the kingdom of God for the salvation of the world was so urgent that the disciple must put the kingdom even before important family matters—even this sacred duty of burying his father. The kingdom of God must enjoy priority over all earthly matters. Let those who are spiritually dead take care of burying those who are physically dead.

Another disciple wished to follow Jesus but he needed to delay. He needed to spend a few days to bid farewell to his family. Jesus felt that he was too attached to his family. His farewell business would cause too much of a delay. The message of the kingdom to save people from the entrapments of this world is so urgent one must follow the call without delay. Several days of waiting are intolerable. The needs of the kingdom come before even these family obligations. Entry into eternal life through the kingdom is an urgent matter beyond all earthly concerns.

Thursday of the 26th Week in Ordinary Time Lk 10:1-12

Besides the twelve Apostles representing the new Israel and their patriarchs, Jesus had others who associated closely with him called disciples. He was teaching them also to evangelize the people. They were to bring the peace of the kingdom to the people and their homes through personal contact.

These seventy-two remind us of the seventy elders God commanded Moses to gather together. Then God took some of the spirit that was on Moses and bestowed it upon them to share the burden of ministering to the people (Num 11:16-17, 24-25). We disciples who also have been taught by Jesus must feel responsible to share that knowledge with others so that they too may experience the joy and life of the kingdom. This is especially true for those in *Come, Lord Jesus!* who have experienced more keenly the blessedness of the life of the kingdom. Jesus sent the seventy-two out in pairs for mutual support and to generate divine love wherever they went. The multitudes are in desperate need of evangelizers. You must make them realize what they are missing. They are in dire need of the blessings of the kingdom that you have received through *Come, Lord Jesus!* Even in Jesus' own day the laborers were too few for the vast number who needed to be evangelized. We too need to pray and labor that more will help proclaim the Good News of the divine Jesus and the super life that he gives to make our human lives so much more meaningful and valuable. There is an urgent need to harvest souls for Christ.

Lambs are quite defenseless. The disciples are without weapons. Yet they will be at times in a hostile environment as if among wolves. But God will watch over them. They are to depend on divine providence for their livelihood. Those whom they nourish spiritually through the proclamation of the Gospel will support them.

They must not waste precious time by endless greetings along the way. They must spend their time evangelizing. Their mission is urgent. They are to offer peace to each household. If that peace is accepted, the receivers will be blessed indeed! Otherwise, that peace will return to the disciple. They are to stay in the same house to avoid competition and distraction. They can eat and drink whatever is set before them. They are no longer restricted by dietary laws. The believing community is to support the evangelizers so they can give the Gospel their undivided time and attention. They are given the power to heal the sick and announce that the kingdom of God is at hand for them. The disciples must shake the dust off their feet in judgment against those who refuse to accept the Good News. It will be just too bad for them! If Sodom was destroyed by fire and brimstone, the punishment for those who reject the Gospel will even be worse! The disciple must move on to those who are receptive to the Good News.

Friday of the 26th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 10:13-16**

Jesus backed the authenticity of his Person and message by miraculous cures, even to raising people from the dead. Surely this would have led people to believe in him so that they would regret their sins, overcome their sinful habits, and begin to live holy lives. But such conversions did not take place in Chorazin and Bethsaida, two cities north of the Sea of Galilee located about five miles from Jesus' headquarters in Capernaum.

Surely, one would expect that the very presence of the Son of God, his powerful preaching, and marvelous deeds would convince these people. But his efforts proved unsuccessful. They were so deeply entrenched in their vices that they refused to budge. Their passions blinded them

from clearly seeing the truth of Jesus' actions. They were so addicted to their sinful pleasures that they failed to cede to Jesus' grace-filled words and deeds. They preferred to suffer the pains of eternal damnation to giving up their selfish, sinful lifestyles. Jesus lashed out at them in anger in an effort to move them to repentance.

He assured them that on the Day of Judgment they will be condemned more severely than the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon, located north of Palestine on the coast of Phoenicia. These pagan towns would have expressed their sorrow for sin by wearing sackcloth and ashes if they had enjoyed the privilege of hearing Jesus. But these Jewish towns had received so much from Jesus, yet were totally unresponsive. Jesus leveled the same condemnation on the people of Capernaum who likewise failed to repent. They will be thrust down to Sheol/Hades, or the netherworld, away from God and eternal punishment. As sinful as the people of Sodom were, even they would have repented and been spared of destruction had they experienced Jesus and his works. Capernaum will be judged more severely than those notorious sinners. Jesus used such scathing language in an attempt to shake them out of their plightful, sinful condition.

The one who hears the disciple proclaim Jesus' gospel, hears Jesus himself. When we hear the reader proclaim the sacred readings at Mass, it is Jesus himself who is speaking through him or her. The one who rejects the disciple is actually rejecting Jesus himself and his words of eternal life. Such a person is rejecting the Father who sent Jesus. What folly for one to reject the friendship of God himself as well as the supreme life of heaven he is being offered.

Saturday of the 26th Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 10:17-24

The seventy-two disciples returned from their mission and reported to Jesus how successful their mission had been. In a similar way each week we give an account of our mission of evangelization to each other.

The disciples reported how the demons were subjected to them who were acting in the power of his name or person. Jesus concurred with their report saying that he saw Satan fall from the sky like lightning. He had given his disciples power over the forces of evil as symbolized by “snakes and scorpions”. God was truly protecting them. As long as they were living on the level of spirit the tempter had nothing to hold on to them.

That moment of victory over Satan and the powers of evil gave great joy to Jesus. He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit. He broke out in praise of his Father for having revealed to these simple disciples what he had kept hidden from the worldly wise. Jesus is caught up in thanksgiving and praise of his heavenly Father who has graciously willed what had taken place.

Jesus goes on to explain that everything had been given over to him by his Father. These beloved disciples were the Father’s gift to Jesus. It is the Father who had graced them to be receptive to Jesus and the training he had given them. Jesus went on to explain that only the Father really knows the Son—for he is divine. No one else is able to fathom those depths of his divine personality. Likewise, only Jesus is able to know the divine Father with whom he is one (Jn 10:30). They equally enjoy the divine nature which they possess together.

Jesus is able to share some of this knowledge that he has of the Father with those disciples of

his who are well disposed. He can communicate this mystical knowledge to those who are pure of heart through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In this ecstatic moment Jesus continues to share his state of exultation stating how blest are the eyes of those disciples who are seeing and experiencing this moment in their lives: the arrival of the kingdom that is being revealed through them, these lowly disciples. The prophets and kings of old desired to see and hear what these disciples were seeing and hearing, but only now is it being revealed through these humble disciples. What a triumphant moment Jesus and his disciples could now celebrate—it was a moment of extreme happiness for all of them.

Monday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 10: 25-37

An expert in the Mosaic Law stood up to question Jesus to test his knowledge of the Scriptures. He asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asked the questioner to state what was written in the law. He quoted for Jesus the greatest commandment which is to love God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself. He is quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 for the first part, which is to love God; for the second part, love of neighbor, the scribe quotes Leviticus 19:18. Jesus congratulates the man for answering correctly. However, attaining eternal life is not just knowing what to do but actually putting that knowledge into practice. So Jesus concludes, “Do this and you will live”.

The lawyer questioned Jesus still further wanting to know who is his neighbor—as if to say, when do I have to start loving? Among the different people I meet, which ones do I love? a fellow Jew, a proselyte: one who joined our religion, or even a foreigner who is a pagan (one who believes in false gods)? Jesus then proceeded to enlighten his

questioner by telling a story, a parable. There was a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho who came upon robbers. They beat him, stripped him and went away leaving him half dead. A Jewish priest passed by without attending to the victim. He hurried on lest he be attacked by the same robbers who might still be hiding nearby. Besides, if the man is dead, he did not want to become ritually unclean by touching him. The Levite, who served in the Temple, also kept on going out of fear. It was too dangerous to stop. When a Samaritan came by, who were so hated by the Jews because they were heretics and intermarried with foreigners, he was moved with compassion at the sight of the plight of the wounded man. He stopped and painstakingly tended to his wounds, placed him on his donkey and took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he had to leave, but he gave the inn keeper money to care for the man. If more was required he would reimburse him on his way back. Clearly this Samaritan is the one who acted as neighbor. The conclusion is that our concern is not who is my neighbor as my being a neighbor to all who are in need of my love. We pray for divine grace to be so moved by loving compassion that we too will forget our needs to care for those in distress. Anyone in need or in distress is our neighbor and requires our assistance.

Tuesday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 10: 38-42

We learn from John's gospel that Martha and Mary lived in a village called Bethany. They had a brother named Lazarus (Jn 11). They were close friends of Jesus.

Martha welcomed Jesus to their home; she seems to have been the older of the two sisters and the one in charge. Mary, her sister, sat at Jesus' feet, listening to him speak. It was remarkable for a woman to assume the posture of a disciple at the Master's feet in those days. Jesus did not allow

the customs of first century Palestinian Judaism to prevent him from relating in a friendly way to women. We had already seen how he allowed several women to follow him and the Twelve to provide for their needs while he was proclaiming the good news (Lk 8:1-3). His speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well is another example (Jn 4:7-9).

Mary realized what a treasure Jesus' divine Person was. His eternal words nourished her soul. She found it difficult to stay away from such a rich source of grace. What a privilege it was for her to sit at his feet and listen to his spiritually enriching words. But she had left her dear sister Martha to do all the work in preparing the meal. Apparently Jesus' apostles and perhaps others were with him on this occasion.

Martha felt all alone and abandoned to do all the work herself. So she complained to Jesus, asking him to send Mary to help her.

We would expect Jesus to oblige her request. In the previous verses we learned the importance of being a neighbor to those in need. Their need ought to move us with compassion to assist them. However, Jesus used the occasion to teach us another truth. We need to take time out for spiritual nourishment, otherwise we will not have the spiritual energy needed to show others compassion by assisting them in their need.

Jesus responded to Martha's plea, explaining that she was too anxious and worried about all she had to do. "There is need for only one thing" he said. We must first seek the Kingdom of God and its holiness (Mt 6:33). That is what Mary was doing by listening to God's word—just as we should do daily. She was attached to Jesus who has the words of eternal life (Jn6:68). After this important opportunity for teaching Martha and us, we suppose that Jesus then sent Mary to help her disquieted sister.

Wednesday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 11:1-4**

Jesus was often seen at prayer by the Apostles. He would rise very early before dawn and go to a deserted place where he prayed (Mk 1:35; Lk 5:16). He spoke to the Apostles of the necessity of praying always without becoming weary (Lk 18:1). Prayer and continuous communion with his Father was such a part of Jesus' life, his Apostles felt compelled to ask him to teach them to pray the way he did. St. Luke's version is slightly shorter than the one in St. Matthew's gospel (Mt 6:9-13).

Jesus began with, "when you pray, say: Father". We are struck with the intimacy with which this prayer begins. We are God's children. He is our dearest Father. This is the attitude we ought to have in relating to God when we pray. Our very hearts are drawn to him in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). We receive human and divine life from him moment by moment. We are so indebted to him both for our natural and supernatural lives. He is truly our Father.

"Hallowed be your name"—we express the desire that God be respected, revered and loved. "Name" stands for God himself. The respect we owe God for the majesty of his being requires that we live holy lives that manifest our reverence for his presence in us.

"Your kingdom come"—In praying for God's kingdom to come, we express our longing for God's reign or rule to be fully established when Jesus returns in glory. Then God will be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). Then God's glorious being will permeate all of us and all of creation. We will all become God by participation. Our whole being will be thoroughly united to him and in perfect accord with the divine will and being. Meanwhile, as we await the perfect establishment

of God's reign, we ask that God's grace gradually take over our lives and world. We long that we submit ourselves to his will and rule.

"Give us each day our daily bread"—Here we pray for the food for our bodies as well as for our souls. The word "daily bread" is translated super-substantial. It refers directly to the Bread of Life, the Body of Christ (CCC 2837) which we need for our spiritual nourishment. We need Jesus' glorified Body in Holy Communion every day to sustain us so we can do God's will and continue to live in him.

"And forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us"—We ask for God to forgive us our sins because we forgive those who sin against us. That means we let go of all offenses against us so that they do not come between us and God. They do not preoccupy us and hinder our relationships with God and others.

"And do not subject us to the final test"—We recognize the power of evil and our weakness; therefore, we beg God to spare us from the severe test at the end of time when evil and the devil will be particularly strong. We also ask him to free us from such severe testing at the end of our lives.

Thursday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 11:5-13**

Jesus continues to teach his disciples how to pray as they requested. In order to bring out the necessity to keep asking in prayer even if it appears that God is not going to answer our petition. Jesus exemplifies his point with a parable.

Someone approaches his friend at midnight to borrow three loaves of bread because a friend of his arrived from a journey and he has nothing to offer him. But the friend to whom

he requests the loaves refuses to help him: he explains that he and his family have already gone to bed. Unlocking the door consisted of removing a large wooden or iron bar which was noisy and would awaken everyone. The entire family slept on a mat in a single-room house. Even if the friend refuses to give him the loaves at first, he will eventually do so because of his persistence. He kept on bothering his friend by impressing upon him his urgent need, so he felt obliged to get up, open the door and give him the three loaves of bread. The urgency of the situation motivated the petitioner to keep on pleading his case. That is the way we must plead with God in prayer. Jesus guarantees us that if we ask God in prayer we will receive. The prayer of petition consists of our contacting God through the virtue of faith. The immediate result is spiritual enrichment—even if we do not get the earthly good we asked for. We actually received a higher good of a higher order. If God judges that what we are asking for is for our good, he may give that too. Even if he doesn't, we have already received simply by our entering into communion with God through prayer. The Catechism also teaches: "Transformation of the praying heart is the first response of our petition" (CCC 2739).

Similarly, to seek God or his help gets results. The effort of searching disposes us spiritually to receive divine grace. We are already better off for having searched for God or an answer for a need. Knocking on the door in prayer requires an effort on our part and that opens us to receive grace from God.

No earthly father would give something harmful to his child when he or she asks for something good—much less would God, our heavenly Father, do so. If parents who are sinners know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more will our Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.

Friday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 11:14-26**

Jesus shows himself to be more powerful than the demon: he is forced to leave the possessed person who is now able to speak. The crowds continue to show amazement at Jesus.

Among the crowds there were Pharisees (Mt 9:34) who said that it was by the power of the prince of demons that Jesus drove out demons. The name they gave the prince of demons is Beelzebul, a derogatory name for Satan. Others were also not satisfied with Jesus' manifestation of power over Satan. They asked for some kind of spectacular sign from heaven. The many other signs that Jesus had worked did not satisfy them either. Their minds were closed to Jesus' divine qualities. They were stuck on their own interpretation of the law. There is nothing Jesus could do to change them. They were blinded by their pride. They angrily opposed all that Jesus said and did. Here they are insinuating that Jesus is evil. Jesus explained that their claims that he was aligned with the devil did not make any sense. Satan is too intelligent to fight against himself. That would lead to self-defeat. Jewish exorcists knew that their God was actively assisting them in their exorcisms. They would prove Jesus' critics to be in error.

It is by the "finger of God", the Holy Spirit (Mt 10:25), that Jesus is casting out the devil (See Ex 8:15). Therefore they must realize that the kingdom of God has come upon them. Jesus is much stronger than Satan. He has overpowered him and forced him to flee. Jesus can now rejoice over his victory. That is really what happened.

The Pharisees were against Jesus as can be seen from their attacks against him. He is gathering the people of God into a kingdom. His enemies are scattering them. Their followers are like lost

sheep. It is not enough for Jesus to cast out a demon from someone. More has to happen. Such a person must seek to fill himself with goodness by accepting Jesus' teaching and making it part of his life. In this way the demon will find it impossible to re-enter the person. But if a person does not adhere to the good as taught by Jesus, he remains open and vulnerable to evil and a new invasion by the evil spirit. It is imperative that we actively seek God and allow him to fill and rule out hearts.

Saturday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time
Lk 11:27-28

People were entranced with Jesus and his words. They were filled with delight and wonder as they beheld him and heard his mellifluous words. This woman was so full of adulation and praise she could not contain herself. So she blurted out enthusiastically, "Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed". She is saying in effect, what a fortunate woman your mother is. How greatly Mary was blessed to conceive and bear Jesus. She enjoyed interpersonal communion with the Son of God as he was being formed in her womb. How personally and spiritually enriched she became. He was with her every moment of the day. Her pure heart was ever focused and open to receive his outpoured love for her who kindly consented to be his mother. How grateful she must have been to be chosen by the Father to receive such a privilege. What a happy child bearer she must have been as she realized who this child was. She knew this from angel Gabriel's words (Lk 1:26-35). How spiritually enhanced her life must have become. No one had ever had such a privilege in the whole world since the beginning of time or even until the end of the world. Mary was blessed indeed! Her child was totally dependent on her. She was giving him human life. He was living off her. He was taking flesh through her. In

a true sense it can be said that when we receive him in the Eucharist we are receiving her and her gift to us. But Jesus responded that Mary is even more blessed because she heard God's word to her through the angel and carried it out. She is even more blessed for having believed such a preposterous promise. She consented to God's plan for the salvation of the world. She was the unique woman prepared by God from the time of Abraham to have that quality of faith like Abraham to believe God and faithfully respond to his request. We too will be blessed if we believe God's word and observe it, giving it our all as Mary did.

Monday of the 28th Week in Ordinary Time
Lk 11:29-32

More and more people were attracted to Jesus. The divine perfections in him drew people: they wanted to be near him. They derived satisfaction in being close to his Person. The words of eternal life that he spoke also kept them spell-bound (Mt 7:28; Jn 7:46).

It was the scribes and Pharisees who asked Jesus to show them a sign (Mt 12:38). They were too blind to recognize the power of God present in the other signs (miracles) that Jesus had already shown throughout his ministry. Even raising the dead was not enough for them.

Jesus sees those who seek a sign as an evil generation. His very Person, his words and saving actions ought to be sufficient to stir faith in them. But they are too caught up in themselves and their shallow interpretation of the law to have faith in Jesus. Their evil is the sin of disbelief even after all the signs of God's presence in Jesus were manifested. They wanted fantastic miraculous signs to tickle their senses and something to get excited and talk about. They were not interested in

signs to stir faith and bring about repentance and a conversion of life. Jonah became a sign of the need to repent to the Ninevites. As a result of his preaching, the king and all the people believed his message. “They proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth. When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out” (Jon 3:5, 10).

Jesus is an even greater sign than Jonah for the need to repent. Jonah fled and later preached repentance only because he was compelled by God to do so (Jon 1:1-3; 3: 1-5). Jesus the Son of God came out of love to do his Father’s bidding: “he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave... he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2: 7, 8). “At the judgment the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn” it for its disbelief and failure to repent.

Similarly, the queen of Sheba (which is now Yemen) will rise with the men of this generation and will condemn them. She came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon (see 1 Kgs 10). She concluded, “...happy these servants of yours, who stand before you always and listen to your wisdom” (1 Kgs 10:8). But Jesus is the divine Wisdom incarnate. He has the words of eternal life. His teachings bring to perfection those of the law, the prophets and all wisdom literature. Yet the hardened hearts of Jesus’ audience failed to grasp or appreciate the divine wisdom uttered by Jesus. They remained in their hardened unrepentant state.

Tuesday of the 28th Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 11:37-41

Jesus accepted an invitation to eat in a Pharisees’ home. He entered and reclined at table without having washed his hands.

He disregarded the custom of ritual washing of hands before meals established by the Pharisees.

This custom was added on to the Mosaic Law. This custom or human tradition was passed on by word of mouth until it was written in the Jewish Mishnah about A.D. 200. The Pharisee was amazed that Jesus failed to wash his hands before dinner. He considered this religious laxity. This practice, however, was a distraction from keeping the more important principles of the Mosaic Law. Such customs emphasized the danger of ritual impurity of the hands to the neglect of moral defilement of the heart commanded by God. The Pharisees had elevated these merely human traditions to an equal level with God’s revealed law. This was clearly wrong, and Jesus took exception to it. So he seized the opportunity to point out the fallacy of this practice. There were so many of these rules and regulations it was difficult to keep them all or to distinguish these man-made rules from the ones God commanded.

Jesus proceeded to point out how the Pharisees cleansed the outside of the cup or dish, while they allowed the inside of their hearts to remain unclean, morally contaminated with plunder or greed and evil. Even with the ritual purification that took place, their hearts remained encrusted with sinful habits and desires. These vices were allowed to remain undisturbed.

God made both the outside as well as the inside of a vessel or person. The inside must also be kept clean. In order to cleanse the inside of their hearts and free them from avarice or greed for money and possessions, they need to give some of their wealth as alms to the needy. By detaching themselves from possessiveness in this way their hearts will be cleansed so that they will begin to see clearly. And cleansed from disordered desire, all will be made clean for them.

**Wednesday of the 28th Week in
Ordinary Time
Lk 11:42-46**

Calamity and severe punishment will come upon the Pharisees—Jesus warns. They meticulously put ten percent aside on garden herbs as a tax for the temple. But they overlooked the more serious matters of the law such as justice and love for God. The law stipulates that “all tithes of the land, whether in grain from the fields or in fruits from the trees, belong to the Lord, as sacred to him” (Lev 27:30). It was commendable that the Pharisees went so far as to give tithes on even these garden herbs. But they failed to be tender hearted toward their fellow human beings. And their selfish hearts were stuck on themselves instead of wanting to please God and doing his will. Jesus also chastises them for their pride and vanity in seeking the places of honor in the synagogues. They positioned themselves in market places to be the center of attention so they could be seen and greeted by the people. Their egoism took the place of God in their lives. They were full of vice and corruption. They pretended to be holy on the outside but inside they were reeking with un-repentant sins. Instead of repenting when Jesus pointed out their sins they became very angry with him and wanted to kill him. They resisted God’s grace even more and hardened their hearts to the truth that Jesus spoke. Jesus compared these Pharisees to graves filled with corruption over which people were walking over unknowingly.

One of the scholars of the law, a legal expert, told Jesus that he felt insulted by his remarks. In response Jesus further explained their injustice: By the many obligations that they imposed on people by their human traditions and rules, they laid heavy burdens that were hard to carry. And these scholars did nothing to alleviate them.

**Thursday of the 28th Week in
Ordinary Time
Lk 11:47-54**

Jesus continues to show the evil deeds of the leaders of the Jewish people. They build memorials to the prophets. But their ancestors killed them. In this way, Jesus says, they bear witness and give consent to the deeds of their ancestors: they killed the prophets and these scribes and Pharisees show themselves to collaborate with them when they build their tombs. Jesus is relentlessly attacking them in an attempt to awaken them to their wrongdoing. He is calling them to true love of the people and they still do not see what he is trying to tell them. They prefer to stick to their human traditions that are detrimental to the divine law.

God foreknew and announced by his wisdom Incarnate that the prophets of old, as well as the Apostles Jesus would send anew, would suffer persecution and be killed. Here he is connecting the mission of the church, as carried out by the Apostles, with the mission of the Old Testament prophets. Both suffered the rejection of their contemporaries. Thus, the generations of leaders in Jesus’ day are charged with the blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world. Here Jesus connects the murder of Abel, the first murder recounted in the Old Testament (Gen 4:8) to that of Zechariah whose murder is recounted in 2 Chr 24:20-22, the last murder presented in the Hebrew Canon of the Old Testament. Jesus warns that this generation led by the scribes and Pharisees will be charged with the blood of the prophets and Apostles. They were bogged down in their legalism and were prevented from understanding the Scriptures that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. And they prevented their followers from understanding this fulfillment of the Scriptures. Thus neither these leaders nor their close followers enter the Kingdom of God that Jesus is introducing. These fierce verbal assaults angered the scribes and Pharisees who

became more hostile than ever toward Jesus. They did everything they could to trip him up by their questions and opposition.

Friday of the 28th Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 12: 1-7

Crowds continue to pursue Jesus. It seems that they could never get enough of him. On this occasion “so many people were crowding together that they were trampling one another underfoot”. But his words were directed toward his disciples. He warned them about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. He used the word leaven for hypocrisy because it stood for corruption and fermentation. Their teachings may appear holy, but their hearts are far from God. They did not communicate grace.

Jesus taught many things in private to his close disciples. He answered their questions. He revealed to them that he was the Messiah. It was not yet time to reveal this fact in public. But once he has risen, ascended to the Father and sent the Holy Spirit, they will be empowered and must begin to speak out and reveal everything Jesus has told them. Their message is for the salvation of the world and entry into the kingdom and eternal life.

Jesus wants us to be fearless in proclaiming his word of truth. Some may intervene in our speaking even to the point of inflicting bodily harm. But that is all they can do. They cannot touch the soul. God is the only one whom we ought to fear. He is able to cast us into hell symbolized by the word Gehenna. We must be careful to avoid the occasions of sin. Grave sin can destroy the divine life in our souls and deprive us of eternal life. To suffer persecution and even death itself can only harm the body. The soul in grace will then ascend to be with God in heaven forever. We are loved by God who loves us to a supreme degree. He is solicitously concerned

about our spiritual welfare. If he cares for each little sparrow, surely he will take care of us for whom his Son suffered and died. He is aware of every single hair on our head. So we need not worry about his concern and protection. He loves us more than we love ourselves. We must be fearless for his holy cause. He will allow our lives to end on earth only when he deems our souls ready and we have reached maximum growth and holy maturity.

Saturday of the 28th Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 12: 8-12

Because Jesus is God, and the source of our salvation, he can rightfully demand our total allegiance. To deny him is to cut ourselves off from divine and eternal life. That is why we must prefer him to our very life. Natural life is passing. The life that Jesus gives is eternal and the beginning of heaven. It is better to acknowledge him before men, even if it means persecution and death. Our natural lives will perish sooner or later. But our spiritual lives will endure forever. If they are enriched by sanctifying grace they will be equipped to enjoy the vision of God for all eternity.

Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man, the lovely human being who comes on the clouds of heaven and who is to receive everlasting dominion, glory and kingship (Dan 7:13-14). He will appear in that way at his second coming to reward those who remain faithful and united to him. By meditating on his word, prayer and the sacraments we receive the power to identify ourselves as his followers, even if it means inconvenience and suffering.

If we should have the misfortune of denying Jesus, we separate ourselves from him. We suffer the loss of grace, which means we lose the divine life and therefore it is impossible to enter into

glory. We lose our identity as children of God so that Jesus cannot identify us—he must deny any knowledge of us. He cannot truthfully call us his followers.

Those who sin against Jesus can be forgiven. They eventually see their mistake and ask forgiveness. At Pentecost, for example, many who had sided against Jesus were enlightened by the Holy Spirit. They were sorry for having rejected him and began to believe in him as their Messianic Savior. They were repentant and forgiven.

The sin against the Holy Spirit is unpardonable. The teachers of the law sinned against the Spirit when they attributed to Satan the miraculous powers of Jesus. They knew the truth but they sinned against it. They sinned against the light of the Holy Spirit. They resisted the light of the Holy Spirit to acknowledge their sin. There is no other recourse for conversion. They die in their hardened resistance to grace (Compare Jn 9:41). Jesus forewarns his disciples of their future persecution. When they are brought before rulers the Holy Spirit will teach them what to respond. He will be present in them to defend them.

Monday of the 29th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 12: 13-21**

Jesus is approached with a request to help settle a dispute over a family inheritance. But he refused to get involved. That was not the mission given him by the Father. He can only give principles to live by, so family members will have the virtuous dispositions to make the division of property or possessions justly and peacefully. If Jesus would accede to arbitrate in particular cases, it would be impossible to meet all the demands made on him. Jesus proceeds, then, to point out the main vice that is the root of the problem. “Take care”, he says, “to guard against all greed”. This is an excessive desire for possessions.

The Tenth Commandment forbids us to covet our neighbor’s goods (Ex 20: 17). This inordinate desire for property or possessions must be tempered and controlled. Such covetousness goes against the first and greatest commandment to love God with our whole heart, and the second to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Jesus warns that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. These do not give or secure life. They are temporal goods that remain outside of us. We can still be miserable while possessing an abundance. It does not benefit the spiritual welfare of a person, which is the real source of joy. Wealth does not assure us of continued life. It does not provide security against death. In fact, worry over maintaining wealth may diminish and even destroy life.

Jesus tells a story to demonstrate his teaching. A rich man’s farm produced an abundant harvest. In order to store it, he built large barns. He thought, then, that he would have a good life awaiting him with so much goods stored for the future. Now he would be able to live a life of ease to enjoy himself for years to come. But that same night he was going to die and be forced to leave his possessions to others. He must now face death totally unprepared. His total focus had been to attain earthly goods while neglecting to enrich himself spiritually. We must make sure that as we maintain our lives by attaining earthly goods, we must at the same time maintain our spiritual lives and attain heavenly riches.

Tuesday of the 29th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 12: 35-38**

Jesus urges us to be vigilant and ready for action. We must be prepared to welcome the Master when he returns. The free-flowing garment worn in those days needed to be gathered up at the waist with a cincture so that activity will

not be impeded. A lamp needs to be lighted and kept burning to provide lighting in the night as we await Jesus' return to take us to himself. We must be completely ready to receive him without delay.

One could not predict when the wedding festivities would end. The master, therefore, could arrive at any unpredictable moment. We do not know when Jesus will return to take us to himself at the end of our lives or at his return for us in glory. We must not keep him waiting. Our reception must be immediate. Our readiness must be continuous for whenever he returns and knocks.

The same is true when he comes to us in grace. When he knocks on the door of our hearts to offer us a new grace, we must respond immediately. He may ask us to sacrifice our time to give to someone in need of us; he may call us to practice self-restraint when surrounded with plenty so that we will not overwhelm our spirit with self-indulgence; he may call us to an act of service for someone who asks; he may ask us to give up a pleasant recreation for the sake of fulfilling a duty....

If we are prepared and welcome him, he will proceed to gird himself and wait on us. He will have us sit at table and serve us a spiritual feast. If he finds us vigilant in prayer during a holy hour, he may give us the gift of infused contemplation: that is the way he will feed us. He will nourish us with a spiritual banquet and a foretaste of heaven.

The Jews had three watches in the night. The second or third watch was between 10 PM and sunrise. This signifies that we must be ready at all and any time. We will be greatly blessed for having been prepared at all times to receive our Lord in this way. Even when we are asleep our heart must keep vigil, ready to receive our master with joy. That kind of readiness means that spirit rules our lives and we have overcome the lethargy of the flesh.

Wednesday of the 29th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 12: 39-48**

Jesus warns us to be prepared for his coming. He compares his coming at a time we least expect like a thief. If we knew the exact time the thief was coming we would be prepared. But as a matter of fact we do not know. Therefore we must always be prepared. Jesus, the Son of Man, (Jesus' favorite title for himself) will come when we least expect him. We could say that Jesus is continually coming toward us, and we stand ready to receive him each moment with open hearts.

Peter wanted to know whether the parable was meant for the Apostles or for everyone. Jesus' response seems to ignore the question. The parable is meant principally for the Apostles or anyone who has a responsible position. Jesus is addressing "the fruitful and prudent steward whom the Master will put in charge of his servants to distribute the food allowance at the proper time". Such a one will be greatly blessed for fulfilling his duty. The master will reward him by giving him a raise and a higher position. But if such a steward abuses his position by beating his servants and engages in drunken misbehavior, the master will return unexpectedly and punish him severely. He will likely get fired or be demoted to the level of a servant. The person who knows God's will and fails to carry it out will be punished severely. Even the servant who is ignorant of the Master's will but acted irresponsibly will receive punishment because he should have known better—although his punishment will be lighter.

A person who is entrusted with a serious responsibility is expected to fulfill his duties well. The more serious his responsibilities, the more will be required of him. For example, the mother or father of a family has God's precious children under their care. They will have to answer to God for forming them in Christian

virtues. Their reward will be great for carrying out their responsibilities well. The punishment will be severe for those who did not care. The same can be said of a bishop or priest who cares painstakingly for their flock. They will be greatly rewarded. Those who lead selfish lives and did not sacrifice themselves to care for their flock will be punished severely.

Thursday of the 29th Week in Ordinary Time Lk 12: 49-53

Jesus came to cast fire upon the earth. God is love (1 Jn 4:16) and is a consuming fire (Heb 12:29). We see his presence manifested in fire on Pentecost. “Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit...” (Acts 2:3-4). Those whom the fire touched were filled with love unto total self-sacrifice and a burning zeal for claiming Jesus and his kingdom.

This was also a fire of judgment. When the people realized that they had crucified their Messianic King “they were cut to the heart” and wanted to know what they were to do. They were deeply grieved and were forgiven and baptized. They were moved by the Holy Spirit to devote themselves to the word of God, the communal life, the breaking of the bread and to the prayers (Acts 2:42). Thus they maintained their fervor—they were on fire with the love of God and neighbor.

Jesus set that world on fire by his love unto death. He was immersed, baptized in his blood and the indescribable sufferings of crucifixion. But in the end he was enraptured by the fires of the divine glory which he then sent upon the earth to sanctify those who believe. Jesus was in anguish for that moment to come true. He was anxious to accomplish his redemptive act so that the people of good will could be sanctified by the gift of the Spirit.

As a result of Jesus’ coming, people will choose to adhere to him, and some will choose to go against him. This will cause division among members of families. Those who belong to Christ will experience deep peace through the forgiveness of sins. They will be at one within themselves and enjoy interpersonal communion with God. Even in the midst of strife because of different allegiances, Jesus’ promise to his disciples will be realized: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you” (Jn 14:27). Jesus was aware that he was “destined for the fall and rise of many...and to be a sign that will be contradicted” (Lk 2:34). He wanted his disciples to know ahead of time the difficulties they would face. Externally they would experience conflict and dissension, but internally they would be at peace within themselves.

Friday of the 29th Week in Ordinary Time Lk 12: 54-59

People knew from experience that when a cloud rose from the west (the Mediterranean coast) that it was going to rain. They also knew that when the wind was blowing from the south (the desert) that it was going to be hot.

They were experts at interpreting the signs from the earth and the sky; they could give a forecast of the weather, but they were incapable of discerning the arrival of the Kingdom of God—despite the signs given them. John the Baptist preached that one mightier than he was arriving; they were to repent of their sins to be ready to receive him. He would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. John did not consider himself worthy even to untie his sandal strap. He announced Jesus as the Lamb of God spoken of by Isaiah who would take away the sins of the world. He saw the sign of the dove coming from the sky to rest on Jesus. John testified to Jesus in that way. His disciples were immediately attracted to Jesus and left John to follow him.

They stayed with Jesus and came to realize that he was the Messiah. They excitedly told each other that they had found the Messiah (Jn 1:41) and the one that Moses and the prophets wrote about (Jn 1: 45). Yet the leaders of the Jewish people were not able to recognize him. They were looking for signs to meet their own expectations rather than the one announced by the prophets. They were too worldly and self-centered to see the spiritual evidence Jesus gave. Isaiah had predicted this would happen when he said, “you shall indeed hear but not understand...look but never see. Gross is the heart of this people...” (Mt 13:14-15).

They were too spiritually blunted to interpret the signs Jesus worked, just as Isaiah had announced: “Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared; Then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the dumb will sing” (Is 35:5-6); Lk 7:20, 22-23).

Judgment is about to take place. Jesus’ opponents have no time to lose. They must settle accounts immediately. They are already on their way to meet the judge (God). They had better come to conversion now. They must settle their differences with everyone and be reconciled, otherwise they will be handed over to the judge who will send them to prison. They will remain there until they have paid the last penny of what they owed.

Might this passage imply the need for a place of purgation after we die? We will be released only after we have been perfectly purified and reconciled.

Saturday of the 29th Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 13: 1-9

Galilean pilgrims came to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices. They were in the courtyard while their sacrifices were

being carried out by the priests within the temple. It was then that the Roman garrison descended upon and slaughtered them. We do not know for what reason. Pilate was a very brutal man.

It was thought in those days that these people perished because they were greater sinners than the rest of the people. Jesus denied that to be true. We are all sinners and liable to die by violence at any moment. This incident is a reminder to all of us that we must be repentant and ready to die at any given moment.

The same can be said about the eighteen people who accidentally died when the Tower of Siloam fell on them. They were not guiltier than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem. It was simply their time to die according to God’s providential designs. Such accidents remind us that we also could die without notice and that we must maintain a clear conscience and live in the presence of God without the least sin-ready to face death at any moment. Daily meditation on God’s word and measuring our conduct by it is valuable to keep us reforming our lives so that we will be ready when it is our time to face death.

Jesus tells a parable about a fig tree on which the owner found no figs—it bore no fruit. He was so displeased with it after three years of searching for fruit on it; he was ready to cut it down. But the gardener convinced him to leave it one more year. He would then cultivate the ground and fertilize around it to help it bear fruit. If it still did not bear fruit, then they would cut it down.

Israel was sometimes compared to a fig tree (Hos 9:10). After some three years of ministry in which Jesus preached repentance, the nation had been given ample time to convert itself and bear fruit through being true to God and following his commandments. But the nation still bore no fruit. Yet a little more time will be given to it. If it does not respond to all the care that Jesus is giving it, destruction will be allowed to come upon it.

Monday of the 30th Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 13: 10-17

Jesus continues to be concerned about conveying the truth. He communicates to the people the great reality of God and the reverence due him. He wanted the people to realize that the kingdom of God was arriving in him. He taught the correct interpretation of the Law, the revealed word of God.

The Sabbath rest was meant to be a good for the people. They needed a day of rest after a whole week's labor in the burning sun. They needed to restore their physical, mental, and spiritual strength. The Jewish tradition maintained by the Pharisees had so multiplied the requirements and restrictions for keeping the Sabbath that the burden had become intolerable. Jesus confronted and transgressed these traditions and emphasized the reason that God had given the Sabbath rest.

Thus Jesus, while he was teaching on a Sabbath day of rest, noticed this woman who was cripple and completely bent over. She had suffered this condition for eighteen years. In his divine compassion he took pity on her and announced to her that she was now going to be set free from her infirmity. Then he laid his hands on her to communicate by a loving touch his divine power. At once she stood up straight and was immediately healed. In response she began praising God for being restored to perfect health. However, the leader of the synagogue became exceedingly angry with Jesus for having cured on the Sabbath. Therefore he announced to the crowd that they should come on the other six days of the week to be cured—not on the Sabbath.

The synagogue leader was really attacking Jesus by his statement because he healed on the Sabbath. He is called a hypocrite because he pretended zeal for the law but his motive was to attack Jesus for his healing on the Sabbath.

Jesus pointed out the incongruity of the ruler of the synagogue's thinking. It was permissible to untie an ox or donkey from the stall and lead it to water. But he would not allow this woman, a daughter of Abraham, to be set free on the Sabbath day. That showed how far off his interpretation of the Sabbath Law had gotten. It was far too strict and did not make any sense. That is why Jesus used his authority as Son of Man to correct this misinterpretation. The people's religious sense understood the truthfulness of this position and gave praise to God to the humiliation of Jesus' opponents.

Tuesday of the 30th Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 13: 18-21

Jesus continues to preach about the kingdom he has come to establish. He tells parables and makes comparisons to things people are familiar with in order to describe the Kingdom of God. Firstly, he compares it to a mustard seed that a person planted in a garden. This is a very tiny seed. This brings out the fact that the kingdom starts off very small and not very easily noticeable—like Jesus and his small band of followers. But this tiny seed is very powerful. It will quickly multiply its size and grow into a large bush of about ten feet high. The birds of the sky will come to perch in it and make nests. This represents the different nations from far away who will enter the kingdom and dwell in it. There is such a huge difference between the tiny beginnings of the kingdom and how it eventually encompasses the whole world. It is marvelous how many different nations and peoples have come to make their home in it.

The fact that its location is in a garden reminds us of the Garden of Eden. Could we not say that the kingdom is the beginning of a new paradise? Eventually the lost garden will be fully restored; it will become a paradise for all who dwell in it.

Secondly, the kingdom that Jesus is establishing may also be compared to yeast that is mixed with three measures of flour, that is, about fifty pounds. There is a great disproportion: just a little bit of yeast hidden in this huge batch of wheat flour will permeate and cause the whole dough to rise. It will transform the dough into delicious bread. That is how the spirit of the kingdom is going to affect the world in which it exists. God's grace will sanctify the people of the world and make it holy.

Each of us is called to be a kind of leaven to influence the environment we live in. We inculcate spiritual principles by our words and actions. We cause the area we live in to become better by diffusing the grace of God by our virtuous behavior and speech. Jesus said that his words are spirit and life (Jn 6:63). We must commit his words to memory and absorb their spirit and life-giving power to speak them at every opportunity to sanctify others. We do this by simply sharing with others the thoughts that inspired us. For example, we could simply share with a friend that we came to realize from this parable that we are like yeast for our environment. We can make it holy. We can sanctify it by our presence and words and peaceful or joyful demeanor.

Wednesday of the 30th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 13: 22-30**

As Jesus travels toward Jerusalem he takes every opportunity to teach about the Kingdom of God. It is important that we know the truth and live by it. Someone asked him whether only a few people would be saved. He does not answer such impractical questions. He uses the occasion to enunciate a practical point. The entrance into the spiritual kingdom is very narrow. It takes self-discipline to be in spiritual condition to enter. A strenuous effort is required. Self-denial is necessary to be spiritually fit. The world, the flesh and the devil converge to

captivate and entice our allegiance to themselves. We then become indisposed to enter the kingdom (compare 1 Jn 2:15-16).

Many will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough. We are so prone to self-indulgence and put the self before God and his word that we lack the moral strength to live by Jesus' gospel. We, therefore, are incapable of living spiritual lives which the gospel requires to be able to enter the kingdom. Our allegiance is given to this world and its pleasures rather than the Kingdom of God.

We have a limited time to accept and respond to the invitation. The narrow door will not remain open indefinitely. To fail to respond immediately may mean that we have other earthly interests that we put before the kingdom of heaven. We may become so absorbed in these that we will miss the opportunity to enter the spiritual kingdom. The present grace will be lost. This choice of an inferior earthly enjoyment to replace a superior heavenly life may endanger the loss of such an opportunity forever.

A mere physical or social acquaintance of Jesus is not enough to enter the kingdom. One must make a faith commitment. Only the virtue of faith can transport us into the spiritual world of the Kingdom of God. It is only through faith that we can enter into communion with Jesus in order to be saved from sin and self. Refusal to believe in Jesus and redeemed by his paschal mystery is to die as evil-doers. This will result in being painfully deprived of entering the eternal banquet of joy with the patriarchs. What a terrible grief and anguish that would bring upon them. People from all nations everywhere who accept in faith the kingdom announced by Jesus will enter, while those who were first called will be the last to accept it, or perhaps even fail to accept it and excluded.

Thursday of the 30th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 13: 31-35**

The Pharisees had a real hatred for Jesus and were trying to get rid of him. In this instance they attempted to scare him off. They told him that Herod wanted to kill him. That was credible enough, for he is the one who had had John the Baptist beheaded.

But Jesus would not be intimidated. He had work to do. He had to proclaim the kingdom and its arrival. He taught and preached; he healed as a sign that the kingdom was appearing in him; he also exorcised demons to show that the power of God for good was in him. He gave people so much hope.

He knew that the Father had given him so much time to accomplish this work. He had a little time left between then and his entry into Jerusalem. He would finish the work the Father had assigned him. No one would scare him off until he was ready to move on.

He called Herod a fox which is a shrewd predatory animal to describe the typical character of the king. Jesus knew himself to be secure in the Father's protective care and would not be run off before he had completed his mission in that area.

Jesus knew what was awaiting him in Jerusalem. Only then would his mission be finished. There he would suffer, die and be taken up in glory. Until his arrival there, no one could harm him.

Jesus' thoughts are now centered on Jerusalem. He laments over the city's impenitence and hardness of heart. Rather than be converted at the preaching of the prophets, it stoned them to death. The people were adamant in their sinful way of life and would not change. They simply got rid of those who wanted to teach the way of righteousness.

Jesus uses the endearing image of a hen gathering her brood under her wings to describe how much he longed to lovingly assemble the people under his protective care. But they were too hardened in their selfish, sinful ways to listen to him. As a result, God would abandon them to their ways. The time will come when their enemies will encircle the city and completely destroy it and those within it.

Friday of the 30th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 14:1-6**

We see in this episode that Jesus mingled socially with even the Pharisees. He was always looking for opportunities to teach people. There was so much error among the leaders in their teaching regarding the law. The rules they fabricated made it very difficult for the common people to observe. Jesus tried his best to enlighten them. They were too proud and self-centered to see what Jesus was trying to tell them.

They were observing him carefully, always looking for opportunities to find fault with him and bring him into disfavor with the people. We would do well to observe Jesus carefully also in order to learn from him. His actions show us how a human being is supposed to conduct himself. He was a perfect man and was always trying to please the Father. His compassion for underprivileged people was remarkable. He demonstrated a special love for those who were hurting. We pray that our union with him will empower us to be like him. That is why we must read the gospels to understand him better so we can imitate his ways. Prayer will draw power from him to aid our efforts.

Jesus observed a man suffering from dropsy. This is an ailment that causes abnormal swelling of the body because of the retention and accumulation

of fluid. He took pity on the man and decided to heal him. But before he did he asked the scholars of the law and the Pharisees whether it was lawful to cure on the Sabbath or not! They failed to answer him. He was too much for them. Jesus then proceeded to heal the man and then dismiss him. He wanted to show these men that the Sabbath was instituted for the good of man. Their overly strict rules made life difficult to live by them.

Jesus tried to reason with them by an example they were familiar with. If one of their animals fell into a cistern, surely they would pull him out on the Sabbath day of rest. Isn't a human being such as the man with dropsy more valuable than any animal? Surely they would understand that. But they were unable to answer his question. What he said must have made sense but they would not depart from the human traditions built around the law to accede to Jesus' wisdom.

Saturday of the 30th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 14:1, 7-11**

Jesus noticed how those who were invited were choosing the places of honor at table. This would often be a sign of a lack of humility and lack of a sense of one's own lowliness. The fact that we came from nothing and have sinned against God should help us realize that we deserve the last place. Maintaining such a humble attitude of mind, along with self-effacement, disposes us for God to raise us to a new, higher spiritual plane. Our worst problem in the spiritual life is pride and self-centeredness. These block God out of our lives. Humility overcomes pride and opens us up to God and the love and service of neighbor.

Jesus uses this social gathering and the prideful activity that he noticed to teach a spiritual truth. Pride and egoism conflict with love for God

and others. Mary tells us in her Magnificat, "[God] has...dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart...but lifted up the lowly" (Lk 1: 51-52). The Catechism in its glossary defines pride as "undue self-esteem or self-love, which seeks attention and honor and sets oneself in competition with God". God has no tolerance for the proud of heart. That is an entirely false posture which leads one to damnation. Pride puts us in the company of the devils.

Jesus, in the parable he told, demonstrated the practical outcome of one who usurps the first place—he ends up being displaced by someone more worthy of it—to the embarrassment of the usurper. Eventually the prideful person will be discovered for who he really is and will be demoted from his wrongful position.

Having a humble appraisal of oneself is much safer and realistic and true to life. We are only a grain of sand in this boundless universe. Our life-span is only a dot of time in comparison to endless eternity. We have such little love compared to the great love to which God calls us. We are such sinners compared to the holiness to which we are called. We are so poor in virtue compared to the perfection the Gospel demands of us.

In light of these facts and so many others, only the blindness of pride prevents us from seeing how humble we ought to be and always inclined to seek the last place.

All Souls Day **Jn 6:37-40**

Jesus said to the crowds: "Everything that the Father gives me will come to me..." The Father gives Jesus disciples to follow and be formed by him. Jesus explained how the Father gives him followers: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him..."

(Jn 6:44). And how does the Father “draw” people to Jesus? He does so by grace. In general, he inspires them to do good and avoid evil. If they respond, he then goes on to enlighten their minds and warm their hearts with love for Jesus. He attracts people to Jesus through his virtuous life. They are made to see Jesus’ beautiful personality as he goes about doing good by his preaching and miracles, his works of mercy shown to suffering humanity.

It is important that people respond to that grace and go to Jesus. Jesus explains: “Everyone who has listened to the Father and has learned comes to me” (Jn 6:45). These promptings of grace that the Father gives us through the Holy Spirit inspires faith in Jesus. Jesus is our merciful Savior. He became human – one of us – precisely to save us from sin and give us eternal life. Jesus explains: “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work” (Jn 4:34). “...I always do what is pleasing to him” (Jn 8:29).

And it is the will of the Father who sent him that he should not lose anything of what he gave him. Jesus went to great lengths to redeem us from sin. His suffering by crucifixion and death shows how much he loves us and desires our salvation. We can be confident that he will receive us joyfully if we go to him (see Lk 14). His great desire is to give us the life of God, which is the beginning of eternal life even now (see Jn 5:24). This eternal life is a participation in the very life of God. It is spiritual and incorruptible. It is the moment when we pass from this world to the Father. We come from God who created our spiritual souls; when the body becomes too feeble or damaged for the soul to function, it leaves the body and returns to the Father who created it.

We go to God to be rewarded for a virtuous life, for having completed the mission for which he sent us into this world, and for fulfilling the will of God by a good life. The Book of Wisdom, which was written one hundred years before the coming of

Jesus, expresses the same belief in eternal life. The first reading puts it in these words, “The souls of the just (those who die in God’s friendship) are in the hand of God and no torment shall touch them”.

God sustains them in life and protects them from harm. “They are in peace.” All of their desires are being fulfilled. Their deep yearnings are being met with total satisfaction. Their hope for immortality is being realized. In their lives on earth, they experienced different levels of trial. But they continued to be faithful to God in doing his will. And since they died united to him in love, they will shine with his glory in heaven. God’s grace and mercy remain with his holy ones. His loving care remains with them throughout eternity.

Monday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 14:12-14**

Jesus was continually teaching people about the Kingdom of God. He seized every opportunity to teach the nature of life in the Kingdom. Here he is conveying how single hearted we must be to live in the Kingdom. We tend to be very selfish by nature. But divine love calls us to be selfless. This frees us from our disordered desires so we can love God and neighbor with all our hearts. Pure agape divine love is a challenge to attain. Utter selflessness requires great detachment and self-discipline.

Jesus uses strong language and hyperbole to put across his message. He says, “Whenever you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors, in case they may invite you back and you have a repayment.”

He expresses his teaching in this way to challenge his listeners to selflessness. We tend to lack purity of intention, seeking ourselves and reward for our actions and good deeds. He calls us to do good

to others simply out of love without seeking any recompense for ourselves. Purity of intention is important to attain pure selfless love. Purity of heart will be secured if we invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, for they have no means of reciprocating. Jesus is pressing us to do things for others out of pure love. That is how we approach attaining divine agape love. Whenever we do anything for anyone we must aim at doing it out of pure love rather than out of ulterior selfish motives.

We bring this need to God in prayer and petition God to grace us with this pure love. We must keep on working at it also so that little by little we will reach that goal. This is a divine love. We cannot attain it only by our own efforts. In his efforts to convey the need for pure love in our intentions, Jesus is not discouraging us to serve reciprocal meals to each other as relatives and friends. Jesus often enjoyed meals with his dear friends Martha, Mary and Lazarus (Lk 10:38; Jn 12:1-2). He took pleasure in banqueting with his friends and Apostles at the Paschal meals (Lk 22:14-15). The Holy Spirit inspired fellowship meals in the early Church (Acts 2:42, 46; 1 Cor 11:33). To be hospitable like Abraham or Martha may call for great selflessness also (Gen 18:1-8); Lk 10:38). Whether we eat with friends or strangers, we are called to pure love and selfless service. That is how we are called to live in the spiritual kingdom. Such selfless love will be rewarded in the resurrection.

Tuesday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 14: 15-24

A fellow guest with Jesus said to him, “Blessed is the one who will dine in the Kingdom of God”. He was referring to the Messianic banquet that “the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines...” (Is 25:6). Jesus uses the man’s

comment to tell a parable that not everyone is going to enter the Kingdom and enjoy the banquet—only those who are worthy.

In the first invitation a man invited many people to a great dinner. They accepted the invitation and said they would attend. When it was fully prepared, his servants were sent to announce to the guests: “Come, everything is ready”. But they all began to excuse themselves and said they would not be able to attend: one purchased a field and had to examine it; another purchased five yoke of oxen and was going to evaluate them; another used the excuse that he was newly married. These flimsy reasons were unworthy excuses for so great an honor of being invited to the Messianic banquet issued by Jesus, the Messiah himself. The chosen invited guests disgraced themselves and insulted the Messiah by their refusal to attend—this is especially true since they had initially accepted the invitation. The banquet was prepared for them.

So the Master ordered his servants to invite others, since the original chosen ones refused to participate. The dinner is ready and the banquet hall must be filled. The many must be given the marvelous opportunity to partake of such a joyous sumptuous feast. So the Master sent his servants to go into the streets and alleys to bring the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame to share in the banquet of the Kingdom. These were Jewish outcasts. But even with these attending there was still room for more. So the Master ordered his servants to go to the country roads and highways and make those they see (the Gentiles) come in to the feast that God is offering through his Messiah. The spiritually rich food of the Word of God and Eucharistic Bread and Wine nourish the guests with eternal, heavenly Life. This is a spiritual meal from which none can afford to absent themselves! Those who foolishly refused to attend with such invalid excuses will be barred from participating in this once in a life-time opportunity. They allowed passing earthly things to come before the all-important eternal realities of the Kingdom. Thus they forfeited eternal life.

**Wednesday of the 31st Week in
Ordinary Time
Lk 14: 25-33**

Jesus continues to attract great crowds. He turns to them and tells them quite frankly the qualifications necessary to be his disciples. He can make such a demand on them because he is divine. He is the Son of God, one with and equal to the Father. No one and no thing is more important than he. They must hate and repel any obstacle to union with him. Although they must love everyone, even their enemies (Lk 6:27-28), they must hate intensely any action or attitude on the part of anyone who would try to separate them from following Jesus; for he is their Savior and salvation. No one, no thing is more important than he. He gives them eternal life. He is their incarnate God. We must even hate our own life whenever sinful desires tempt us to sin. We must go against them. We must choose to die rather than commit a sin against Jesus. We may not deny our allegiance to him to save our lives. We must love him unto death.

Another quality needed to follow Jesus is the willingness to suffer with and for him. We must be willing to suffer and die for him. It is through His sufferings on the cross that Jesus saved us from sin and eternal death. Suffering accepted in obedience to God's will has proven itself that valuable. It is also transforming and spiritualizing. Jesus kept his wounds even after he was glorified. He wanted to show us in this way the victorious power of suffering. We are encouraged thus to practice patient endurance when we are made to suffer. Human nature must inevitably come face to face with suffering. Jesus shows us how spiritually beneficial it is for us so we can accept it.

Just as we must calculate the cost of a building to see if we have enough money to complete the project, so too, we must be aware of the sufferings we must patiently endure to be Jesus' disciple.

One who goes into battle must figure whether he has the means to face and overcome an opponent. So too we must prepare to face and endure the cross to be a disciple of Jesus.

We must put Jesus before everything we possess. Whatever gets in the way of following him must be cast aside. In that sense we must renounce all our possessions to follow him. We must detach our hearts from whatever preoccupies us and takes us away from him.

**Thursday of the 31st Week in
Ordinary Time
Lk 15: 1-10**

Sinners were drawing near to listen to Jesus. His merciful love drew them to himself. They found solace in his compassionate heart. But the unconverted sinners who had blocked and resisted the wisdom and love of Jesus did not understand how he could welcome sinners the way he did. So he tried to enlighten them with parables.

His going out to sinners is like the shepherd who leaves the flock of sheep to seek out the lost one. When he finds it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy and celebrates with his friends and neighbors. God and the angels and saints rejoice when a sinner repents and is restored to grace—he loves and appreciates the faithful ones who never left, but he has special joy when he finds and restores the lost one.

God cares about each person. Each is his child, created in his image and likeness. He loves him or her dearly and wants to be close to them. Love is his name. When they stray away from his love, he is concerned about them. He knows that they are in distress without him. The passing pleasures that attracted them leave them empty and sad. So in his great love for them he seeks them out waiting for the right moment to grace them again with

his benevolent, peaceful presence. His search for wayward sinners is like someone very poor who loses some of the little money she has. She searches for it until she finally finds it. She has great joy and celebrates her find with her friends and neighbors. The angels and saints rejoice also with Jesus when he finds the lost sinner and he returns to him.

Friday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 16: 1-8**

Jesus tells another parable to bring out how prudent we must be in preparation for being dismissed from this life. The end is coming sooner than we think. We must use the goods of this world in such a way that they will assist us in gaining eternal life when we depart from this world.

The parable is about a dishonest steward who was wasting his rich master's property. The rich master called in his steward to tell him he was going to be dismissed. He had finally caught up with the way he was wasting his goods. We do not know exactly how he was doing this.

In order to prepare himself for the future after his dismissal, he figured out a way to make a life for himself. He summoned the master's debtors and gave them a noteworthy discount. The steward reduced the price of about eight hundred gallons of oil by fifty percent. He also reduced the price for about one thousand bushels of wheat by twenty percent.

In this way, he established close friendships with these debtors so that when he was dismissed they would receive him into their homes. Thus he would be able to work for them and make a new life for himself. The master commended his steward for the way he provided for his future. Often the sons of light, that is, those who have been enlightened by grace and the teachings of

Jesus are not as wise as this steward. They do not invest their money in the poor by being charitable to them so that when they die, the poor would receive them into the heavenly life.

We must use our wealth and possessions wisely with a view to promote our spiritual growth. We grow in grace through detachment from material goods by giving some away to the church and charitable causes. In this way we also free ourselves from possessiveness so that our hearts are free for God and spiritual riches.

Saturday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 16:9-15**

Jesus is concerned about preparing us for eternal life. He wants us to use dishonest wealth or mammon of iniquity wisely. It is called dishonest because there is a tendency of wealth to lead one to dishonesty. So Jesus advises us to invest our wealth so that we will receive eternal dividends. By investing it virtuously, that is, for the sustenance of the church and the poor, the handicapped and the infirm, we will be preparing a home for ourselves for eternity, in the heavens. Those we helped and supported will be waiting to welcome us in the heavenly home that our offerings prepared for us.

Grace builds on grace; one calls for another. Each time we practice a virtue it grows stronger. Fidelity to one grace establishes us stronger in all the virtues. They are all connected, for their source is spirit. Our spirit grows stronger through the practice of any of the virtues, so that fidelity even in small matters, which requires the practice of virtue, makes us stronger and able to carry out ever greater ones.

To be dishonest in very small matters weakens us in honesty so that we tend to be dishonest in greater ones. Dishonesty implies a disordered

desire for sensible goods. This weakens our spiritual nature, the source of self-discipline to perform virtuous deeds.

If we cannot be trusted in the use of money, which has weakened our spirit, we are indisposed for God to give us the true wealth of grace. Money is worthless and useless in eternal life. Only grace acquired by a virtuous life is lasting. Virtue acquired by cooperating with God's grace can be truly called ours. It is transforming, for it spiritualizes us. It requires spirit assertiveness which grows ever stronger through responding to God's grace.

Both God and money require total devotion. To devote ourselves to maintain wealth and to serve it so as to make it grow will usurp the total devotion due to God. By relegating wealth to second place and controlled use, we thus subdue it so God retains our total devotion.

The Pharisees proved their attachment to money when they sneered at Jesus for speaking about the grave danger that wealth imposes. They could justify themselves externally as being right with God—perhaps—but God knew their hearts. Human esteem, what people think of us, means nothing, for it is so often based on vain external appearances. Whereas the true state of the Pharisees, Jesus knew, was an abomination to God.

Monday of the 32nd Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 17:1-6**

Given the human condition and its inclination to sin and rebel against God, serious temptations to sin will inevitably occur. But the person who leads another into mortal sin is doomed to serious consequences. It would be better for such a person that a great millstone used for grinding were tied around his

neck and that he be thrown into the depths of the sea than cause a child or one of Jesus' least disciples to be introduced to serious sin and subsequent vice. This would mean that such a victim would lose his or her innocence and the joy and peace that go with it. They would no longer know the happiness and consolation of experiencing the continuous presence of God. What terrible consequences the victim would have to bear. The one who caused the scandal would have to endure dire punishment for such a crime.

Be aware of the fact that if someone sins against you, you have a duty to remonstrate with him. But if he is sorry for sinning against you, you must forgive him. Even if he should sin against you many times the same day, and is truly sorry, you must forgive him. In this way you will free him to return to a virtuous life. He will be free to make strenuous efforts to correct his sinful actions. He will appreciate you and may even become a devoted friend. You will have helped him overcome his weakness. Perhaps this would especially be true for spouses. The disciples realized how strong their faith must be to be able to practice that kind of virtue. So they asked Jesus to increase their faith. A mustard seed is very tiny but so powerful it will produce a ten foot shrub. Faith has that kind of power. This power when exercised is comparable to causing even a mulberry tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea. This idea brings out how faith can invade a person's life and transform him or her into a great saint. Faith will overcome all kinds of deeply rooted sins and cause heroic virtue to abound. It will transport a person from a life dominated by sin to one that is utterly holy and pleasing to God. The power of faith is inestimable. It can actually transform us into being like God, into becoming God by participation.

**Tuesday of the 32nd Week in
Ordinary Time
Lk 17:7-10**

Jesus gives a comparison of a servant's relationship to his master in order to teach us the attitude we ought to have in serving God. God is our Master and we are his servants, his slaves. We can never do enough to pay him for what he has done for us. We can never do enough service to pay him back. His gifts are always more than we can repay him for what he has already done for us. We can never catch up in returning his favors. We may work ourselves unto exhaustion and still be behind in repaying him. He can still ask us to do more in all justice. He owes us no thanks because all we do, no matter how much, is really all due him, and even more. It is not right for us to expect him to show us gratitude. He does not owe it to us.

We are not in a position to be demanding of God because we have done such and such for him. That was owed him in justice. He rightfully can demand much more of us.

We ought to be very grateful to him for what he has already done for us. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). What do we have which we have no received from him? Nothing!

We are unprofitable servants: we have done no more than we were supposed to do. We must be humble in serving God and expect nothing in return. We are doing no more than our duty.

**Wednesday of the 32nd Week in
Ordinary Time
Lk 17:11-9**

Lepers lived in groups so they could assist each other. Normally, Samaritans and Jews did not associate with each other. But

leprosy broke down these social barriers. They approached Jesus, but only from a distance. They were forbidden to be part of healthy society for fear of contamination.

They must have heard of Jesus' healing power. So they called out to him, "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!" He responded to their request by saying, "Go show yourselves to priests". They obeyed him, as they were going, they became cleansed of their leprosy. Nine of them continued on their journey to show themselves to the priests. These would inspect them, have them undergo purification ceremonies, offer sacrifice and eventually declare them clean again.

The Samaritan, however, realizing that he had been healed, was spontaneously overcome with gratitude. He had been in such misery before, and had led such a hard life. Now he is perfectly healed of that horrible disease. He was so utterly grateful to Jesus for cleansing him. He glorified God with loud thanks and praise. He went up to Jesus and fell at Jesus' feet. He thanked him profusely. Yet this man was a Samaritan, a foreigner and a heretic, comparable to a Gentile. But the grace of God knows no boundaries. Jesus wondered where the other nine were, perhaps enjoying their new freedom in society. This foreigner, however, was too full of gratitude for the source of his wellbeing to forget Jesus. Jesus sent him away, indicating that his faith had saved him. The others apparently thought that salvation from leprosy was their due. This man felt it to be an undue gift for which he was intensely grateful. This attitude opened him to communion with Jesus and the divine life that he gives us through grace. The Samaritan was thus ushered by his humble disposition into the new era of the Kingdom of God. His faith brought him into the supernatural world of grace.

Thursday of the 32nd Week in Ordinary Time
Lk 17:20-25

The Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God would come. His answer to them was twofold. First he tells them that the Kingdom of God is among them. It has already arrived in Jesus. But in a sense the Kingdom is not observable. The grace of the Kingdom is an invisible reality. They could observe the visible effects of that grace when Jesus healed the sick and exorcized demons. But the invisible power of God issuing through Jesus was not observable. The glory that was in Jesus was hidden from the Pharisees. But those who were pure of heart could see God acting through him...So much for the Kingdom of God present in Jesus and his actions during his public ministry.

The second aspect of Jesus' coming will be different. His glorious second coming will be seen by all—even as lightning can be seen from one end of the sky to the other. This will occur when Jesus returns as Son of Man. As Daniel prophesied, "One like a son of man coming on the clouds of heaven" [will] receive "dominion, glory, and kingship.... his dominion is an everlasting dominion...his kingship shall not be destroyed" (Dan 7: 13-14).

The days will come when the Pharisees will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man. When the Roman army surrounds the city to destroy it and they are in deep trouble they will hope for his glorious return! But that will not happen.

His coming is unpredictable. They need not follow after the false rumors about his appearance. When he comes no one need tell them. He will be plainly seen by all, even as all can see lightning across the sky. But before any of that can take place, Jesus will have to undergo his passion, death and resurrection. He will ascend to the Father and remain there until the right time for his return in glory.

Friday of the 32nd Week in Ordinary Time
Lk 17:26-37

When Jesus returns as Son of Man, the situation among the people in his day will be totally unprepared as in the days of Noah. They were totally taken up with the natural life, with no thought whatsoever to the eternal life. The life of faith, practically speaking, was non-existent. So when the flood came, they were all destroyed—unprepared for eternity—except Noah and his family who believed and obeyed God. They were taken away and escaped the flood.

The same situation occurred in the days of Lot, and even worse, for these people gave free reign to immorality and unnatural vice (Gen 19). As a result, the divine wrath descended upon them in the form of fire and brimstone. All of them were destroyed. Only the God-fearing Lot and his family were spared. They were whisked away by God's protecting angels to safety. The same will happen when Jesus as the glorified Son of Man appears. The majority of the people will be so caught up in the good ole natural life or the wickedness of habitual sin; they will be destroyed by the fire of Judgment without the least preparation for eternal life with God. Before the final Day of Judgment takes place, as a sign that one day it will occur, judgment will befall Jerusalem. The Roman army will surround the city and the people within it and destroy them all. Therefore, when the army approaches, Jesus' followers must quickly flee. They must not delay in the least or they will forfeit their lives. They must be wholly intent at God's coming in judgment and prepare for it so that their lives can be spared. They must not be like Lot's wife who fled only reluctantly and looked back—her attachment to what she had to leave behind cost her her life. Thus whoever seeks to preserve his life of the past by remaining attached to it will lose it. But if they leave it behind for the new life with God they will save it. When the Lord returns to take us to himself one will be

prepared like Noah and Lot and so will be spared. The other who is totally unprepared will be left for destruction. The destruction of Jerusalem will be a sample of the Day of the Son of Man when he returns to judge the world. "Where the body is, there also the vultures will gather". The vultures are attracted to decayed matter (carrion). So the Roman army, like vultures, will come upon corrupted Jerusalem and its unfaithfulness to God and devour it with fire and plunder.

Saturday of the 32nd Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 18:18**

Jesus told a parable to encourage us to pray without ceasing. Such prayer is a necessity. That is how we exercise our faith. Such a continuous prayer keeps us connected to God so we can draw strength from him to do his will. That is the only way we can be virtuous. Without drawing divine power and spiritual energy from God through prayer, we cannot remain faithful to God and do his will or keep his word or commandments. If a person is unable to overcome sin in his life, it is because there is insufficient time spent in prayer with God. Faith is our only means of union with God. Even with receiving the sacraments, for example, the Holy Eucharist, faith is the theological virtue that unites us to Jesus who comes to us as the living Bread from heaven. Communion with him takes place through faith. Communion is a form of praying faith intuitively. The parable Jesus tells to demonstrate the power of persistent prayer is about a widow who is, in herself, powerless before a callous judge. He did not fear or reverence God nor did he respect any human being, especially this defenseless widow. But day in and day out she kept going to the judge, asking for justice. For a long time he did nothing. He had no concern for justice. To him the poor widow was just a "nobody". But the widow kept on going to him. She was persistent

in begging him for a just decision. She wearied him so much by consistently going to him, she finally wore him out. So out of fear of losing his health and life, he broke down and pronounced a just decision in her favor.

If continuous prayer forced a callous, unjust judge to render a favorable decision for the widow, all the more will God who is so good and just hear his chosen ones who call out to him day and night. When we have reached a point in our prayer that has rendered us ready to have our petition answered, God will act speedily in our favor.

Jesus asks whether there will remain any faith among his people when he returns in glory. The answer is, that depends whether his people will be in continuous prayer despite persecution or surrounded by riches and luxury. Habitual prayer enables us to remain virtuous and faithful to God. Without it, faith will fail. That is why it is extremely important that we develop a strong, faithful habit of prayer.

Monday of the 33rd Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 18:35-43**

On his way to Jericho Jesus met a blind man who was begging. He could not see Jesus but he heard the crowd and enquired what was happening. When he heard that Jesus was passing, he called out with all his might, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!" The words, "Son of David", show that the man had faith in Jesus as Messiah. The people going before him told him to stop shouting. But he would not be silenced. He called out to Jesus once more to have pity on him. Jesus was noted to have compassion on the poor, the lame and the blind. So he stopped and ordered that the man be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me

to do for you?” The man begged him to let him see. Jesus complied with his petition. He said, “Have sight; your faith has saved you”. He immediately received his sight and began to follow Jesus. He began to praise and thank God. All the people joined him in praising and thanking God.

Before the blind man received his sight, he would only sit and beg. Now that he sees, he follows Jesus and praises God. Not only did he receive physical sight but also spiritual sight. We may have physical sight but do we also have spiritual sight? Perhaps we are merely sitting along the road of life and never even think of giving glory to God. We may not even think of following Jesus. We never read his words in the gospels to follow him more closely or attain better knowledge of the Son of God.

We need to cry out to Jesus like the blind man for the gift of spiritual sight so we can arise from our spiritually lazy life-style and begin to follow Jesus more closely.

During the Mass, we also need to cry out loudly to Jesus, “Lord, have mercy on me”. We are so blind! We’re afraid even to sing—we are too weak and embarrassed to sing out loud. We ought to be ashamed of ourselves.

Jesus is asking you, “What do you want me to do for you?” Specify your spiritual needs. He wants to help you. You are blind, sitting along the road of life and spiritually vegetating. The blind man’s faith connected him to Jesus. Perhaps yours is too weak to be effective. You need to beg for an increase of faith. You need to strengthen your faith by reading and meditating on God’s word. Once you have faith, you need to activate it by ceaseless prayer. It’s high time that you get up and start following Jesus. Get ready for eternal life. You may die soon!

Tuesday of the 33rd Week in Ordinary Time

Lk 19: 1-10

Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector in charge of a district of tax collectors. He was a wealthy man, but he was interested in seeing Jesus. His wealth and business were not all-consuming. There seems to be a spiritual hunger in him that was leading him to seek Jesus. His wealth had not smothered his thirst for the divine and eternal. He had apparently heard about Jesus and his message about the Kingdom of God. He wanted to know more. This life of plenty was not fully satisfying to him. He wanted more. He was too short of stature to see above the crowd, so although a man of prestige, he did not let that or what people thought of him keep him from running ahead and climb a sycamore tree so he could get a good look at Jesus as he was passing by. Seeing Jesus was important to him. He is the image of God. When we look at him we see God; we also see in him what we are called to be.

Perhaps Jesus saw Zacchaeus before he saw Jesus. Jesus was looking at him and wanted to see and visit with him. Jesus said, “Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house”. How surprised he must have been to receive such an invitation. It is the same for us. St. John quotes Jesus saying that if we love him and keep his word, he, and the Father as well as the Holy Spirit will come to live in us (Jn 14: 15-17, 23). How honored we ought to feel!

Zacchaeus descended quickly and received Jesus with joy. We had the honor of being in Jesus’ presence, who is one with the Father in the Spirit.

But some grumbled because they felt Zacchaeus was a great sinner, since he was a tax collector, and a chief one at that. The little man revealed his true nature at that moment. He said that he would give half of his possessions to the poor and that

he would restore and repay four times more to anyone he might have extorted anything. We see here how powerful Jesus' grace-giving presence is and how it affected the man.

Jesus confirmed the good man's intention, for he knew his heart. "Today", he said, salvation has come to this house. He manifested himself to be a true descendent of Abraham by his faith and generosity. Jesus realized his mission in Zacchaeus, for he, the Son of Man, came to seek and save what was lost.

Wednesday of the 33rd Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 19: 11-28**

As Jesus approached Jerusalem, his disciples thought he would be enthroned as King and establish an earthly kingdom (Acts 1:6). So Jesus proceeds to tell a parable to correct that misconception.

Jesus must first ascend to the Father in heaven to receive kingly power (12). Then he will return to judge those who rejected his being made king (27) at his second coming.

In going away, a nobleman (Jesus in disguise) called his servants and gave them ten gold coins for them to trade with until he returns. When he returned as king, he checked to see how well his servants had done with the coins. The first was very successful, he earned ten more. As a reward for being faithful and industrious, he put him in charge of ten cities. The second servant earned five more coins. The king rewarded him by putting him in charge of five cities. The other servant, however, was too afraid to deal with the coin, so he simply put the coin away. He blamed the king for being a fearsome and demanding person. But the king did not accept his excuse; rather he condemned him for not investing his money to make more with it. He was judged to

be wicked for not being industrious even if there was a risk involved. So he took the gold coin away from him and gave it to the one who already had ten. He knew the one with ten would make still more. Whereas the one with only one, by non use, would lose the little he had.

God gives us gifts and talents and expects us to use them so they will be perfected and become profitable. We must be industrious and invest what we have so it will grow and produce more. Grace builds upon grace. If we cooperate with the grace given us we will increase in holiness. We will become better servants, and grow in charity. So when Jesus returns as Messianic King to judge the world, he will reward us for doing our best to develop our gifts and talents. Those who failed to develop their gifts will be condemned. Fear and idleness will not be accepted as excuses for doing nothing. We were meant to bring to perfection what little or much we have received.

Thursday of the 33rd Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 19: 41-44**

Jesus finally arrived at Jerusalem. When he saw the city, he began to weep over it. He loved his people dearly. He wanted so much for them and their leaders to listen to the good news of the gospel; but they had their minds and hearts set on their own unenlightened beliefs. They were hardened in their sins and could not be moved. He was greatly saddened by their resistance to truth. That sadness in the depth of his heart welled up and burst into tears.

What makes for peace is conformity of our wills with the will of God. But the leaders' hearts were dead set against God's will as Jesus proclaimed it in the fullness of truth. They were too blinded by pride and vainglory to be able to see and understand the good news of God's love that he was revealing. Their innermost being which

is inclined to truth was contradicted by their prideful wants. As a result they were agitated and disturbed within themselves. This inner turmoil expressed itself outwardly in angry, hostile attacks against Jesus. Now that peace is no longer attainable. They are hardened in their selfishness.

Jesus foresees what will happen to the city and its people in the year 70 AD. The Roman army will surround the city so that none will be able to escape. Those who tried to flee were caught and crucified. Those within the walls starved. The enemy eventually broke through the wall and slaughtered those within. They burned everything within and toppled over everything that was still standing. This marvel of the world, the Temple of God, was completely destroyed as Jesus predicted. And all of this was because God had come to visit them in love through his Son, but they rejected him entirely. They wanted him out of their lives so completely that they had him crucified, killed and buried.

Friday of the 33rd Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 19:45-48**

When Jesus arrived at the temple, he saw that animals were being sold in the Temple's outermost court, the Court of the Gentiles. These animals would be used for sacrifice. This presented a total distraction and prevented the Gentiles from worshipping God. Those in authority enriched themselves through the exchange of money and the high prices of the sacrificial animals. The noise of the braying animals and bartering arguments made for an irreverent atmosphere so that it became impossible to pray. Turning God's house into a worldly business-like sphere of activity greatly angered Jesus. According to St. John, Jesus made a whip of cords and drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; he poured out

the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables (Jn 2:15).

At this point, Jesus combines Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 to make one single quote. We see here how well he knew the Scriptures and how he could unite different sayings from two different prophets into one statement.

God said through Isaiah, "For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples". Isaiah foresaw the Gentiles' entry into the church. To it Jesus joins the words of Jeremiah, "Has their house which bears my name become in your eyes a den of thieves?" In this passage, the people were committing all kinds of abominable sins and then would go hide in the temple, thinking they would be safe there. They used the temple as a hideout after committing their crimes. The leaders of the people in Jesus' day were using the temple to steal from those who had come to worship.

This was a prophecy in action. Jesus' cleansing of the temple prophesied its cleansing and destruction by the Roman army in 70 A.D.

Jesus continued to teach in the temple. The priests and scribes were infuriated with him, even to desiring to kill him. But they feared the people who were hanging on every one of his words—his words were so full of divine unction.

Saturday of the 33rd Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 20: 27-40**

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. They asked Jesus a question whose answer would make the life after death ridiculous. The Mosaic Law stipulated that if a man died leaving his wife without a child, it was necessary that his brother take her as wife to raise descendants for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. They each took her as wife but

died without leaving a child. Finally the wife also died. The question was, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? All seven were married to her.

Jesus explained that the life of the resurrection is not like that on earth when people marry and remarry. People do not marry in heaven. Because of the resurrection they can no longer die. Before the resurrection of the body they are pure spirits. Even after their spirits are reunited to their bodies, they are spiritualized and glorified. They are like angels. The number of people to be born and exist will be complete. All those in the tombs will rise in their glorified bodies and in all truth become the children of God.

Jesus then proceeded to quote from the Torah one of the first five books of the Old Testament, the only ones that the Sadducees accepted: "That the dead will rise even Moses made known in the passage about the bush, when he called 'Lord' the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex 3: 6). To say he is their God implies that they are alive. He relates to the patriarchs as men who are still alive. This proves life after death and resurrection from the dead. Some of the scribes present understood Jesus' answer and congratulated him. The Sadducees dared ask questions no longer.

Monday of the 34th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 21:1-4**

Jesus was a keen observer of nature and people. He used the facts he gleaned to tell parables and reveal the truth. He noticed that those who contributed were both wealthy and poor. The wealthy gave of their surplus. It was not really hurting them. They had plenty more to spare. That kind of giving is good but it does not require a great deal of sacrifice. It does require some temperance to freely give away some of our possessions. That is what happens when we give away, for example,

ten percent of our earnings to the Church or to charity. Some amount of faith and temperance are required to accomplish that. This is spiritually healthy for it requires some detachment. That Jesus could say that the poor widow put in more than all the rest with her two small coins refers to the amount of sacrifice it cost her. It took great faith in God and his providence that he would take care of her in her destitution. Her faith led her to give him her all. She had nothing left but God. She had to have been a very spiritual person to have given so much. Self-sacrifice had to have been a habit and second nature to her. She had to understand that the highest life is in the spirit and not in the flesh (Jn 6:63). She seems to have reached that point of self-emptying in life that is said of Jesus when he became human (Phil 2:7). Like Jesus, she was not grasping at possessing things for the sake of status. God was enough for her. She must have enjoyed continual prayerful communion with God to be able to be so detached. God must have taken over her life to enable her to be so selfless. Her strong spiritual life would have caused the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be operative so that it is he who rules her life. It is he who took possession of her and led her to give herself to God to such an extent. For she had become totally dispossessed of all except God. He had become her all.

We too are called to gradually do the same. We can only reach this supreme spiritual point in life little by little as we grow in God's grace. For this is indeed a fruit of God's abundant grace. It supposes continuous cooperation with God's grace through prayer and the practice of the virtues.

Tuesday of the 34th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 21:5-11**

The beauty of the temple in Jerusalem was one of the wonders of the world. Some were speaking with admiration about its

beauty, how it was adorned with costly stones and votive offerings. The Apostles must have been shocked to hear Jesus pronounce the prophecy that one day that beautiful temple would be totally demolished. It is also a sobering thought to realize that these beautiful, healthy, strong and youthful bodies of ours will one day come to an end. We need to reflect on this truth, it will help us to remain faithful to God. Scripture says, “In whatever you do, remember your last days, and you will never sin” (Sir 7:36). Another passage reminds us of our origin and our end, “The Lord from the earth created man, and in his own image he made him. Limited days of life he gives him and makes him return to earth again” (Sir 17:1-2). If we come from the earth and will return to earth again (Gen 2:19), how can we act so independently and sin? Scripture remonstrates with us and makes us face stark reality, “Why are dust and ashes proud? Even during life man’s body decays; a slight illness—the doctor jests, a king today—tomorrow he is dead” (Sir 10:9-10).

Jesus’ prediction of the destruction of the temple actually came true in the year 70 AD when the Roman army surrounded the city, broke through the walls and destroyed the temple and the city. The Apostles wanted to know when that would happen, but Jesus would not say. They wanted to know what signs to look for indicating that the destruction was about to take place. He simply told them to be aware of false prophets claiming to be the Messiah, or that the end of the age was arriving. They must not believe or follow them. Much time will elapse before the final end. Wars will take place, uprisings and civil wars will happen. They are not to be terrified when all of that happens.

Warring countries with each other remind us of the final days. Alongside these signs, others such as earthquakes, famines and plagues will also occur. Added to this, “awesome and mighty signs will come from the sky”. We do

not know when the final end will come. It will come suddenly. Our task is to remain vigilant and ready at any moment. We must live in the divine presence with a clear conscience, ready for Jesus’ arrival.

Wednesday of the 34th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 21:12-19**

Much will take place before the end of the world will happen. Jesus warns his disciples that they will be persecuted for being his followers. What he is telling them now, he will repeat again—to expect hatred from the world. During the Last Supper he says to them, “If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (Jn 15:18, 20). They will be arrested as heretics and handed over to the synagogue authorities. They can expect to be beaten and imprisoned. We see this actually happen in the Acts of the Apostles, “Saul, meanwhile, was trying to destroy the Church; entering house after house and dragging out men and women, he handed them over for imprisonment” (Acts 8:3).

As he stood before King Agrippa on trial, Paul admits, “I imprisoned many of the holy ones with the authorization I received from the chief priests, and when they were to be put to death I cast my vote against them. Many times, in synagogue after synagogue, I punished them in an attempt to force them to blaspheme; I was so enraged against them that I pursued them even to foreign cities” (Acts 26: 10-11).

The good that will come from this persecution is that “It will lead to your giving testimony”. Those arrested will be given the opportunity to profess their faith in Jesus as Suffering Servant and risen from the dead. He is the fulfillment of what Moses and the prophets foretold.

They are not to be anxious about what they are to say in order to defend themselves. Forethought, yes, but, not anxiety. For Jesus, through his Holy Spirit, will give them a wisdom in speaking so that all their adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute. Stephen's discourse before the Sanhedrin is a good example of this (see Acts 6:8—7:60).

Members of a family who become believers will be persecuted by other members of the same family. Some will be put to death for adhering to Jesus. They will incur the hate of all. But they will be kept intact by the grace of God. They will be preserved from all moral harm, from sin. Their patient endurance will secure eternal life for themselves.

Thursday of the 34th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 21:20-28**

Jesus is warning his disciples that when they see the Roman army gathering, they need to move quickly. This is the moment in time when Jerusalem is going to be laid waste. The disciples have little time to escape. Those in the open country need to flee and hide in the mountains. Those within the city must flee immediately. Those in the neighboring area must keep away from the city. This is the time ordained by God for Jerusalem to be punished for its infidelity to God (see Jer 6:6-8).

It will be particularly difficult for pregnant women and nursing mothers in those days. Some people will die by the sword; others will be taken captive and deported. Jerusalem will be leveled. All of this will take place in AD 70 when God will use the Roman army to chastise his people for rejecting his Messiah and their sinfulness.

The times of the Gentiles seems to refer to that period after the destruction of Jerusalem until the signs that will accompany the coming of the Son of Man (when Jesus returns in glory). Since the

Jews as a whole rejected the invitation to enter the kingdom, God opened it to the other nations, the Gentiles: that is their time.

Jesus used images that the Old Testament prophets employed to announce God's oncoming judgment (see Joel 2:10-11). When God appears, the heavenly bodies are jolted and stirred by his almighty presence. The waters of the sea are greatly disturbed, gigantic waves lash against the shore with tremendous force. People will die of fright upon seeing the forces of nature so out of control. They foretell that the end of the world is about to happen.

These tumultuous signs anticipate the world-shaking appearance of Jesus, the Son of Man, as he manifests himself in all his glory with all the saints and angels. When these signs begin to happen it is the time for God's faithful ones to look up and await the redemption they so longed for. It is about to take place when Jesus appears in all his glory.

Friday of the 34th Week in Ordinary Time **Lk 21:29-33**

The harshness of winter causes the fig tree and other deciduous trees to shed their leaves in order to face the harshness of the winter cold and storms. So too the end times will bring about hard times for Jesus' followers. The invasion and destruction of Jerusalem and the end of that old world gives us an idea of what the end of the world will be like. But the end of the Old Testament world will be the beginning of a new one. The New Testament will replace the old one. The budding trees after the harsh winter are a sign of hope. A new world is about to begin in the kingdom of God. We have reason to be very optimistic when we are in the midst of persecution and must face various forms of suffering. We are encouraged to persevere in our

holy faith. Such an experience is very purifying. It will spiritualize us and dispose us for a deeper union with God.

Challenging times, then, are to be given a positive interpretation. Something is in the process of happening, just as the budding trees announce the beginning of spring or virtual summer. The kingdom of God is about to be revealed. John the Baptist announced its bare beginnings when Jesus appeared on the Jordan. It continued to be revealed through Jesus' presence, his preaching and his exorcisms and miraculous healings. It will reveal itself still more completely through Jesus' passion, death and resurrection and the sending of the Spirit. This generation, the one that he was speaking to, Jesus says, will experience what he is talking about. The destruction of Jerusalem took place about 35 years later, and that was like a preview of the end of the world. He who speaks is the truth and everything he said would most certainly take place. And with his Resurrection and Ascension he anticipates his return in glory.

Saturday of the 34th Week in Ordinary Time Lk 21:34-36

The day of the Lord is coming, whether it refers to his judgment on Jerusalem or Jesus' return in glory. And each of us will have to face the Lord and be judged when our personal lives come to an end. Death could strike us at any moment. Then we will have to face God and be judged.

That is why we must remain ready and vigilant. Therefore it is necessary that the spirit rule our lives. It must dominate our lower human nature and keep it under control. Otherwise, self-indulgence will take over and we will lose our alertness. Overconsumption of food and alcohol

overwhelms our spirit's alertness and causes drowsiness. The spirit is no longer in command. Holy temperance and self-restraint give way to disordered desire. Disordered self love displaces our love for God and his will. Opaque flesh dominates the clarity of spirit so that our awareness of the presence of God is clouded over. Our conscience is blurred so that it loses its keenness of judgment, sensitivity and purity of heart. We then can easily begin to gradually drift away and engage in acts that are contrary to God's will.

Drowsiness replaces vigilance. We lose our supernatural bearing. We can also become distracted by the affairs of daily living. We lose our spiritual perspective by becoming preoccupied with certain concerns. We become anxious and absorbed with worry. Ideally, we would commend our just concerns to God and trust in his providential care. He would continue to remain the center of our lives. Thus we would still be vigilant and live in his presence as we await his coming. In this way we would be fully prepared and welcome his arrival.

The day of the Lord is coming for every single one of us. We want to be ready for it. We must be quick to repent of the least sin, get it behind us, and continue to strive to be pleasing to God.

A holy temperance and self-restraint will keep up spirit dominant and fully alert and awake. Prayerful communion with God will keep us strong and virtuous. We will thus be able to bear patiently with all the tribulations that come upon us. We will have the strength to stand before Jesus the glorified Son of Man when he appears.

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