



Prayer † Scripture † Eucharist † Community

Understanding the Sunday Epistles

CYCLE C

by Father Conley Bertrand

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

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The Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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1st Sunday of Advent

1 Thes 3:12-4, 2

Thessalonica was an important port city on the Thermaic Gulf in northern Greece. In the first century, it was a cosmopolitan city with a large Jewish colony and many pagan cults. Paul, Silvanus and Timothy arrived in Thessalonica in 50 AD in the course of his second mission. They began to preach the gospel in a Jewish synagogue, and there in the house of a certain Jason. A large number of the “God-fearing” Greeks, along with many pagans and important women were converted. The Jews, however, jealous of Paul’s success, stirred up a mob against the missionaries and forced their expulsion from the city. Paul’s success stirred up a mob against the missionaries and forced their expulsion from the city. Paul’s stay in Thessalonica must have lasted two or three months. His two letters reveal a flourishing Christian community, strong in faith, hope and charity, despite constant persecution by their fellow citizens and Jews---a prolongation of that began while Paul was there. In this short time a strong bond of affection was forged between the Thessalonica Christians and then apostle. Paul addresses them as “brother” the term of Christ—and endearment, 21 times, a higher proportion than in any other letter. That date of 1Thessalonians, the oldest in the New Testament. He wrote to encourage them to pressure in the faith he had taught them.

3:12 St. Paul’s prayer to the Father, in his great love for this community, says, “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you.” St. Paul had a special love for these Thessalonians. His desire was that they increase in numbers and that they grow, actually abound, in love for one another. But that love must reach beyond the community of disciples to all in Thessalonica. For love is the distinctive virtue of Jesus’ followers. As Jesus expressed it, “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for another.” (Jn13:35)

1:3 This love proceeds from their union with God

who, at the same time, strengthens their hearts, to be blameless in holiness before God. God’s presence wards off all sin in those who are full of love. In this way they will be fully prepared when Jesus and all the saints appear at his second coming.

4:1 In his immense love for his beloved Thessalonians, St. Paul “earnestly asks and exhorts” them, in union with Jesus, to conduct themselves in a way that is pleasing to God—just as they are presently doing—but in his keen sense of the nearness of Jesus’ coming, he urges them to be even more pleasing to God.

4:2 Here, St. Paul refers to certain previous instructions he had given his disciples. These were specific guidelines that the Holy Spirit inspired him to give them.

2nd Sunday of Advent

Phil 1:4-6, 8-11

Philippi, a city of Macedonia, was the first European city evangelized by St. Paul (Abbot 50 A.D.). He had a special warm corner in his heart for the Philippians; they were fervent converts and his love for them was warmly returned. They helped him financially at least three times when he was in sore need during his missionary journeys. He was in prison when he wrote this letter, but his thoughts are all for his converts. His chains are only a source of rejoicing for him as they are encouraging others to do and dare for the spread of the Gospel.

4 St. Paul is filled with gratitude to God when he remembers the Philippians, as he is always praying with joy for all of them.

5 He is grateful to God for them, because ever since their conversion until the present day they have been partners with Paul in spreading the gospel. They have both suffered for the gospel (1:29) and assisted him financially (4:13-18).

6 St. Paul is fully confident that God the Father, who began to grace his dear Philippians, will

continue to bring their sanctification to perfection until the day of Jesus' coming, when those loyal to him will be with him and share in his eternal glory.

8 St. Paul very frankly expresses to his loved ones how he longs for all of them. This longing springs from the love and affection of Jesus himself that is in his heart.

9 His prayer is that their love may increase ever more and more. This is a primary concern, for "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom 13:10). It is the greatest commandment that fulfills all the others both toward God and neighbor.

St. Paul also prays for an increase of knowledge and insights so that the Philippians may discern what is of value in the sight of God. In this way they will be guided in purity of heart and live blameless lives as they await the day of Christ's Parousia or second coming.

11 They will then be filled with the fruit of righteousness and every virtue with which it is endowed. This comes through Jesus—not from their own power—for the glory and praise of God.

3rd Sunday of Advent Phil 4:4-7

St. Paul is writing to the Philippians while in prison and even in danger of death. And yet, he burst out in joy: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice." Jesus had said to "rejoice and be glad" when we are persecuted and rejected (Mt 5:11). How is that possible when it is so unnatural? The natural tendency under these circumstances is to be sad and dejected. Throughout his letter he remains full of joy.

Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22). The fruits of the Holy Spirit are defined as acts of virtue which reach a certain degree of

perfection and fill the soul with joy. When we first begin to practice virtuous acts, they require effort and discomfort. But with practice, we acquire a facility and can even enjoy performing them. For example, we can experience a holy joy when we form a habit of holy temperance and moderation in partaking of food and drink. This is an interior joy which comes from perfected virtue. It is born in the spirit, the deepest aspect of the soul. Perfected virtues have been so spiritualized they begin to image God and become one with the risen Jesus dwelling within us. Thus, through the gift of wisdom, we begin to savor or experience a foretaste of the life of glory.

St. Paul was physically and psychologically suffering in prison and anticipated being put to death, yet he could be joyful because this joy comes from the perfected virtue and the gift of fortitude experienced in the deepest realms of his soul called spirit (see 1 Thes 5:23).

St. Paul is rejoicing in the Lord because he has become one spirit with him through perfected virtue (1 Cor 6:17). Suffering accepted and patiently endured by the virtue of fortitude had so purified and transformed Paul's being that he could experience the joy of his glorified Lord.

5 "your kindness should be known to all." The word kindness may also be translated as forbearance. We are encouraged either to have an overflowing goodness or to remain steady in bearing with the difficulties of life.

"The Lord is near." We need to be constantly aware of the Lord's indwelling presence so we remain in communion with him to draw power for patient endurance in trial. His nearness may also refer to his continuous coming to us in grace or his return in glory.

6 Anxiety means we are worried about something. We are fearful about some evil. St. Paul says, "Have no anxiety." Anxiety causes us to become absorbed in the evil we fear and to forget God. Rather, we ought to have a holy concern about

the impending evil as we remain connected to God in prayer and intercession, making our needs known to him, even thanking him ahead of time for hearing us.

7 Then God's peace will flood our souls. Such interior prayer will cause us to recede into our hearts (spirit) where God dwells. Contacting him there will enable us to know God's presence as peace. His presence will keep our hearts anchored deep within him. We will live in the secure knowledge of being in Christ, our glorified indwelling Lord.

4th Sunday of Advent Heb 10:5-10

This writing was written some time before the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. It was probably written by a disciple of St. Paul. The animal sacrifices of the Old Testament were not able to cleanse people from sin. They were only a shadow and prefigured what was to come. They only reminded people of their sins. Their moral blemishes could not be removed by the blood of animals.

5 The inspired author takes the Psalmist's words of the Greek version (The Septuagint) and applies them to Jesus at his coming into this world. He attributes Ps 40:7-9 to Jesus at his Incarnation as he assumed our human nature.

The inferior sacrifices of the Old Law are giving way to what they looked toward, their fulfillment. "Sacrifice and offering...holocausts and sin offerings" are being replaced.

These four terms are probably intended as equivalent to the four principal types of Old Testament sacrifices: peace offerings, cereal offerings, holocausts, and sin offerings.

6 It is obedience that is the real remedy for sin. Disobedience separated us from God; obedience reunited us to him. Jesus' ears were open to God's

will for him. He was obedient even to the death of the cross through which he redeemed all the sins of the whole world. Since he was a divine Person, the value of his sacrifice was infinite and made up for sin's infinite offense against God.

7 The "scroll" refers to the book of the Old Testament which spoke of a coming redeemer, as for example Genesis 3:15. Jesus comes in obedience to fulfill that or those promises. "A body was prepared" for Jesus (5) when he was conceived so that he could offer it in sacrifice as willed by God in reparation for sin.

8 These animal and material sacrifices are not things God could delight in since they could not bring about reconciliation with God—they could not make up for the sins of the world. This was done according to the Old Law while waiting for the one perfect sacrifice of Jesus.

9 Jesus came into the world when he was born a human being out of obedience to the Father. And that will was carried out to completion when he offered himself in sacrifice on the cross for the salvation of the world. What an impressive way to show God's love for us in his desire to free us from sin! That's what it took! The act of reparation had to surpass the heinousness of sin.

"He takes away the first", that is, the Old Covenant and its sacrifices—these proved inadequate. God replaced the first covenant with the second, that is, the New Covenant with its one perfect sacrifice which effectively redeemed the world and more than adequately made up for sin.

10 By this will of God by which Jesus sacrificed himself on the cross in obedience to the Father, we are set apart and consecrated to God. This one sacrifice in which Jesus offered himself is of infinite value and makes up for all sin, past, present and future. It is more than adequate for all

time. It was offered once for all: The ritual which Jesus performed at the last supper, which we call the Mass and which Jesus commanded us to do in his memory, simply makes that one sacrifice of Jesus present among us so we can partake of its fruit.

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

Col 3:12-21

“Put on as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” (12).

In addressing the Colossians as chosen, holy and beloved, St. Paul sees this Christian community as the new Israel. For these are the terms used to describe Israel of old. They were chosen by God, holy and set apart for him, and greatly loved.

Through baptism the people of Colossae are entering into a new community of God’s people. Their relationships with one another must reflect the holiness of God’s specially chosen people. The virtuous way in which they treat one another ought to bring this out.

The five virtuous qualities mentioned express the inner transformation that occurred at baptism. We then received a new nature patterned unto the image of Christ. These virtues enable us to be like Christ in relating to one another.

We are moved with a heartfelt compassion for those who are in pain; the love in our hearts is expressed by kindness in dealing with others. We have a sense of our own lowliness through humility; moving us to serve them or accept mistreatment at their hands. Meekness enables us to control our aggressive passions so that even under duress we are gentle in responding. We remain long-suffering, patiently enduring hardship so that a loving attitude always prevails.

“..bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do” (13).

“Bearing with one another” means enduring what is distasteful and odious in other’s character. Patient endurance is very purifying and transforming because suffering spiritualizes our human nature. By forgiving one another, we let go of the hurt and give it to God, thus freeing us from preoccupation with it. Then we can focus on loving God and one another with our whole heart. We have been forgiven many times by the Lord. We must pass on the mercy we have received to others. If we want God to forgive us, we must do what we pray for in the Our Father: “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”.

“And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection” (14).

All of the preceding virtues flow from love: “Love is patient...It bears all things...endures all things” (1 Cor 13: 4, 7). The foregoing virtues are likewise held together by love. The stronger love is, the firmer all the other virtues will be – for they proceed from it and are held together by it. “For stern as death is love...Deep waters cannot quench love, nor floods sweep it away” (Sg 8:6, 7). Love perfects the other virtues, for it embellishes them with its sweetness. Love also binds persons together and makes them one. Since love comes from God, it is divine. It perfects our union with one another and all the other virtues which it informs.

“And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were called in one body. And be thankful” (15).

Jesus is peace itself (Mic 5:4). This peace flows from his perfect union of love with the Father and conformity with his will. Union with Jesus in love and obedience opens us to receive that divine peace which controls our heart and keeps

it serenely self-possessed in God. This peace affects our relationships with one another. It holds us together in mutual love and unity. Our heart overflows with gratitude for existing in the wonder of that divine peace.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God” (16).

Jesus held the scriptures in his heart and could quote them to bring out the truth (e.g. Mt 4: 4, 7, 10). So we must do likewise. That is how we are consecrated in the truth (Jn 17:17).

We can also use that word to teach and admonish one another as St. Paul tells Timothy (2 Tim 3:16). We are encouraged to use these inspired words to sing to God with gratitude for his countless blessings.

“And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (17).

We are called to do and speak in the name of Jesus, our Lord and God. He is our creator with the Father and our redeemer. We owe him our all. We ought to do everything for him, to glorify him. Everything we do or say ought to be in obedience to him, to accomplish his will. We are also called to remain in union with him, to be “in the name”, immersed in the divinity, in communion with him, always filled with gratitude for his endless gifts, especially that of sharing his divine life with us.

We always go to the Father through Jesus because he is our mediator. Without him we can do nothing.

“Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord” (18).

This seemingly one-sided statement is softened by St. Paul’s other address to spouses when he says,

“Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5: 21). The next verse in today’s epistle also balances off the idea of the wives’ subordination:

“Husbands, love your wives, and avoid any bitterness toward them” (19).

The wife will gladly submit herself to a loving husband who is naturally endowed with leadership qualities if he is a loving spouse who seeks the good of his wife and children.

“Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing to the Lord” (20).

The Old Testament teaches parents’ authority over their children. The Book of Sirach says, “God set a father in honor over his children; a mother’s authority he confirms over his sons.” (Sir 3: 2).

The first of the commandments regarding love of neighbor is, “Honor your father and your mother...” (Ex 20: 12). Respect for parents is strongly demanded. Scripture further says, “He who mistreats his father, or drives away his mother, is a worthless and disgraceful son” (Prov 19: 26). “A blasphemer is he who despises his father; accursed of his Creator, he who angers his mother” (Sir 3:16).

Our passage ends with “Father, do not provoke your children, so they may not become discouraged” (21).

Fathers are counseled to treat their children with love and respect. The children will be encouraged to reciprocate with love and obedience.

The Epiphany of the Lord Eph 3: 2-3a, 5-6

Our epistle begins with, “...you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for your benefit” (2).

St. Paul is writing to the Christian community of Ephesus from his Roman imprisonment. He is

reflecting on his mission to the Gentiles, the non-Jewish nations. He was called as an apostle to be a steward and administrator of God's grace to them. He considered this call to be a special grace for him. God's plan for the Ephesians would be realized through Paul.

St. Paul discusses how this mission came to him, "that the mystery was made known to me by revelation" (3). He tells us that Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9: 3-5) "so that [he] might proclaim him to the Gentiles" (Gal 1: 16). Jesus told Paul quite specifically from the very beginning that he had been set apart from his mother's womb for this purpose (Gal 1: 15-16). That puts St. Paul on the level of the Old Testament prophets, such as Jeremiah. God told him, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you" (Jer 1: 5).

St. Paul is very much taken up with the mystery that Jesus revealed to him. He is intrigued with God's mysterious plan to save the nations along with the Jews. That mystery was kept hidden in the mind of God from all eternity until these New Testament times. He says, "It was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (5). Thus St. Paul considered his being called to reveal this mystery a unique grace and privilege. St. Paul goes on to explain what this mystery is, "that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (6).

God promised Abraham "in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing" (Gen 22: 18). Later on God revealed to the prophet Isaiah regarding the Servant of the Lord, "I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (Is 49: 6). But exactly how this blessing was to take place was not revealed.

Jesus himself told the apostles, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations..." (Mt 28: 18-19).

But it took time for this commission to be understood and fully realized. God and his angels had to intervene in the apostles' lives and give specific instruction to include the nations (Gentiles) in their mission of salvation. For example, Peter received a vision to make him understand that "God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him" (Acts 10: 34-35). "The holy Spirit fell upon all [the Gentile, Cornelius, his relatives and friends] who were listening to the word" that Peter spoke (Acts 10: 24, 44). These Gentiles were then baptized and received into the church (Acts 10: 47-48).

In response to those who believed that "It is necessary to circumcise [Gentiles] and direct them to observe the Mosaic law. The apostles and the presbyters met together [in Jerusalem] to see about this matter" (Acts 15: 5-6).

"After much debate had taken place, Peter got up" (Acts 15: 7) and spoke. He explained how the Holy Spirit was given to the Gentiles just as to the Jews. "He made no distinction between us and them for by faith he purified their hearts...We believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they" (Acts 15: 9, 11) and that brought the debate to a conclusion. The Gentiles, then, could be received into the church without the need for circumcision or the keeping of the law.

St. Paul is now explaining "the mystery of God, Christ" (Col 2: 2-3). That mysterious hidden plan of God that Paul has been commissioned to reveal is to unite Jew and Gentile in Christ. Jesus reconciles and unites them all in himself. All are redeemed by the shedding of his blood. Through baptism all are united to him and to each other. They become one body in him who is their savior and head. Faith, not the law, is what unites them to him. Through this faith they draw divine life. "Those who have faith are children in Abraham...Consequently, those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham who had faith...You are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3: 7, 9, 29). "Gentiles are coheirs [with the Jews], members of the same

body [of Christ], and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph 3: 6).

God’s plan is to unite us all together in Christ. Everyone is directly joined to Jesus, the God-man, who redeemed us by his suffering and death on the cross and rose again to share with us his divine life. The Holy Spirit joins us immediately to our Risen Lord. We are all together in him, joined to him and to each other. Love is at work here, breaking down all barriers of separation and hostility.

God’s manner of saving us is through joining us intimately to himself. Through his Holy Spirit, he infuses us with love. He inclines us to reciprocate with love, to return love for love, both to God and our fellow humans to whom we are joined in Christ. God is love. His manner of saving us is one of love. How can we not love when we are caught in the embrace of God’s love, which has united us and put us in Christ who loved us to death?

The Baptism of the Lord Acts 10: 34-38 (B)

“Peter proceeded to speak to those gathered in the house of Cornelius saying, ‘In truth, I see that God shows no partiality’” (34).

Peter came to this conclusion that God is not more partial to one nation, the Jews, than to another (the Gentiles). He came to this realization by divine revelation. He received a vision that made him understand that all foods are clean (Acts 10: 9-16). “What God has made clean,” he was told, “you are not to call profane” (Acts 10: 15). Furthermore, the Holy Spirit commanded Peter to accompany the three men sent by Cornelius, a Gentile centurion. Upon arrival, Peter explained, “...God has shown me that I should not call any person profane or unclean” (Acts 10: 28). As Peter was speaking to Cornelius and his relatives and friends who had gathered, “...the holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the word. The circumcised believers

who had accompanied Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit should have been poured out on the Gentiles also...Then Peter responded, ‘Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these peoples, who have received the Holy Spirit even as we have?’ He ordered them to be baptized” (Acts 10: 44-48). Peter explained the whole scenario to those who objected to his association with Gentiles. When they heard his explanation, “they stopped objecting and glorified God, saying, ‘God has then granted life-giving repentance to the Gentiles too’” (Acts 11: 18). Only this divine intervention could have solved this difficult question regarding opening the Christian faith to uncircumcised Gentiles.

The eighth century prophet Isaiah announced that all nations (the Gentiles) would stream towards the mountain of the Lord’s house. “Many peoples shall come and say: ‘Come, let us climb the Lord’s mountain...that he may instruct us in his ways...’”(Is 2: 2-3). Jesus himself said, “Many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 8: 11). And as Jesus was leaving the earth, he told his apostles “Go...and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28: 19). But exactly how the Gentiles would become one with the Jews in the kingdom of God was not known. This would have to be worked out in time. This is what Peter was led to realize and bring about. Only a divine intervention and revelation could enable him to understand this. This is an important moment in the history of the Church. In the words of St. Paul, “God...wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2: 4). “God shows no partiality”.

“Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him” (35).

Anyone who “fears” the Lord, that is, reverences God and does his will is acceptable to him. “The Lord looks into the heart” (1 Sam 16: 7) and relates graciously to the well-disposed.

“You know the word that he sent to the Israelites as he proclaimed peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all” (36).

The word of God was preached first of all to the Jews regarding Jesus’ saving passion, death and resurrection. The peace that was proclaimed was available through faith in Jesus, repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Jesus became Lord of all, both Jew and Gentile, by his glorification. We note the phrase “Jesus Christ”, as if Christ was Jesus’ family name. He is really Jesus, the Christ, the anointed one and Messiah.

“What has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached” (37).

The exciting news about Jesus quickly spread throughout Palestine. His electrifying presence, preaching and miracles attracted much attention and discussion. The preaching and baptizing of John was itself a topic of much talk. But all of this was leading to his baptizing Jesus and proclaiming him to be the Lamb of God.

“...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power” (38).

What does this baptism and anointing mean? The Catechism explains, “The baptism of Jesus is on his part the acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God’s suffering-Servant. He allows himself to be numbered among sinners; he is already ‘the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.’ Already he is anticipating the ‘baptism’ of his bloody death. Already he is coming to fulfill all righteousness, that is, he is submitting himself entirely to his Father’s will: out of love he consents to this baptism of death for the remission of our sins.

The Father’s voice responds to the Son’s acceptance, proclaiming his entire delight in his Son. The Spirit whom Jesus possessed in fullness from his conception comes to ‘rest on him.’ Jesus will be the source of the Spirit for all mankind.

At his baptism ‘the heavens were opened’—the heavens that Adam’s sin had closed—and the waters were sanctified by the descent of Jesus and the Spirit, a prelude to the new creation” (CCC 536). “Jesus’ gesture of allowing himself to be baptized is a manifestation of his self-emptying” (CCC 1224).

It is because Jesus possesses the fullness of the Holy Spirit when he became human, and now at his baptism when that fullness was publicly manifested to prepare him for his mission that he is called The Anointed One, that is, the Christ (Greek) and the Messiah (Hebrew). He accomplished his mission by his preaching, miracles, and his passion, death and resurrection through which he poured out the Spirit upon all of us as glorified Lord.

“He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him” (38b).

Grace exuded from Jesus wherever he went—he communicated the sweet fragrance of the Spirit by his look, his voice, his touch. He was all goodness to every receptive heart. He was full of God. St. John tells us, “From his fullness we have all received” (Jn 1: 16). He is still present among us through his priesthood through which he gives us the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and his indwelling presence in each of us.

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Cor 12: 4-11

Certain special charismatic gifts were given to the church at its beginning to give it a vigorous start and to help it spread. The more ostentatious ones eventually ceased or became much rarer. St. Augustine gives the example of our watering a newly planted tree. But once it has taken roots, it is no longer watered. It becomes firmly established and begins to produce fruit of its own.

These special gifts may have caused some who were endowed with these to become inflated with pride. Others may have felt left out. Some might have felt envy. A competitive spirit may have developed. There was a need for Paul to explain the nature and purpose of these gifts.

12:4 Our passage begins with, “There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit.” The reception of these gifts should be an occasion of gratitude rather than pride. They are given mysteriously by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church. All three persons of the Blessed Trinity are involved in giving these gifts, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are explicitly mentioned as “Spirit” (4), “Lord” (5) and “God” (6). But all of the gifts are attributed by appropriation to the Holy Spirit. He is the Person who continues the work of sanctification to complete the mission of Jesus. St. Paul is going to identify these “different kinds of spiritual gifts.”

5 The first mentioned is “different forms of service” whose source is Jesus, the Lord. Jesus came “to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28). The deacons were chosen for this task in the early church (Acts 6:2-4). Serving is a way of giving our lives to others in love. It is a simple way of growing in love and holiness. It is also a way of self-effacement and growing in humility.

6 “There are different forms of workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.” These “workings” are attributed to God the Father; he is the source of all being and power through which good works are done. We need spiritual energy for works of love and service. We must draw these from the Father by being in communion with him through Jesus, our glorified Lord.

7 “To each individual, the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.” Each has received gifts from the Spirit. The manifestation of the Spirit is shown through some particular gift. That is how we know that the Spirit of God is in us.

The gift he gives us is means for the benefit of the community. Sanctifying grace is given to sanctify the individual personally. Charismatic gifts are given to edify others, to benefit the community. They are not meant to be used for one’s selfish advantage.

8 Some of these gifts are now enumerated; “To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom.” The gift of wisdom enables a person to judge rightly in all that pertains to life and conduct. It leads to an appreciation of spiritual truths and a preference for divine rather than earthly things. This will help the community make wise decisions based on truth. “...to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit.” This is knowledge which exceeds human nature and which can be obtained by divine communication. Ordinary knowledge comes through the senses to the intellect but infused knowledge is much surer and is given directly by God, independently of the senses. This enlightens the community to make correct decisions in what course of action to take.

9 “To another faith by the same Spirit.” Faith used here refers to an unusually high degree of trust in God whose intensity is such that it produces miracles (see Mk 11:22-23). This is a special charismatic gift of faith. “to another gifts of healing...” Some are given the gifts to heal particular illnesses. They have the gift, for example, to heal sun strokes, shingles and other maladies. These are known in our parts as “traiteurs.”

10 “to another mighty deed...” These are miraculous powers that only God could perform to the astonishment of all beholders. A miracle that cannot be naturally explained is attributed to the intercession of a particular saint, such as an instantaneous cure of a fatal disease.

“to another prophesy...” A prophet is one who speaks forcefully for God to move his people to do his will. These may include foretelling some future event (compare Acts 13:1-3)

“to another discernment of spirits.” One gifted

in this way is enlightened to be able to discern whether a person is acting genuinely from a virtue and grace of God or from a false or evil spirit. One is able to discern a true from a false teacher or prophet.

“to another varieties of tongues.” Some were charismatically gifted to praise and glorify God in many languages. Others have the gift of speaking many languages with ease such as St. John Paul II. “to another interpretation of tongues.” Such a person has the ability to understand and make intelligible one who speaks in various tongues whether natural or ecstatic

11 “But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes.” The Holy Spirit is the source of these gifts. He determines which of these each believer should have.

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time **1 Cor 12:12-30**

12:12 The body of Christ is like the human body. Although it has many parts it is only one composite. So too, the body of Christ, the Church, has many members that form one body.

12:13 The reason for this is that we were all baptized or plunged into the risen body of Christ and informed by his glorious Spirit, even as the human body is animated by the spiritual soul. In this one body there is no distinction between Jew or Greek, slave or free. All are infused by the same Holy Spirit, even as the soul permeates every part of the human body.

12:14 The body is composed of many different parts just as the members of Christ’s body are individually different. Although the foot and the hand are quite different, they still belong to the body.

15:21 No matter how individuals differ from each other, they still belong to the body of Christ. Just as

the different parts of the body are needed for it to function properly, so it is with the body of Christ, the Church. We are all gifted differently and have different activities for the proper functioning of the body. Each different part is needed so that the body can maintain itself. The feet, the hands, the ears and eyes are not in conflict but work in harmony for the good of the whole body. We are all individually different and gifted in the body of Christ. We are not in contention with each other but work in harmony for the good of all. We all need each other. We cannot do without each other. We need the song leader, the musician, the choir director, the servers, the celebrant, the ushers, the lectors, the extra-ordinary ministers of the Eucharist, the care takers etc. We are all so differently talented, but that makes for beauty and colorful variety—not enmity or division!

15:22 The weaker ones are just as necessary and needed as the stronger ones.

12:23 The less comely and attractive parts of the body are treated with greater honor and clothed attractively.

12:24 The more beautiful parts do not need such special attention.

12:25 This makes for equality and a healthy concern for one another. That is how we function harmoniously as a body. And that is how we are called to care for one another in the body of Christ. God uses diversity to create unity in the body of Christ.

12:26 When one part of the human body is in pain, the whole body feels it. So too when one part is pampered or honored, the whole body feels it and rejoices.

12:27-30 We end by reviewing how particular individuals are differently gifted. We are not gifted in the same way. Each has a different gift for the good of the whole body of Christ.

4th Sunday in Ordinary time

1 Cor 12:31-13:13

12:31 St. Paul advises the Corinthians to “Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts.” He repeats himself in 14:11: “Strive eagerly for the spiritual gifts, above all that you may prophesy.”

The ability to prophesy is the preferred charismatic gift. It is primarily the ability to encourage the assembled church in a powerful way. It speaks to the community for its upbuilding, encouragement and consolation (14:3). But St. Paul is inspired to say further, “But I shall show you a still more excellent way”. Here he begins to speak of the theological virtues, especially that of charity or love which is the greatest of all.

13:1 He goes on to explain the value and superiority of love over any and all of the charismatic gifts. St. John the Evangelist reveals that love is a participation in the very life of God. He says, “God is love, and whoever remains in love, remains in God and God in him” (1 Jn 4:16). The theological virtue of love unites us to God. Without this virtue we remain outside of God. This virtue of love must inform all of our actions and all of the charismatic gifts we exercise. It gives value to them. Without this divine virtue of love, they are worth nothing. Speaking in tongues, no matter how exalted, unless the words are informed with love, is just a loud noise.

13:2 Even the highest charismatic gift of prophecy (14:1), or the ability to comprehend all mysteries, and attain all knowledge—without being informed with divine love, are worthless. The same can be said about having the kind of trusting faith that can move mountains—if I should have such a gift without love—I am nothing. For without love, I am separated from God who gives me worth, without whom I am valueless.

13:3 If I should go to the extreme of giving away all I own or even surrender my body to

martyrdom—if it should be without love, I would gain nothing. That’s how important love is. The charismatic gifts tended to create problems such as division, envy, pride, jealousy, boastfulness and other sins. Whereas love unifies, strengthens fellowship, rejoices in seeing the good and talents in others, is quick to affirm others’ giftedness etc.

13:4 Love expresses itself by patiently enduring hardship and discomfort because it is intimately united to God from whom it draws strength. Through its union with God, love is kindly sympathetic and gentle, overflowing with charity. The various sins that seemed to have plagued the community such as jealousy and pride would be non-existent if love informed their charismatic gifts.

13:5 If all were filled with the love and presence of God, rudeness, selfishness, quick-temperedness and brooding over injuries would not exist among them. For charity is loving, unselfish, longsuffering, and forgiving. Love is rich in virtuous qualities that make for unity and harmony.

13:6 Love is happy in doing good; it regrets and is saddened when it sees wrongdoing. It rejoices in what is right.

13:7 Since love makes us one with God who is love, it enables us to bear patiently with difficulties; it believes all that God has revealed because it lives on the level of spirit; it has the power in God to endure whatever trials come its way.

13:8 Because love makes us one with God, who is eternal and who is love, it will never end. It perdures through all eternity. It unites us to God forever. Prophecies will pass; the gift of tongues will cease; knowledge about the faith and about life will no longer be needed. We will know all things in God.

13:9 Knowledge and what is prophesied to encourage will become obsolete.

13:10 When we see God face to face all these things will no longer be of service once we have reached our goal.

13:11 The things we were concerned about in this life will all pass when we go into eternal life. We outgrow all of these earthly matters.

13:12 Now we see indistinctly as the bronze mirrors of old. But in the life to come we will see God face to face. We know only partially now, but we will know completely even as God knows us.

13:13 Of the three theological virtues, faith will no longer be needed because we will see God directly in all of his beauty, goodness and glory. Hope also will no longer be needed because in heaven we will possess God forever. But charity, love, will remain forever to unite us to God. Clearly love is the greatest gift of all, even among the theological virtues. It alone will have no end and keep us united to God. We will become total love; because God will become all in all of us (1 Cor 15:28).

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Cor 15:1-11

“I am reminding you of the gospel I preached to you, which you indeed received and in which you also stand” (1).

Five years previously, before writing this letter in 57 AD, St. Paul had preached the basic truths of our salvation through Christ and the eternal life he won for us. He was pleased that the Corinthians had received his preaching and were still standing in that grace.

“Through it you are also being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain” (2).

Salvation will be absolutely assured to us when we die in the state of grace. Jesus said, “But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved” (Mk 13:13b). During this lifetime, however,

beginning with faith and baptism, we are in the process of being saved by grace and the Holy Spirit. This holds true if we continue to believe and live virtuously. A faith that is not practiced is ineffective and cannot save us. We pray for the grace of final perseverance.

“For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures” (3).

The word “handed on” refers to Sacred Tradition by which our holy faith has been handed down to us. This sacred truth is protected by the Holy Spirit, so that the truths preserved in the holy Catholic Church remain pure, whole, and unadulterated (see Jn 14:16-17; 16:12-14). This oral tradition referred to by St. Paul was received by him and passed on to his people. It teaches that it is for our sins that Christ died in order to make up for them. By his saving death, he freed us from our bondage and captivity to sin. This occurred “in accordance with the Scriptures” as seen, for example, in Isaiah: “But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins, upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed” (Is 53:5).

“...that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures” (4).

Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection is a fact of history as witnessed by many and recorded here. These events did not appear suddenly and unannounced. They had been foretold in the Scriptures. For example, St. Peter, in his Pentecost sermon, quotes Psalm 16 referring to David’s son, the Messiah, saying, “...you will not abandon my soul to the nether world, nor will you suffer your holy one to see corruption” (see Acts 2:24-33; also Is 53:10-11; Hos 6:1-3).

“...that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve” (5).

Jesus’ appearance to Peter is listed first because of his primacy. St. Luke’s gospel records the eleven Apostles stating, “The Lord has truly been raised

and has appeared to Simon!” (Lk 24:34). Peter’s denials did not change Jesus’ mind about his appointing Peter as the rock of his Church (Mt 16:18). For Peter had repented of his denials and had wept bitterly (Lk 22:60-62). Jesus knew that his experience would bring Peter to deep humility and to a holy dependence on God for everything. Jesus also appeared to the Apostles as a group and revealed himself to them as risen Lord (Lk 24:36-48; Jn 20:19-29).

“After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep” (6).

This public appearance mentioned by Paul is the only place that it is recorded in the New Testament. The sight of the risen Lord by such a large group would increase the number of eyewitnesses who saw Jesus after he had risen from the dead and who could testify to the reality of the resurrection. Since some of these were still living, they could testify and verify the fact. The Corinthians could consult them for verification. “After that he appeared to James, then to all the apostles” (7).

This James is not John’s brother and son of Zebedee (Mt 4:21), but “James the brother of the Lord” (Gal 1:19), who was not one of the Twelve. He played an important role in the Jerusalem church. Paul may have regarded James as an Apostle (see NAB footnote to Gal 1:19). This kinsman of Jesus seems to be the son of Mary, the wife of Clopas (Jn 19:25; Mk 15:40; 16:1); this Mary was Jesus’ mother’s relative (Jn 19:25).

It is uncertain what Paul meant with “all the apostles”. Are these identified with “the Twelve” mentioned earlier in verse 5? Or does it refer to another group of disciples?

“Last of all, as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me” (8).

Those who saw the risen Lord before Paul, saw him between his resurrection and ascension. Paul saw him only after Jesus had ascended to

heaven, when he appeared to him on the road to Damascus at his conversion. That is why he considered himself as “born abnormally” (Acts 9:1-9).

It is interesting to note that of the six appearances mentioned by St. Paul, he does not include the holy women who saw Jesus (Mt 28:1, 9; Mt 16:9; Jn 20:11, 14-18). This is probably because women could not give admissible legal testimony.

“For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (9).

St. Paul felt deeply humiliated that he persecuted the early Christians (Acts 9:1-2; 22:4-5, 19). Not only had he been embarrassingly erroneous about the truth of the new way, he was a sinfully angry man who cooperated and approved the murder of Stephen (Acts 7:54-58; 22:20). This “young man named Saul” was actually Paul, who was to become a great saint and evangelist—he was truly repentant. He confesses to Timothy, “I was once a blasphemer and persecutor and an arrogant man, but I have been mercifully treated because I acted out of ignorance in my unbelief.... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of these I am the foremost” (1 Tim 1:13, 15). He considered himself unworthy to be called an apostle and the least among the Apostles.

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them; not I, however, but the grace of God [that is] with me” (10).

St. Paul was very much aware that it was God’s merciful love and his overflowing grace that saved him from his sinful behavior and brought him into the truth. Through no merit of his own, God looked upon him with love and in his mercy brought him into his kingdom of light and love. This grace also made him into the most valiant apostle and drove him to the ends of the earth with burning zeal to spread the good news. He supported himself through tent-making, so he

would not be a burden to anyone. He worked harder than all the others, driven as he was by God's superabundant grace. He had experienced his own sinfulness, so he had no doubt that it was God's grace that empowered him to do all he did. "Therefore, whether it be I or they, so we preach and so you believed" (11).

Both Paul and the other Apostles preached the same faith. They all belonged to the one holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church, just as we do today. We also believe that same faith preached from the very beginning. We are not divided as many others into many churches and different beliefs. We are that same Church that is still directly connected to the Apostles and believe the same truth that they preached.

1st Sunday of Lent Rom 10:8-13

"What does [Scripture] say? The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith that we preach)..." (8).

The precious word of God, which reveals God's wisdom and love for us, is so readily available to us. We do not have to make strenuous efforts and exorbitant expenditures to obtain a copy of it. It is already in our home. We can easily pick it up, open it, and read it. We hear it preached and explained at every Sunday Mass and perhaps even at daily Mass. What a treasure! Through it God communicates his wisdom to us and even himself. It is our spiritual nourishment. If we receive that word and accept it, it remains in our heart to nourish and guide us. That holy word of God is called "the word of faith" because it stirs faith in us (Rom10:17) which opens us to communion with God and his gift of himself to us. If our hearts are filled with God's holy word, it will overflow in our conversations with others. It will sanctify our visits and lift them to a higher level. We will be sanctified through the experience and grow in holiness.

"...for, 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" (9).

To confess that Jesus is Lord is to believe and proclaim to others that Jesus is divine; he is God incarnate. We have experienced his love and power personally through baptism and the forgiveness of sins. His sanctifying and uplifting presence makes us his living witnesses. We know with certitude that he has been raised from the dead by the Father because of the marvelous effects and repercussions that we have personally experienced. The salvation we read about is a fact that proves itself to be true from our own experience of deliverance from sin and the transformation of a merely human life to a joyous, elevated human-divine life. This experience of being saved begins now and will reach its fullness in eternity—provided of course that we remain faithful to God's word and will. Again, we need to assert that it is the one who perseveres to the end who will be saved with absolute certitude once and for all in heaven for all eternity.

"For the scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame'" (11).

The salvation or grace that leads to deliverance from sin and hell was gained for everyone by Jesus, for both Jew and Gentile. Each individual, no matter who, or how bad off, has that salvation available. Jesus' infinite divine love and mercy is greater than any sin and all the sins of the world put together. We have but to believe and entrust ourselves to him. Jesus' suffering and death, out of love for us, redeemed the whole world. Faith opens our heart to Jesus who makes himself available for forgiveness if we but regret our sins and ask for forgiveness. He makes himself available personally in the sacrament of Penance where he hears our confession and administers forgiveness through his presence in the sacrament of Holy Orders.

"For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him" (12).

Jesus does not consider a person's nationality when anyone goes to him. He only looks at the sincerity of each one's heart. There is no exception to his love and forgiveness for each repentant sinner. Not only does he free us from the heavy burden and evil oppression of sin and the devil, he also enriches all with his divine life through sanctifying grace. But we must call upon him in faith through which he is readily available.

“For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (13).

Again, it is Jesus who is Lord through his glorification. The title “Lord”, once reserved for Yahweh alone, who revealed himself to Moses in the Old Testament, is now given to Jesus. He came for the salvation of the whole world. But we must call upon him in faith through which we open ourselves to receive his loving forgiveness. He has won salvation from sin and death for us, but we must open ourselves to his saving grace. We have free will and must make the move to receive it. A minimum effort is required of us: we have but to call upon him in faith. He will give us the grace we need to move us to sorrow for our sins, to humble ourselves to admit them in Confession, to do works of penance for further purification, to strengthen our weakness, or whatever our need might be. Jesus graciously receives us just as he did the straying apostles when he met them after his resurrection from the dead. He did not condemn them. Instead he offered them his peace and loving reconciliation. We have nothing to fear and everything to gain. Who could refuse to take advantage of such a gracious offer, free of charge?

2nd Sunday of Lent **Phil 3: 17 – 4: 1**

“Join with others in being imitators of me, brothers and sisters, and observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us” (17).

St. Paul was a fervent disciple of Christ. His whole life was modeled on him. He speaks of the “supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things... that I may gain Christ.” He wanted “to know him and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to His death” (Phil 3:8,10). St. Paul can truly say, “For to me life is Christ” (Phil 1:21).

Therefore, he can say in all truthfulness, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). He makes Christ present and current for them to see him in Paul and imitate him. We can even say, “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). Even to this day the saints make Christ present and show us by their example and in their persons what it is like to be Christ in our modern world in this day and time. St. Paul also advises his people to look at the lives of those among them who have modeled their lives on him. In them they can also see Christ. True Christian models are important because there are some who are trying to lead the Philippians astray.

“For many, as I have often told you and now tell you even in tears, conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ” (18).

These enemies of the cross were those who denied the redemptive effects of Christ's costly sacrifice. These enemies were the “Judaizers” who wanted to make Christians conform to certain Jewish practices, especially circumcision. These were primarily Judeo-Christians, especially those who had once belonged to the sect of the Pharisees (Acts 15:5). Some Gentile Christians had also been won over to their tenets and took an active part in propagating them. Regarding that teaching, St. Paul

writes, “if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing” (Gal 2:21). Other enemies of the cross were those who failed to crucify their passions. They did not continue in that state of death to sin and selfishness which they entered at baptism when they began to share Christ’s death on the cross. Their self-indulgence was totally contrary to their baptismal promises.

“Their end is destruction. Their God is their stomach; their glory is in their shame! Their minds are occupied with earthly things” (19).

Unless these enemies of the cross change their ways, they will surely perish. They have made dietary law their fetish, fixation or extravagant devotion. They are proud of their circumcised flesh. They value only the earthly. This verse may also refer to those Christians who are slaves to gluttony. They glory and brag about their shameful, sinful acts. They are bent upon satisfying their passions and earthly desires. This kind of life-style is leading them to damnation.

“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (20).

Our life on earth is really an exile. We are away from our true home. Our union with Christ through baptism has transferred us to heavenly realms. “God... brought us to life with Christ, raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus... So then [we] are fellow citizens with the holy ones [angels and saints] and members of the household of God...” (Eph 2:6,19). Consequently, St. Paul tells us, we must behave accordingly: “If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory” (Col 3:1-4).

“He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself” (21). St. Paul tells us that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit

incorruption” (1 Cor 15:50). It is true that little by little we are now being transformed into the image of the Lord (2 Cor 3:18). We are becoming more spiritual as the glorious Spirit of Jesus invades our persons ever more completely. But our bodies will only be totally transformed when Jesus returns for us. St. Paul in the inspired words of Scripture assures us, “Behold, I tell you a mystery. ... we will all be changed, in an instant... the dead will be raised incorruptible... for that which is corruptible must clothe itself with incorruptibility, and that which is mortal must clothe itself with immortality” (1 Cor 15: 51,52).

Our weakly powered souls will be replaced by the powerful Spirit of our risen Lord to animate our bodies, enabling us to experience the divinity and live the divine life (see 1 Cor 15: 42-44).

Quoting Psalm 8:7, the epistle to the Hebrews sees it fulfilled in Christ, saying “you crowned him with glory and honor, subjecting all things under his feet” (Heb 2: 7-8). At that moment, through the action of our glorified Savior and the power of the Holy Spirit, God will become “all in all” (1 Cor 15: 28). The whole universe will be filled with the glorious presence of our redeeming God.

“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord” (4:1).

St. Paul had a special love for his beloved Philippians. He was their cherished father whom they had supported in his missionary journeys. They are his “joy and crown”. He tells them “I hold you in my heart, you who are all partners with me in grace” (Phil 1:7). He writes these endearing words: “how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:8). It is so beautiful to see what an intimate relationship he had with his people. They were so close and cherished each other so warmly.

St. Paul’s great desire for his beloved Philippians is that they “stand firm in the Lord”. He exhorts them to persevere in the faith.

3rd Sunday of Lent 1 Cor 10: 1-6, 10-12

“I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea” (1).

St. Paul is concerned about making the Corinthians realize that although their ancestors in the Old Testament were greatly blessed, most of them did not enter the promised land because of their disobedience and idolatry. The Corinthians, also, may fail to enter heaven if they do not cooperate with even greater favors received in the New Testament. God showed his love for his people during their desert journey. “The Lord preceded them, in the daytime by means of a column of cloud to show them the way, and at night by means of a column of fire to give them light. Thus they could travel both day and night” (Ex 13:21; Ps 105:39). His protective and guiding presence never left them (Ex 13:22).

God also saved his people from the pursuing Egyptians. This occurred when Moses obeyed the Lord’s command: “Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord swept the sea with a strong east wind throughout the night and so turned it into dry land. When the water was thus divided, the Israelites marched into the midst of the sea on dry land, with the water like a wall to their right and to their left” (Ex 14:21-22). “Moses stretched out his hand over the sea [at the Lord’s command]...As the waters flowed back, it covered the chariots and the charioteers of Pharaoh’s whole army... Not a single one of them escaped” (Ex 14:27-28).

God performed this stupendous event to save his people because of his great love for them. “And all of them were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (2).

The people of God were one with Moses as they were covered by the clouds and passed through the Red Sea. This prefigures our union with Christ

as we passed through the waters of baptism. St. Paul uses the expression, “baptized into Moses” because he is comparing the Red Sea experience to our baptism into Christ. The similarity brings out the parallel between the Israelites’ blessings and that of Christians—although the latter are much greater.

“All ate the same spiritual food” (3).

The spiritual food referred to here is the manna, of which it is written, “...he commanded the skies above; the doors of heaven he opened. God rained manna upon them of food; bread from heaven he gave them” (Ps 78:23-24). “Morning after morning, they gathered it, till each had enough to eat... The Israelites ate this manna for forty years, until they came to settled land” (Ex 16:21, 35).

The manna can be called a spiritual food because it came from heaven, from God. It stirred faith in the goodness of God and his wonderful providence that provided for his people in their desert journey. It prefigured the real bread from heaven, Jesus, who becomes our spiritual nourishment in the Holy Eucharist.

“And all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ” (4).

The spiritual drink was the water that flowed from the rock which Moses struck at God’s command in response to the chosen people’s plea for water. That water can be called spiritual because it came from God in concern for his people. That water was clearly from God’s loving providence to stir faith in his people (Ex 17:1-7; Num 20:6-12). It was truly a spiritual, heavenly water for thirsty people.

The “spiritual rock that followed them” refers to rabbinic legend or tale which said that the rock rolled along with the journeying people to give them water. This legend conveys a truth of God’s

continual presence with his people. Yahweh is often called “The Rock” (Deut 32:4) or “our rock in whom there is no wrong” (Ps 92:16). God had told Moses, “I will be standing there in front of you on the rock in Horeb” (Ex 17:6) – and indeed he was! He came to be identified as “The Rock” because of his faithfulness and dependability. St. Paul applies this image to Jesus, the risen Christ, who is always with us as the source of living water, the Spirit (Jn 7:37-39). That living water is always available to us from our glorified, indwelling Lord who is present in our very hearts (Jn 14:23).

“Yet God was not pleased with most of them, for they were struck down in the desert” (5).

Despite all these favors and blessings given by God to the chosen people, they did not respond obediently and with gratitude for his love. The people as a whole grumbled and refused to trust God. As a result Joshua and Caleb were the only two adults of that generation that came out of Egypt who were allowed to enter the promised land (Num 14:20-38). Three thousand were put to the sword for having worshipped the golden calf (Ex 32:25-29). Twenty-four thousand were slaughtered for having taken part in the shameful rites of Baal of Peor (Num 25:1-9). Many of those who complained against God and Moses died from the bites of the seraph serpents (Num 21:4-6).

“These things happened as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil things, as they did” (6).

With the appearance of Jesus, the Messiah, in the New Testament, we have received even greater blessings. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit and the presence of the risen Christ in our midst. We have the sacraments and divine revelation faithfully preserved in the Church through sacred tradition: we have been lavished with endless, precious blessings readily available to us through faith. We cannot afford to go astray in disobedience as the chosen people of the Old Testament. If they suffered such severe

punishment for their sins, how much more should we! We must take great care not to “desire evil things” as they did. We must work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12) in all seriousness and intensity.

“Do not grumble as some of them did and suffered death by the destroyer” (10).

The “destroyer” may be the angel sent to bring death to those who defy God such as Pharaoh did which resulted in the death of the first born (Ex 12:23, 29). The “destroyer” may also refer to God himself when confronted by serious disobedience to his authority. He caused the earth to open and swallow the people and their leaders Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Fire consumed the others. (Num 16). In the words of St. Paul, “Whoever resists authority opposes what God has appointed, and those who oppose it will bring judgment upon themselves” (Rom 13:2).

Grumbling is an expression of dissatisfaction with God and his will. We are selfish and hate inconvenience or having to suffer. We are proud and hate to subject ourselves to God and his will either in legitimate authority or in the unfolding of the difficult circumstances of life: the human condition. Grumbling is a rebellion against God’s will to which we refuse to surrender docilely, lovingly.

“These things happened to them as an example, and they have been written down as a warning to us, upon whom the end of the ages has come” (11).

By seeing what an unhappy outcome is the result of disobeying God and not responding with gratitude and cooperation with his blessings, we are forewarned that even worse will happen to us if we fail to appreciate and cooperate with even greater favors. The result of their sinful behavior and disobedience teaches us to be careful and live in accord with God’s word.

“The end of the ages has come,” all previous ages in salvation history were in movement toward the messianic age in which we are now living. We are living in the fullness of time when God sent his Son to redeem us and lavish his grace upon us in full measure (Gal 4:4; Jn 14, 16). We must hasten to open ourselves to the fullness of these outpoured graces. We receive them through Christ and the Catholic Church which he established (Mt 16:16-19).

This we accomplish by living in union with Christ Jesus through prayer, meditating on the Word of God and receiving the sacraments. These are our meeting points with Christ, especially the Eucharist (Jn 6:51-58; 1 Cor 11:23-32).

“Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall” (12).

We must avoid being overconfident. We are full of weaknesses and can easily be deceived and fall. We must rely on God’s grace to persevere in grace and virtue. “God is faithful and will not let [us] be tried beyond [our] strength (1 Cor 10:13).

4th Sunday of Lent **2 Cor 5:17-21**

“...whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come” (17).

Baptism plunged us into the glorified Christ. We were cleansed from sin and given a share in his divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). We became children of God (1 Jn 3:2), born again with new spiritual powers (Jn 3:3-6), able to call God “Father” (Gal 4:6), and live in intimate communion with the indwelling Trinity (Jn 14:15-23). We have been empowered to overcome the sinful world and the evil one (Jn 16:33; 1 Jn 3:4; 5:19). We have been blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens (Eph 1:3). The old order of sin and the burdensome Old

Testament laws have been done away with. “For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed [us] from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2). We are now called to “live by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16). We are now in the promised new covenant when God gives us new hearts and places a new spirit within us enabling us to live in harmony with God and know him personally (Jer 31:33-34; Ez 36:25-27).

“And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation...” (18).

This new creation and the reconciliation, or the repairing and restoration of the breach between God and man, was initiated by God. Just as it was God who first called out to Adam who was hiding after he had sinned (Gen 3:8-9), so, too, it was God who sought to restore that broken relationship with man. This he accomplished by sending his Son to teach us how to live, suffer, and die. Through his death, resurrection, and the sending of his Spirit to renew us, he reconciled us to God.

Jesus left the Apostles to continue his ministry of reconciliation after his ascension. With Peter at the head of his Apostles, Jesus formed a church to continue his ministry (Mt 16:15-19). In this way, he would preserve the Church from error and disintegration. Through their preaching and the administration of the sacraments, the Apostles continued Jesus’ work of saving people from sin and giving them the new life of grace to live as children of God. Jesus called St. Paul after his ascension so he could join the rest of the Apostles in this ministry of reconciliation (Acts 9:1-22).

“...namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation” (19).

The Father was one with Jesus in reconciling the world to himself. He sent the Son and sustained

him as he went about his reconciling ministry of preaching the love and mercy of God. It was especially Jesus' suffering and death [as suffering servant (Is 53)] that took away the sins of the world. His sacrificial death made up for the sins of the world. The ministry of reconciliation entrusted to Paul and the other Apostles was to make the world aware of the salvation from sin and death available through Christ. They moved the people through faith to attach themselves to Christ to receive his outpoured saving grace. These Apostles were empowered to forgive the people' sins (Jn 20:21-23) and bestow God's grace upon them so that they could begin living according to God's will.

"So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (20).

Paul and the Apostles, as well as their successors, the bishops of the Church and the priests who assist them, are ambassadors for Christ, that is, his authorized representatives. They have been chosen, ordained, and officially delegated for this mission of reconciliation. They are empowered to preach, teach the truth, forgive sins, and communicate God's grace. Addiction to serious sin is a terrible enslavement. The Apostles are to appeal relentlessly to these unfortunate victims of evil to open themselves to God's loving forgiveness. They work in behalf of Christ: he came to earth and became man specifically to reconcile people to God. He went to great lengths to make this possible. He went to extremes in suffering and dying by crucifixion so that the sins of the world could be made up for, forgiven, and taken away. Surely, all of this loving redemptive work must not be ignored and passed up unused. Can the human heart be so hard as not to melt before that kind of love? That is what the work of the apostle involves: convincing sinners of God's infinite love and mercy for them. All they have to do is regret their sins and turn to Christ to receive forgiveness, so they can be freed from sin and begin to live a joyful life filled with peace.

"For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (21).

Jesus had no personal experience of sin. He was always in total accord with God's will. He could say, "I always do what is pleasing to him" (Jn 8:29). "Can any of you charge me with sin?" (Jn 8:46a). St. John, who was so close to Jesus, tells us, "You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there was no sin" (1 Jn 3:5).

Yet Jesus assumed our human nature so that he could identify with us. For example, he insisted that the protesting John the Baptist baptize him so he could humbly identify himself with sinners (Mt 3:13-15). He was anticipating his passion by that act in which he identified with criminals in allowing himself to be crucified. He took upon himself our sins, though perfectly innocent, and died with them, burying and destroying them with himself. Then having destroyed our sins, he was glorified and began to share his own righteousness with us. We have but to believe in him in repentance of our sins to connect ourselves to him and his saving grace. In this way, he shares with us the righteousness of God inasmuch as we can participate in it according to our human capacity. This righteousness is what we usually call sanctifying grace. We are then made into new creatures and children of God. We are thus empowered to live in accord with God's will, to live righteous lives.

5th Sunday of Lent Phil 3:8-14

“...I consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (8).

Everything St. Paul had come to know before as a Pharisee, compared to knowing the Risen Jesus, he considered to be a loss. There was no comparison between what the Old Testament had to offer with the New. It was the startling difference between the foreshadowing and the grand reality.

Encountering the glorified Christ was a foretaste of heaven! Everything earthly was empty and distasteful in comparison. Keeping the external letter of the Law involved merely human activity. The Law did not connect one to the grace of the Redeemer or give one personal knowledge of him. When St. Paul was finally given the privilege of meeting the life-giving Jesus, he was overwhelmed with that gloriously electrifying experience. Moreover, it was not just a passing experience. It was something that remained with him. He had been plunged into the glorified Christ never to leave. That is why he frequently expressed his being “in Christ”.

It continued to be a living reality for him. That is why he considered all of his former experiences or knowledge to be a loss. Actually, it took a supernatural, miraculous appearance of the divine-ascended Jesus to obliterate the prejudices that Paul’s knowledge as a Pharisee presented.

In order to accept Jesus, Paul had to abandon his life as a Pharisee. All the meticulous knowledge he had acquired regarding the strict rules of keeping the 613 legal precepts were now a minus, useless and to be discarded. But for him that was good riddance, meaningless and no longer of value. He likened all of that to trash from which he was freed so he could gain the Christ who had encountered and saved him. Now all his

attention was focused on Christ who had become supremely valuable to him.

“...and to be found in him, not having any righteousness of my own based on the law but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God, depending on faith” (9). St. Paul’s joy is to be “in Christ”. That is where he wants to be found on judgment day. To remain united to his glorified Lord was his great desire. He wanted to be identified with him. Paul was being strongly drawn to become like Jesus, in an ever deepening union and transformation into him. The righteousness based on the Law was merely external and led to pride and self-centeredness. The interior of a person was left infected with sin. St. Paul had experienced this legal righteousness which had left him saturated with pride and anger. This led him to the harsh treatment of Jesus’ followers, even to consenting to Stephen’s being stoned to death. Paul knew from experience that that kind of righteousness had left him restless, without peace and with a guilty conscience. Happily he had found true peace in the righteousness he encountered in Jesus. This was God’s own righteous holiness drawn through faith. It led to repentance and the forgiveness of sins. The heart that had been in turmoil like a restless sea now experienced a deep peace in the presence of God. All of that had been made possible by the redeeming death and resurrection of Christ who had sought and saved Paul.

“...to know him and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death” (10).

There was that ever deeper yearning in St. Paul to know Jesus more completely. That fathomless abyss of Jesus’ divinity kept drawing him. He could never get enough of it. There was that ceaseless hunger in Paul to grasp Jesus in his glorified state. He exerted so much life-giving power! This world has nothing like it. The experience of Jesus’ glorious being brought about complete fulfillment. But St. Paul also realized

that it was Jesus' sufferings that had disposed his human form to be filled with the glory of the resurrection. Paul understood that all the sufferings he experienced in his ministry opened his being ever more completely to receive God's glory, the Holy Spirit, poured out from Jesus' glorified body. Paul was being driven to die ever more perfectly to this world and to participate more fully in Jesus' saving death through his many hardships as an apostle.

"...if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (11).

Participating in the suffering and death of Jesus in his apostolic labors would mysteriously bring Paul to the glory of the resurrection. He knew this from experience. That is why he could state, "although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor 4:16-17).

"It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus" (12).

St. Paul felt that he still had some ways to go before he attained perfect Christian maturity. But he was striving with all his might as a runner strains all his muscles to reach the finish line. He had been apprehended by Jesus who had taken possession of his person on the road to Damascus. Paul desired to reciprocate Jesus' love for him. He wanted to possess Jesus as much as Jesus possessed him.

"Brothers and sisters, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead" (13).

St. Paul felt that there was still more for him to attain in the life of grace. He was not quite yet

complete. There was still more for him to give for his total transformation into Christ. He would not allow himself to become distracted by looking back; he could not delay for a second. He had to continue to push forward toward perfect sanctity and the accomplishment of God's will for him personally and in the apostolate.

"I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus" (14).

Paul was looking forward to the completion of his race towards his heavenly reward. He would ascend to join Christ and receive the prize of eternal glory for which he had labored so hard.

Palm Sunday

Phil 2: 6-11

Our epistle to the Philippians begins with, "Christ Jesus, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped" (6).

St. Paul presents Jesus to the people of Philippi as a model of selflessness and humility. For this purpose it is believed that Paul is quoting an ancient Christian hymn in this passage. Jesus was "in the form of God" means that he possessed the divine glory and status. But he did not cling to his equality with God. He gave up that eternal dignity and took on the condition of a slave. Adam grasped at becoming equal to God. Jesus emptied himself of his exalted position to become human like us. Being one with God in union of wills is where true happiness lies. Grasping for anything beyond that is to lose the essence of happiness. Jesus exemplifies the right attitude. Adam lost all by his grasping attitude. Christ regained all for us by his letting go of all for the sake of love, love for his Father and love for us.

Our epistle explains, "Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness and found human in appearance" (7).

Jesus gave up that glory that was rightfully his as Son of God. By assuming a human body through the Virgin Mary he was able to serve us as a slave, giving himself up for us in sacrifice. The use of the term “slave” identifies Jesus with the “servant of the Lord” in Isaiah 52: 13. He was fully human, thought to be “the carpenter’s son” (Mt 13: 55). He got tired like us and had to rest (Jn 4: 6). He had to sleep the way we do (Mic 4: 38). He was thirsty (Jn 19: 28). He bled (Jn 19: 34) and died (Mk 15: 37). Becoming human in the mystery of the Incarnation was Jesus’ first stage of humiliation. “..he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (8).

This humble obedience, even to the point of death, marks the second stage of Jesus’ humiliation. Obedience was the life of a slave. But obedience even to death, even death on a cross, was heroic. This was the lowest depth of humiliation that Jesus could descend, the farthest away from his heavenly, glorious status; the phrase “even death on a cross” is believed to have been added by St. Paul to the hymn he is quoting. This was apparently necessary because the earliest statements of belief, such as expressed in the hymn, seemed to have avoided mentioning the cross because of its shame. But St. Paul gloried in the cross. It is the means God chose to bring about our salvation. It is “the power of God” (1 Cor 1: 18), about which we can boast (Gas 6: 14). Through the cross we are sanctified and transformed (2 Cor 3: 18; 4: 11, 17).

Our epistle continues, “Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name” (9).

The Father responded to Jesus’ self-emptying and humiliation. He glorified him in the resurrection and exalted him to the highest heaven to reign with him over all creation. He could not endure Jesus’ self-abasement any longer.

The Father raised Jesus “far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things” (Eph 4: 10). The

humble self-effacing Jesus was raised high above all the angels and saints. His obedience and self-annihilation were contrasted with adulation and glorification. His humiliation was superseded by the heights of glorification.

Jesus’ exaltation included being given “the name which is above every name”. The name refers to the person, and the Person meant is God himself. Jesus was reinstated with the full glory due to him as a divine Person. That name places him “far above every principality, authority, power and dominion (various classes of angels), and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things beneath his feet” (Eph 1: 21-22).

As a result of Jesus’ exaltation and being restored with the full glory of the divine name “at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (10).

Jesus deserves to be given true worship as God—he is divine and one with the Father. “In him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and invisible...” (Col 1: 16). He sustains the whole universe by his power (Heb 1: 3). The entire cosmos is indebted to him for its existence. The adoration due to God: “To me every knee shall bend” (Is 45: 23) must now be given Jesus because he is equally a divine Person as the God who revealed himself to Abraham and his children. Bending the knee is a sign of reverence and adoration. By that act we acknowledge Jesus to be our superior and Lord.

“In heaven and earth and under the earth” includes the whole created universe that must give the divine Jesus homage.

“And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (11).

This statement and profession of early Christian faith is the climax of the hymn St. Paul is quoting. For example, St. Paul tells the Corinthians “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” (Rom 10: 9). That’s what it means to be Christ-ian. Christ is the anointed one—the Messiah, the Son of God made man. After he had emptied himself of the glory proper to his divine nature, he assumed a human nature. In that way he could suffer and die to make up for our sins. This is the Jesus who was glorified and made Lord of all even in his human nature now divinized. We acknowledge him to be our savior and Lord. In Jesus we see the words of the prophet fully realized, “on that day it will be said: ‘Behold our God, to whom we looked to saves us! This is the Lord for whom we looked; let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!’” (Is 25: 9). We are astonished that God became a human being, yes, indeed, “Jesus Christ is Lord!” In him both the divine and human natures are conjoined in one divine Person, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

It is the Father who has so exalted his son who obeyed him, even to death on the cross. The two are not in competition. That is why we say “Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father”. Jesus’ whole being is directed to glorify the Father. That was what his whole life was about on earth. It continues in heaven. His glorification does not place him in opposition to the Father. Jesus receives his glory from the Father and ceaselessly uses it to glorify the Father. He glorifies the Father with the glory he receives from him.

“Jesus is Lord!” means that the Father made Jesus the Supreme master and sovereign ruler of all creation. Jesus in turn uses his power to reconcile the world to God. He is henceforth in the process of reclaiming the universe to God’s supreme rule so that all creation will submit to him and give him the glory that is rightly his. “When everything is subjected to him [Christ], then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one [the Father] who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15: 28).

Easter Sunday: The Resurrection of the Lord Col 3: 1-4

Our epistle begins with, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (1).

The grace of baptism unites us to Jesus at the very moment he was being raised from the dead. This new life of grace makes us partakers of the risen life of Jesus. He is now taken up in the glory of the Father: “He lives for God” (Rom 6:10). That grace is moving and pointing us in the same direction. It is urging us to cooperate or work with it by setting our hearts on spiritual and heavenly realities. We must seek to live with Christ, to live in his presence and in his company. We must set our minds on him in prayerful communion. We strive to be with him in the presence of the Father by being attentive to doing his will the way Jesus did. We devote ourselves to the reading of Holy Scripture to know his will and to be empowered to carry it out (see Rom 1:16-17). We frequently receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist as we long for him to transform us more perfectly into his image and likeness. We associate with God’s friends and seek to establish a holy environment for ourselves. In these and other ways we continue to “seek what is above”. We are careful to avoid what drags us to earth, things that take us away from God and cause us to stray or diminish our love for him.

We want to be with Jesus, who has won complete victory over sin, evil, and death. We seek to be under his gentle rule of grace, peace and love. Jesus is seen as “seated at the right hand of God” in fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy (Ps 110: 1). God himself has made him “Lord” over all creation and has seated him at his right hand. There he enjoys God’s favor. We want to be with him in spirit. He is our beloved Savior. He wants us to abide with him in love where he is with the Father.

Our epistle continues, “Think of what is above, not of what is on earth” (2). Our thoughts must remain with our Lord who sacrificed himself out of love for us and freed us from sin and eternal damnation. Our concern is to be with Christ. Our love will not allow us to leave him. We want to live in his company constantly. Our hearts are welded to him. Even in the midst of various activities, our hearts, if not our thoughts, are on him. Earthly dealings weigh us down. But our spirit lifts us up to live with Jesus, our glorious risen Lord. We will not allow earthly matters to hold us down. We were joined to Christ at our baptism and we will not allow ourselves to be separated from him. He took us to be with him in the presence of the Father and that is where we live. We are careful to spend exclusive time with him in prayer so that, when we must concern ourselves with the duties of our earthly condition, our hearts continue to be united to our Lord and Savior. Earthly life without him would be miserable.

We must be on our guard so that the attractions and pleasures of this earth do not ravish our hearts and stir our passions. We can easily be blinded by these passions so that we forget and lose touch with our glorious Lord. We must make a concerted effort to remain detached from such earthly attractions. We must lead disciplined lives to steer clear of them so that our hearts will remain true to our great Lover and Savior.

Our epistle tells us why: “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (3). In other words, baptism united us to the death of Jesus. This grace inclines and urges us to die to any earthly desires that interfere with our life in Christ. That grace empowers us to renounce sinful habits that prevent us from living the life of Jesus. We are called to mortify our passions as a way of life so that they will remain subdued and unable to overwhelm us and precipitate us into sin.

Having stilled these earthly desires, we can then be at peace to enter into our hearts, and, unseen

by this world, hide ourselves with Christ in God. This is an interior life of intimacy and love with God in union with Christ – withdrawn from this world. Just as we cannot see Christ in the bosom of the Father with bodily eyes, so too, there is nothing exteriorly visible of the union and spiritual activity the baptized person carries on with Christ. All of this takes place secretly in our hearts.

Our epistle concludes, “When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory” (4).

The glorious life that Jesus is now living is hidden and unseen, but he will return and manifest that glory to us in all its splendor. At that moment, we also will arise with him and appear in glory. Jesus promised this when he said, “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Mt 13:43). The life of grace will then be turned into glory. We will all share in Jesus’ triumph. We share the very life of Jesus now as we live in union with him. That is the same life that will become the glorious life when Jesus manifests himself at his Parousia or manifestation at the end of the world.

2nd Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday) Rev 1: 9-11a, 12-13, 17-19

“I, John, your brother, who share with you the distress, the kingdom, and the endurance we have in Jesus, found myself on the island called Patmos because I proclaimed God’s word and gave testimony to Jesus” (9).

St. John, the beloved disciple who wrote the fourth gospel, is writing to the churches from the island of Patmos. This rocky island was used by the Romans as a penal colony. There is evidence that prisoners there worked in the quarries. The island is located fifty miles southwest of Ephesus in the Aegean Sea. It is only

sixteen square miles. John was a prisoner there because he believed in Jesus and proclaimed the word of God. John was a true brother to his fellow Christians. He was suffering for the faith just as they were. And they were all children of God experiencing the same distress and endured persecution. But they were, nonetheless, in the kingdom: they enjoyed the presence of God, united to their risen Lord and to each other. Theirs was the highest life on earth. They had already begun to live the eternal life (see Jn 17:3).

“I was caught up in spirit on the Lord’s day and heard behind me a voice as loud as a trumpet (10), which said, ‘Write on a scroll what you see’” (11a).

John was transported out of himself through ecstasy into the realms of the spirit. This occurred on the Lord’s day, Sunday. For that was the day that Jesus entered into his rest in the Father’s bosom through his glorification. The original Sabbath, or day of rest, Saturday, was transferred to the first day of the week, Sunday. It was on that day that Christians gathered together to celebrate the paschal mystery through the Eucharistic liturgy established by Jesus on the night before he died (1 Cor 11:23-26). This is the day of triumph when Jesus overcame death for us so that death is no longer to be feared. It is no longer master – it is now seen as the door of entry into eternal life. This understanding would be a fortifying grace for those whose lives were threatened for simply being Christians.

The “voice as loud as a trumpet” startled the seer John into attentiveness. The trumpet is often used when a theophany occurs, that is, when God manifests himself (Ex 19:16, 19; Heb 12:9; Joel 2:1; Mt 24:31). The blast would awaken every atom of one’s being to quicken in awe before the divine presence. Supernatural realities are difficult to describe. They are compared to earthly things. The voice is described as like a trumpet blast to give us an idea of its force and power. But the natural things we are familiar with are

inadequate to convey fully the heavenly, out of this world, experiences. The fact that the trumpet blast occurred on the Lord’s day would remind the people of the times the Lord intervened on “the day of the Lord” in their favor. This would have been good news and encouragement for those who were suffering persecution. It gave them hope.

The voice commanded John to write on a scroll what he saw. The scroll was a roll of papyrus: the pith of the papyrus plant was cut in strips and pressed into a material to write on. They usually measured about fifteen feet in length.

“Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and when I turned, I saw seven gold lampstands (12) and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, wearing an ankle-length robe, with a gold sash around his chest” (13).

John saw seven gold lampstands. These represent the universal church all luminous with the glory of God. The number seven stands for totality, fullness and completeness. The lampstands were gold which suggests splendor and glory, what is most precious, a fitting ambient for such a great king. Jesus stands in the midst of the Church, ever near to support, strengthen and encourage them. Jesus appears as the Son of Man prophesied by Daniel (7:13-14) who receives dominion, glory and kingship which is everlasting. He appears like the eschatological judge, that is, in the end times, who intervenes with the power of God. He is wearing an ankle-length robe, with a gold sash around his chest. These vestments manifest his dignity and royalty as priest (Ex 28:4).

“When I caught sight of him, I fell down at his feet as though dead. He touched me with his right hand and said, ‘Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last...’” (17).

The impact of coming into contact with the glory emanating from Jesus’ glorified person knocked

out the holy John. Saul (Paul) fell to the ground when he encountered Jesus as a blinding light – he remained blind for three days (Acts 9:3-9). It is difficult for us to realize the dynamism of the divine Person and what a shock it is for our human nature to come into God's presence. When the prophet Isaiah came into contact with God he expressed the trauma his being experienced in these words, "Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" (Is 6:5). The holiness of God makes us keenly aware of our uncleanness and sinfulness. When Peter experienced the divinity of Jesus through the miraculous catch of fish, "he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, 'Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man'" (Lk 5:8).

It is interesting to note that, although John could resist bending the knee before the emperor, he now falls down at the feet of Jesus, acknowledging the sovereignty and authority of the one and only Lord.

The right hand that held seven stars (1:16) (signifying Jesus' power sustaining the universal Church) now rests on John to strengthen him. Jesus' voice reassured the frightened John by uttering the divine name, "I am." On more than one occasion Jesus had used that name in the presence of his disciples (Jn 8:28,58). Now Jesus states, "I am the first and the last." The risen Jesus has been exalted to a divine status. He is God! He is the beginning and end of all things. He is the first cause of all creation and the final end of all.

"...the one who lives. Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever. I hold the keys to death and the netherworld" (18).

The life that Jesus now lives is the life of God. His humanity is now glorified and lives the very life of God. His life is the supreme life of God. He once lived our mortal life. He had assumed our flesh and shared our weak, mortal flesh which was so wounded that he died. But now he has

been glorified and enjoys the eternal life of God. We need not be afraid to die now. For Jesus has overcome death in our own human nature. He shared that new life with us empowering us also to overcome death. So John and those to whom he is writing need not be afraid to witness for Jesus even if it costs their lives. Through death they will pass to eternal life to be with Christ in glory.

Jesus holds the keys to death and the netherworld in that he has authority over them. Jesus entered into death, confronted it, and vanquished it. He reigns victoriously over death. Now it serves his purpose to bring us eternal life. So we must not be afraid of it, for Jesus has mastered and tamed it. He descended into that netherworld (Sheol in Hebrew) and gained release for those who were held there (1 Pet 3:19; 4:6).

"Write down, therefore, what you have seen, and what is happening, and what will happen afterwards" (19).

What John has seen and the insights that were given were for the encouragement of the church suffering persecution. He must write everything down so all will benefit from what he saw and learned. It was meant to benefit the whole church.

3rd Sunday of Easter Rev 5: 11-14

"I, John, looked and heard the voices of many angels who surrounded the throne and the living creatures and the elders. They were countless in number" (11).

John, the Evangelist and author of this last book of the Bible, describes his vision of heaven. He uses symbolic language to try and convey what he saw. He begins in this passage to tell about the voices of many angels. These surrounded the throne of God and the risen Christ. The living creatures and the elders likewise surrounded the throne. These four living creatures (5: 14) were the Cherubim (See Ezekiel

10: 4, 20), an order of angels. The elders, listed as twenty-four in number in 4: 4, may represent the twenty-four priestly divisions who served in the Temple in any given year. These could also signify the twelve tribes in the Old Testament, and the twelve apostles in the New Testament: these stand for the ideal church in its entirety. These angels were countless in number. There were thousands and thousands of them—literally 100,000,000 plus 1,000,000 used by the author to express infinity: myriads of myriads.

“And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing’” (12).

The Lamb that was slain and now standing in the midst of the throne (5: 6) is Jesus. John the Baptist had revealed Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1: 29). He is the new Paschal Lamb (See Ex: 1-28) who Isaiah foresaw would be “led to the slaughter” and “gives his life as an offering for sin” (Is 53: 7, 10). This image of Jesus as Lamb is used twenty-eight times in the Book of Revelation. He has now become the center of worship on the throne because it is through him that God the Father saved the world through his obedience unto death. The glory and praise he receives redounds to the Father who glorified him. The glory of which he had emptied himself when he became man is now fully restored to him. His divinity is now manifested even in the human nature which he had assumed. He fittingly receives sevenfold-praise from this high multitude of myriads of angels. The Lamb is worthy of such praise because he is really Jesus, God made man, who sacrificed himself and obtained forgiveness and infinite mercy and grace for the sins of the whole world. It is only because of him that we can be saved from sin, death and eternal damnation. The angels can praise Jesus also because it is through him that they were created. They owe their very existence to him (Jn 1: 3; Col 1: 15-17). He continues to hold them and us in existence (Heb 1: 3).

“Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, everything in the universe, cry out: ‘To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever’” (13).

All of creation located in every imaginable place joins with the angels in praising God and Jesus, the self-sacrificing Lamb, who accomplished redemption for all. Other verses bring out more clearly that the throne belongs to the Lamb as well as to the Father: It is “the throne of God and of the Lamb” (22: 3). “For the Lamb...is in the center of the throne” (17: 7). “The river of life-giving water... [is] flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (22: 1). For it is through the Lamb that God brought about salvation for all.

Paying such tribute to the victorious Lamb would give the persecuted Christians hope and courage to remain faithful, even unto death. For the Lamb who had been slain was now standing and glorified (5: 6). Death was not the end but a new glorious beginning of eternal life. The tomb has become an antechamber and passage leading to the dwelling place of the Lamb. There they would be able to join with the rest of creation in giving thanks and praise to the Lamb who wrought their salvation. For he had overcome death in his human body for them, to give them confidence and assurance: the fullness of life really begins only after we have passed through this valley of tears. The very sufferings endured had a transforming value for them as it had for their Christ. As St. Paul explained, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us” (Rom 8: 18). For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor 4: 17).

“The four living creatures answered, ‘Amen,’ and the elders fell down and worshipped” (14).

According to the prophet Ezekiel (10: 4, 20), “the living creatures” are of the order of angels called cherubim. They are usually ranked below the Seraphim. They were the ones God stationed in the Garden of Eden “with the fiery revolving sword, to guard the way to the Tree of Life” (Gen 3: 23-24). Based on Isaiah, Ezekiel and St. Paul (Col 1: 16; Eph 1: 21) theologians list three hierarchies of angels each containing three orders, making nine types of classifications. The first three are Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones; the second are Dominations, Principalities and Powers; the third are Virtues, Archangels and angels. They differ in the degree of perfection of their nature and of grace.

The elders are said to number twenty-four (4: 4) as explained above, twelve representing the tribes of the Old Testament and twelve representing the twelve Apostles. In other words, the whole people of God in the persons of their distinguished representatives join in giving honor and glory to God and to the Lamb. They are annihilated, as it were, and overwhelmed at being in the divine presence: they fall down before God and the Lamb in adoration. Their beings are as nothing before the supreme presence of God and his glorified Christ. The Cherubim or angelic beings join with their worship by asserting their “Amen”. It is their strong “yes” to all of the adulation being offered to God and the Lamb.

At each Mass we enter through faith into this ceaseless praise of God and the risen Christ that is taking place in heaven.

We are reminded of this at each preface of the Eucharistic Prayer when it ends with such words as these: “with angels and archangels and the whole company of saints we sing our unending hymn of praise: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory”.

4th Sunday of Easter **Rev 7: 9, 14b-17**

“I, John, had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands.” (9).

The vast number of those who enter heaven is too great to be counted. They come from all the nations of the world. Every race is represented. All people of every language are included. The exhilarating experience of being in the joy-giving presence of God is their lot. At last they get to see and be in the presence of the glorified Lamb of God. The glory they see in him is also experienced within themselves. The union with him that they had maintained since their baptism has now come to full flowering. As Jesus promised, “The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Mt 13:43). The white robes they are wearing bespeak of that glory and joy that come from union with God. The white robe which they received at baptism was a sign that all their sins were forgiven. The white signified their moral purity. All their sins were wiped away. They could stand in the presence of God. They were free from the evil that separated them from him. The whiteness was a sign of being clothed in God’s grace, through which they participated in his holy life, free from any stain of sin. They were able to go through the trials and temptations of life and kept their moral purity. They can now stand before God because there is no stain of sin to repel them from him. Rather they are drawn to him by likeness of being. They have come to the very source of the holiness they first received at baptism. The happiness they first received is compounded to an infinite degree. For now they have entered into the fullness of the divine life.

The palm branches they wave are a sign of their victory. They were able to master their passions and overcome their sinful inclinations. They

were patient in their trials and persecution; they remained faithful to Christ. Some had to choose death rather than renounce their faith in Jesus. They persevered to the very end. Now they praise God for giving them the grace to stand firm against the various temptations with which they were besieged. This is an ecstatic moment: to experience final perseverance. And they realize that they owe it all to God. They attribute all to his love and mercy. Yes. Yes. The waving of their palm branches is a way of expressing the joy of their triumph – even over Satan himself.

“Then one of the elders said to me, ‘These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’” (14b).

Those who are before the throne of God survived the time of great distress. The prophet Daniel spoke of “a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began until that time” (Dan 12:1).

Jesus likewise spoke of such a time: “For those times will have tribulation such as has not been since the beginning of God’s creation until now, nor ever will be. If the Lord had not shortened those days, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect whom he chose, he did shorten the days” (Mk 13:19-20).

These severe trials and persecutions of the faithful are due to occur at the end times. Such persecutions as were held during the reign of Nero (AD 54-68) and Domitian (AD 81-96) were examples of this. Jesus knew these things would happen and forewarned his disciples, “In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world” (Jn 16:33). And this victorious endurance of the fiercest persecutions proved Jesus’ words to be true. God’s grace was stronger than all the might of their persecutors.

The “great distress” which those in heaven went through purified them from any sinfulness. They “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” by sharing in his suffering.

As St. Paul explains, “For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison...” (2 Cor 4:17). The afflictions suffered are glorifying because they are so purifying and prepare a person to be receptive to the glory. By participating in the sacrificial death of Jesus through the persecutions and sufferings they endured, they were cleansed from all sin. Thus they proved that they loved God more than anything else – even more than their own lives. This indicated that they had renounced any sinful acts of the past and were wholly devoted to God. They held him to be first and before anything else in their lives.

“For this reason they stand before God’s throne and worship him day and night in his temple. The one who sits on the throne will shelter them” (15).

These have proven themselves to be totally God’s. Therefore, they have been properly disposed, purified and strengthened to be able to be in God’s beatifying presence. For only the clean of heart may see God (Mt 5:8). Just to be in the presence of his glorious being and seeing him face to face is heaven. Being in God’s presence and seeing him face to face is not merely an external relationship. The presence is actually experiencing him within their very persons; seeing him means knowing God through actually experiencing him within themselves (see 1 Jn 3:2). And day and night they remain in his presence in continuous worship. Totally fulfilled are all their longings and desires. Yet they never have too much of him. As they experience his beatifying self-gift they are utterly gratified and give him endless thanks and praise. God himself is their shelter. Nothing can ever harm them anymore. Nothing harmful can ever draw near them. All fear is gone. Only endless blessings and happiness remain.

“They will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them” (16).

All the former desert sufferings’ have ended. God is their all. He is their food and their drink. He sustains them himself. They need nothing

else. The limitations and insufficiencies of time have ended. The inclemencies of weather conditions have ceased. Heaven constitutes a total environment of beatitude.

“For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (17).

The Lamb, the risen glorified Christ occupies the center of the throne. It is through him that the blessed have been saved and brought to heaven. Jesus, the Lamb, leads them to the very source of the life-giving water, the Holy Spirit. Tears and sorrow are things of the past. Nothing remains to mar their happiness.

5th Sunday of Easter **Rev 21: 1-5a**

“Then I, John, saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more” (1).

In his vision of heaven, St. John sees a new heaven and a new earth. He reported earlier that the old earth and the sky had fled from God’s presence (Rev 20:11). A new heaven and earth symbolize a new universe that God creates. The old world was unsuited for the new glorious, powerful and spiritual bodies of the saints (see 1 Cor 15:42-44). Their transformed bodies and spiritualized senses would need a new environment in which to live. St. Paul explains that “...creation awaits with eager expectation for the revelation of the children of God... Creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom 8: 19, 21). All of creation will thus be made to participate in its own way in the glory of God, when he becomes “all in all” (1 Cor 15: 28). Thus our glorified bodies and senses will be able to enjoy fully the beauty of God in all of his new creation. We will be able to see or experience God in himself and

in his new creation. We will stand in wonder and awe over its magnificence.

The old sky and earth will pass away and be replaced with a new universe accommodated to fit our new glorious existence. The sea will be no more insofar as it symbolizes restless turbulence inhabited by hostile forces and fearful, dangerous monsters in its dark and perilous depths.

“I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (2).

The new Jerusalem, (the church and people of God), is thoroughly purified and free from any defilement of sin. It is now empty of all self, and totally receptive to the glory of God. It is born of God; it is full of love and has knowledge of God (see 1 Jn 4:7), as it issues from him. It is indeed holy.

It lives in perpetual communion with God and remains joined to him. That is why “It gleamed with the splendor of God. Its radiance was like that of a precious stone, like jasper, clear as crystal” (Rev 21:11). It has taken on the qualities of God because it is a true child of God and continues to be begotten of God. That is why it is said to be “coming down out of heaven from God.” It comes to dwell in the new glorious world created for it by God. And God is “all in all” of it for its continual enjoyment.

Her union with God is a very personal one. This new and holy Jerusalem, faithful and undefiled, is intimately joined to God. God’s reign is perfectly established in her. But this intimate union takes place through his Son. She is his bride: “ ‘Alleluia! The Lord has established his reign... Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory. For the wedding day of the Lamb has come, his bride has made herself ready. She was allowed to wear a bright, clean linen garment.’ (The linen represents the ‘righteous deeds of the holy ones’)” (Rev 19: 6-8).

The bride, the new Jerusalem, has prepared herself for this marital union by virtuous deeds. These virtuous deeds kept her faithful to her Beloved. As she went through life, she remained true to him. Her constant song was, “My lover belongs to me and I to him” (Song 2:8; 6:3; 7:11). She was able to be strong as she made her way through the desert of life by “leaning upon her lover” (Song 8:5). Their interpersonal communion of love is now permanently sealed and celebrated in an eternal marriage feast, an enduring love-relationship.

“I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them as their God’ (3).

At last God’s great desire to dwell in a communion of love with his people is being realized. His purpose of creating humans in his image and likeness was to be able to live in a communion of friendship and dialogue with them. But man sinned and went into hiding because he could not face God. God called out to him but man had lost the grace that made communion with God possible (see Gen 3).

God’s nature as a Trinity of Persons continued to desire friendship with man. So he sought to reestablish friendship with man through Noah and then with Abraham. Ultimately God wanted to establish a covenant, an enduring love relationship with all his people.

“I will set my Dwelling among you,” he told them, “and will not disdain you. Ever present in your midst, I will be your God, and you will be my people” (Lev 26:11,12). Through the prophets he renewed his intention to dwell lovingly with his people (e.g. Ez 37:27).

And now at last, after much unfaithfulness on the people’s part, God’s dream of a permanent love-relationship can be realized. They are totally disposed and open to receive his self-gift

in love. He will remain with them and protect them as their God; and they will be his people, as they faithfully respond to his loving friendship. Evil will no longer be able to disturb this eternal covenant of love. His people in heaven are now confirmed in grace. Failure is no longer possible – they now see God face-to-face – they could never want anything else in exchange for this supreme Good, Beauty and Truth.

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away” (4).

The qualities of the glorified body have wiped out all of the weak and corruptible characteristics of the imperfect natural life. Sickness is non-existent; death is no longer possible; pain and grief are unknown.

The first imperfect creation has passed away. It has ceded to the new and final, everlasting creation, God has become all in all of it and brought it to a glorious perfection.

“The One who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new’” (5).

God himself gives the final and definitive word. And nothing can undo that word. It remains true forever and will never grow old. This new order is guaranteed by God to be permanent. It will never lose its newness. We will never get tired of it because it is full of the glory of God. Through this new creation we will always be in direct communion with God who satisfies our every desire. He is the substance of this new creation who sustains and maintains it eternally. And he is always new. His infinite perfections are there for us to endlessly explore their newness. God fills the whole universe and sustains it by his presence. He and his universe will be ours to discover anew without end.

6th Sunday of Easter Rev 21: 10-14, 22-23

“The angel took me in spirit to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God” (10).

In this passage St. John is attempting to give us an understanding of what heaven is like. He uses symbolical language in trying to convey realities that are beyond our human experience. In describing the new Jerusalem, the Church, he often borrows from Ezekiel 40-48.

In order to be able to get a better view of the holy city coming down from heaven, the angel took him up in spirit to a high mountain. Clearly, this is not a rebuilding of the old city of Jerusalem that had been destroyed. Rather it is an entirely new Jerusalem created by God. There is nothing earthly about it. It proceeds entirely from God. It is coming down out of heaven from God. There is not a trace of evil left in it – nothing to oppose or resist God remains. It is pure receptivity of God. The city comes entirely from him. Its qualities are divine. It radiates his beauty and brightness.

“It gleamed with the splendor of God. Its radiance was like that of a precious stone, like jasper, clear as crystal” (11).

Since the city, made up of the people of God, dwells in each of them, it shines forth with his own glorious light. God is beaming from within each of the saints who populate the holy city. All together the divine light that comes from each of them is spectacular. They reflect the glory of God. He is in each of them: it is his glory that radiates in each of them, altogether as one. They are like many diamonds sparkling with an unearthly beauty: God himself. The splendor of which we speak stammers and falls short of conveying the true, heavenly reality St. John is experiencing and trying to describe.

The heavenly reality is so much greater. We

attempt to compare the glory of God with the glimmer reflected by precious stones, but the comparison limps. St. Teresa states that what she saw when Jesus revealed himself to her “surpasses everything imaginable here on earth, even in just its whiteness and splendor” (The Book of Her Life, Chap. 28, No. 4).

“It had a massive, high wall, with twelve gates where twelve angels were stationed and on which names were inscribed, the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites” (12).

These high walls symbolize the divine protection. The eternal life is secure. There is no possibility for evil to intrude or penetrate. The angels stand as celestial guards. They admit and receive the several tribes of the spiritual Israel. Their names inscribed indicate that they belong there. They have a right to enter the gates, and go in and out in freedom.

“There were three gates facing east, three north, three south, and three west” (13).

Heaven is a city with open doors where there is limitless freedom for the good. Everyone is mutually accepting of each other – no evil traits remain in anyone. There is no fear in going out to explore the endless spaces of creation filled with God’s glory. We are reminded of Jesus’ words, “I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture” (Jn 10:9). We will enjoy the boundless freedom of the children of God as we regale in the divine nourishment drawn from our contemplative union with God who is seen and savored everywhere in his ever new creation!

“The wall of the city had twelve courses of stones as its foundation, on which were inscribed the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (14).

Just as the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites were inscribed on the twelve gates so, too, the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb

were inscribed on the twelve courses of stones as its foundation. This shows the continuation and the complete harmony between the old and the new covenants. The new fulfills the old and brings it to completion. The preaching of the apostles constitutes the very foundation of the holy city. For they proclaimed Christ and his teaching and the graces that flow from him: so that “living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body’s growth and builds itself up in love – until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ” (Eph 4:15-16, 13). Once the Church has reached full maturity, it will be ready for that glorious state in heaven; and that is the new Jerusalem the Book of Revelation is describing.

“I saw no temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God almighty and the Lamb” (22).

On earth the city needed a temple for God’s dwelling to separate God’s presence from the profane. But now all evil has been swept away. Only openness to God remains. And God has filled everyone with his presence. Jesus, and all who are joined to him has become the temple. This is the temple that Jesus said he would rebuild in three days (Jn 2:19). Not only has he been glorified and is one with the Father – he and his whole body now glorified with him in heaven – have become the everlasting temple of God. God has become “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). Through Christ he is immediately united to everyone. His glory is the joy of each person who sees him face to face. He is immediately, directly present to each person. The entire city, the new Jerusalem, is filled with the divine presence. This dwelling of God with his people in heaven is the full flowering of God’s indwelling while we were on earth (see Jn 14:2, 23). “The city had no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gave it light, and its lamp was the Lamb” (23).

There will be no need for natural light. The bright light of the glory of God and the glorified Christ or Lamb of God lights up the heavenly realms. It is indeed an endless day. The night which symbolizes evil has been overcome forever.

Ascension of the Lord (7th)

Eph 1: 17-23

Our epistle begins with, “May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a Spirit of Wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him” (17).

The Father is the source from which Jesus proceeds and receives the divinity and the glory that is proper to it. St. Paul prays that this Father would give his people, including us, “a Spirit of wisdom and revelation” to illumine our hearts for a personal, experiential knowledge of him. This living knowledge, springing from having been plunged into God, is what kept driving St. Paul to the ends of the earth to proclaim the glory of God and his Christ. That heart knowledge is also available to us who have been immersed in Christ through baptism. It is through the gift of wisdom that the Holy Spirit gives us this personal, vivifying knowledge of God.

St. Paul continues to pray, “May the eyes of [your] hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones...” (18).

The heart or spirit is the very core and center of our being from which thinking and willing proceed. It is to this inner depth that contemplation takes us so that we can have an experience of the divine through the gifts of wisdom and understanding. St. Paul explains, “For God...has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God [shining] on the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). “All of us [are invited] to gaz[e] with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord...” (2 Cor 3: 18). That is how we attain the experiential knowledge

being offered us. That is how we can experience the fulfillment of Jesus' promise, "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God" (Mt 5: 8). It is in this way that we "may know what is the hope that belongs to his call". Elsewhere St. Paul speaks of "Christ in you the hope for glory" (Col 1: 27). In other words our close and intimate association with our indwelling, glorious Savior gives us a foretaste of the glory of heaven. We are given a mystical knowledge of the joy that God is calling us to in heaven. We have a first hand experience of "the riches of glory" when we will have received our "inheritance" among the angels and saints in heaven. God's "glory" is "the radiance of his majesty" (CCC 2809) of which we are given a glimpse in our hearts.

St. Paul continues to describe what he is praying for us to come to know:

"And what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe in accord with the exercise of his great might, which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens..." (19-20).

St. Paul is amazed as he experiences and contemplates God's marvelous power in transforming us from our natural state of existence to the supernatural state of a new creation (2 Cor 5: 17). This calls for a miraculous transition. This requires the creation of new, supernatural, spiritual powers to enable us to operate on a quasi divine level. The exercise of such power is comparable to that required for God to transform Jesus' dead body through glorification and then "seating him at his right hand in the heavens". St. Paul is in awe over such astounding might that is exercised by God in order to accomplish this great mystery. And we too are in consternation over it. And that is not all. St. Paul goes on to describe God's power in raising Christ even further, saying, "far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come" (21).

The excellence of Jesus' glorified body and divine being is even above every kind of angel, whether good or evil. Some of the different orders or choirs of angels are named here—all of these are subordinate to Christ who has been elevated above all creation. This holds true for this present age of history as well as for the age to come, eternity.

"And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way" (22-23).

When God created Adam in his image and likeness he gave him dominion over all creation (Gen 1: 26). David marvels over this privilege saying, "What are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them little less than a god, crowned them with glory and honor" (Ps 8: 5-6). What Adam failed to carry out because of sin, Jesus fulfilled as the new Adam, extending his dominion even over the angels. "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death, for he subjected everything under his feet" (1 Cor 15: 25-27).

What an awesome power is given to Jesus, the God-man, to rule over all of creation and over the whole cosmos. As the new Adam, Jesus is head of a new mankind, created in grace. And he is head of the Church, which is his body, to which he is intimately united to form one organic whole. Jesus is the anointed leader of a visible world community, the universal Church.

As Jesus' body, the Church is the receptacle of his glory. She receives his fullness and distributes it to her members through the sacraments; she gives them the spiritual riches, grace and gifts outpoured from her head. He shares with her the plenitude of his righteousness and holiness. He is her total source of life and holiness.

Pentecost Sunday

1 Cor 12: 3b-7, 12-13

Our epistle begins with, “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (36).

To believe that Jesus is God indicates that the Holy Spirit is within a person’s heart revealing this to him. “Whoever believes in the Son of God has this testimony within himself” (1 Jn 5: 10).

Faith is the testimony of God revealing himself through the Holy Spirit within our heart. Jesus revealed that he and the Father are one being (Jn 10: 30). The Holy Spirit bears witness to this truth in our hearts. In this realization we can address Jesus, the God-man, in the words of Thomas when he saw Jesus after he had been glorified. He exclaimed, “My Lord and My God” (Jn 20: 28). Jesus promised to give us his Holy Spirit so that we, too, would experience the divinity of Jesus in a similar way, “When the Advocate comes whom I will send you from the Father...he will testify to me” (Jn 15: 26).

Our epistle continues, “There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit” (14).

St. Paul gives examples of these different kinds of spiritual gifts: the expression of wisdom, the expression of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, mighty deeds, prophecy, discernment of spirits, varieties of tongues and interpretation of tongues (1 Cor 12: 8-10). All of these are attributed to the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, although all external works are produced by all three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. These spiritual gifts come from God and have a good purpose which is the up-building of the church. However different these are, they work together for the good of all. Their good source have a good effect on the people of God no matter how different they are. “...there are different forms of service but the same Lord” (5). The fact that these different gifts are used by different individuals to serve

the needs of the church should not be divisive. Rather, since they come from God, who is love, they tend to unify and spread goodness and love. To serve is to love and to reign with God. Serving is a way of moving away from self-centeredness. Serving others makes us like Jesus who said, “The Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20: 28). Serving others takes us out of ourselves and overcomes selfishness. “...there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone” (6).

Good works are inspired and sustained by the grace of God. These and, we also, must give him glory for them. “For God is the one who, for his good purpose, works in you both to desire and to work” (Phil 2: 13). Could we not say that the inspiration to begin putting scripture passages together into a program and experimenting with them to be one of the “workings” of God? And the grace of perseverance to bring the program to its full maturity could not have been accomplished except by God’s guiding hand. The richness of spirituality with which *Come, Lord Jesus!* is endowed gives testimony to God’s holy wisdom and creative guidance. We can also see how these “workings” are for the good of all and for the up-building of the church.

Thus, the words, “To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit” (7), are clearly realized. Just as God revealed and gave the kingdom through the Apostles, so too, does he inspire and sustain each individual baptized person to continue that mission, each in his or her own way. The benefit derived is inestimable. It brings about the transition from the mere natural life to a new supernatural way of existence. We pray that many will realize their call and surrender themselves to God for his holy cause. It is far beyond any earthly occupation. It involves eternal life and all that word implies. It means knowing God personally through being united intimately to him and living in close communion with him. This is what *Come, Lord Jesus!* accomplishes in people. It brings them

to realize their full potential in the kingdom of God.

“As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ” (12).

The members of the human body are so different from each other, and yet they work together in unison for the good of the whole body. So in a marvelous way, the spiritual gifts in the church are so different from each other and in each individual in whom they exist, yet the Holy Spirit causes them to work together in harmony for the good of the church. For all of these gifts flow from God and have him as their common source. And God who is three Persons in one divine nature unifies them. To work in harmony for the common good just as the soul unifies all the different members of the body for the good of the whole person.

“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit” (13).

Baptism immersed us into the risen Christ. He is the head and we are his members. We, the Church, form one body with him. His Holy Spirit lives in us to enliven us with the life of God. Ethnic, national or social distinctions no longer separate us—just as the differences in the members of the body do not divide us but work together in harmony. The one Spirit of Jesus of which we have all drunk gives us that divine life. Everything else is secondary to that divine life. Differences that ordinarily tend to divide us fade away into oblivion. Through faith expressed as prayer we can drink from the rivers of living water given us by Jesus. This signifies the Holy Spirit which we also receive through the Holy Eucharist (Jn 7: 37-39); 19: 34).

Solemnity of The Most Holy Trinity Rom 5: 1-5

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1).

Faith is a gift of God. It is the testimony of God revealing himself in our hearts (1 Jn 5:10). This virtue enables us to open our hearts to receive God’s self-gift and revelation. Through faith we are able to accept God’s outpoured love and life. It is in this way that we are given a share in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). This is what we call sanctifying grace through which we are reborn and become children of God. This new nature of ours consists of the virtues and gifts and God comes to dwell in us. Our sins have been forgiven and we are made right with God, that is, justified. We experience peace because all our sins have been taken away. Our consciences no longer bother us. We have become God’s friends and enjoy his presence. And all blessings come with him. All of this is made possible “through our Lord Jesus Christ.” He made it possible through his passion, death and resurrection. He communicated these spiritual riches to us through his gift of the Holy Spirit beginning with our baptism.

“Through whom we have gained access by faith to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God” (2).

It is Jesus, then, who has made it possible for us to receive this grace of forgiveness of sins and participate in the divine life. We were living in the state of sin and wholly undeserving. We were God’s enemies. Through sheer mercy and his liberal love, Jesus came to our rescue and saved us from our slavery to sin and evil. Thus, it is through God’s grace or favor freely given that we can enjoy this peace and friendship with God.

“...we boast in hope of the glory of God” (2).

There is an assurance in this statement. Our hope of attaining eternal glory contains a certitude. We can even boast of that hope of glory. We have already begun to rejoice in the salvation provided by God's grace. We have free access to God's presence. We are already being given a foretaste of the glory to come: "All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18).

We are already being given some inkling of the glory to come to make us long for it all the more: "For God...has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6).

Moreover, Jesus assumed our human nature, and his human body just like ours was glorified. We can expect the same. St. Paul assures us that "we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one, [Christ]" (1 Cor 15:49). The normal outcome of justification, of being made right with God through grace, is glorification. The word of God states this fact emphatically: "those he called he also justified, and those he justified he also glorified" (Rom 8:30). Indeed, we can boast in hope of the glory of God! It's just a matter of being faithful to that initial grace so that it can blossom into the fullness of glory to which it has been destined.

"Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character and proven character, hope" (3, 4).

In this passage, St. Paul explains the value of affliction. We would normally bemoan or complain about being afflicted with some kind of pain, suffering or trial. The spiritual good that comes from affliction is endurance. This means that the virtue of fortitude is exercised and caused to grow stronger. This supposes spirit assertiveness and a closer union with God to

be able to practice the virtue of fortitude. The end result is character or moral excellence. Our person is perfected through such exercise. And we are prompted to hope in God as we cling to him more firmly. Thus, we draw power from him to be able to endure. Our expectation to receive from him all that we need to endure is enhanced. Thus we can see the spiritual value of afflictions.

In this life we are often faced with the limitations of this created world in which we live. In order to accept God's will, rather than rebel or murmur, we patiently face the difficulty at hand, and deal with it. We conform with God's will out of love, and use the opportunity to grow in virtue. We are made holy and brought closer to God in the process. We are spiritually better off than if the affliction had not occurred. The perfection attained, and the maturing of the graced experience of God, increases our hope and expectation of glory.

"...and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (5).

Our hope is in God. In fact our hope is God dwelling in us, giving us a foretaste of future glory. As the psalmist says, "you are my hope, Lord" (Ps 71:5). The theological virtue of hope gives us immediate contact with God, who is love. This virtue connects us to God and draws upon his divine love. Habitual union and communion with God enables God to pour his infinite love into our open hearts.

Afflictions intensify our hope in God who responds by pouring his love and strength into our hearts for increased endurance and moral excellence. The love of God poured into our hearts enables us to love God in return. It also empowers us to love and serve our fellow humans and see that, in serving them, we are really loving Christ.

It is the Holy Spirit who is pouring the love of God in our hearts. He has been given to us.

He is not merely a passing guest momentarily communicating God's love to us. He is a permanent gift who resides in the depth of our heart. He is one with the Father and the Son dwelling within us (Jn 14:15-17, 23). He is their mutual love constantly being poured out within us. We must be attentive through prayer and recollection. When prayerfulness becomes a permanent disposition of ours, we will be habitually receptive to that outpoured love and pass it on to others.

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ—Corpus Christi 1 Cor 11:23-26

This is the earliest written account of the institution of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. It emphasizes Jesus' action of self-giving and his double command to repeat his own action (see New American Bible footnote).

11:23 "I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you..."

St. Paul recalls the traditional teaching of the early Church regarding the institution of the Eucharist. The Tradition which he has delivered to them is one which goes back to Jesus himself and has been handed down by the apostles.

"...that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over..."

This refers to Judas' betrayal of Jesus (Mk 14:43-46; Jn 13:22-30)

11:24 "...took bread, and, after he had given thanks..."

Jesus followed the Jewish custom before every meal and gave thanks to God. This holy custom has been passed on to us when we say grace before meals. "...broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you.'" The breaking of the bread brings out how Jesus' body was crucified for us. The words of consecration "This is my body", is the moment when the bread becomes Jesus' body which was given up for our deliverance. Jesus

is giving himself to us. In a marvelous way, he makes himself present for us so we can receive him and be united in a very intimate way with him. He enters into our very persons to sanctify and transform us into himself.

In saying, "Do this in remembrance of me", Jesus is empowering the Apostles to do what he had just done. In this way Jesus fulfills his promise, "the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world" (Jn 6:51).

11:25 "In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.'" In this way Jesus changes the cup of wine into his blood, shed for us (see Lk 22:20). He is enacting the New Covenant by the sacrificing of himself, sealing the New Covenant with his blood—just as the Old Covenant was sealed with the blood of a victim. (Compare Ex 24:3-8).

In this way, Jesus was anticipating the shedding of his blood on Calvary the next day, helping us to understand its meaning. Then he adds, "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." Again, Jesus commands his apostles to continue to do what he had just done. They in turn passed on this priestly power to their successors, the bishops and priests.

11:26 Jesus concludes, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes".

The great mystery of Jesus' Passover, his suffering, death and resurrection, is made present to us for our sanctification. Jesus commanded his apostles to continue this practice until his return in glory. The Church faithfully carries out Jesus' command at every Mass and makes him present to us. St. Paul expressed our faith in this mystery in these words, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16).

10th Sunday in Ordinary Time Gal 1:11-19

Paul is writing to new Christians from paganism in Galatia. They were being enticed by other missionaries to add observance of the Jewish law, including circumcision, to the cross of Christ as a means of salvation. These false teachers were converts from Judaism. They were undermining Paul's authority, asserting that he had not been trained by Jesus himself. They contended that Paul's gospel did not agree with that of the original and true apostles in Jerusalem. When Paul learned of the situation, he wrote this defense of his apostolic authority and of the correct understanding of the faith. He demonstrates the unique importance of Jesus and his redemptive sacrifice on the cross, the freedom that Christians enjoy from the old burdens of the law and the total sufficiency of Christ and of faith in Christ as the way to God and to eternal life (See New American Bible see Introduction to Galatians).

1:11-12 St. Paul explains that the source of his preaching is not human beings. The gospel he preached to the Galatians came from a revelation that he received from Jesus the Christ. You will remember how Paul (Saul) was encountered by the risen Jesus as a blinding light while he was headed for Damascus to persecute those who believed in Jesus (Acts 9:1-19). From then on Jesus began to teach Paul in person. We should note, however, that Paul also received other faith matters such as creeds and liturgical traditions that were passed on to him that were formulated in the early church.

1:13-14 Paul proceeds to tell a bit of his former life as a Jew, how he persecuted and tried to destroy the church. He was a very zealous Pharisee (Acts 26:4-5), and did all in his power to maintain their sacred traditions.

1:15-16 Paul understood that his mission began even before he was born. He had been set apart by God through a special grace even as the prophet

Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you" (Jer 1:5). God revealed his glorified Son to Paul so that he could proclaim Jesus to the Gentile nations. All of this took place without any consultation with other human beings.

1:17 Paul did not even go to Jerusalem at that time to consult the apostles who were originally called by Jesus. Instead, after his encounter with Jesus, Paul went to Arabia, the region of the Nabataean Arabs east and south of Damascus. It is speculated that he went there for solitude and prayer to prepare himself for his future ministry. There we can believe that he received further revelations from Jesus. Just as Jesus secluded himself in the desert after his baptism by John to prepare for his public ministry, we would expect that the Holy Spirit likewise drove Paul into the desert to do the same.

1:18 After this he returned to Damascus. St. Luke tells us that he stayed some days with the disciples in Damascus. There he began at once to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God (See Acts 9:19-20). After three years, the Jews were trying to kill him, so he fled to Jerusalem to confer with Kephias (Peter). He stayed there fifteen days.

1:19 On that occasion Paul also got to meet James "the brother of the Lord". He was not one of the twelve, but one of Jesus' relatives. He was a leader of the Jerusalem Christian community. The Apostles appointed him the first bishop of Jerusalem.

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time Gal 2: 16, 19-21

“We who know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified” (16).

The word justified means being made right with God. It involves repentance and the forgiveness of sins, the bestowal of sanctifying grace, being made a child of God and enjoying God’s indwelling presence.

These abundant blessings do not come to us simply through our own efforts, by good works. Even our good works and deeds are imperfect and fraught with selfishness and weakness. The works of the law refer to certain requirements of the Mosaic Law, such as circumcision, dietary regulations, purity codes, Sabbath observance and the liturgical calendar of Old Covenant feasts. Merely keeping these external ceremonies and rules do not make a person interiorly holy. Such a one would still have sinful habits and inclinations inherited from Adam and Eve.

Being made right with God through the forgiveness of sin and an infusion of sanctifying grace is obtained through faith in Jesus. This supernatural power of faith connects us to the risen Christ and draws divine life from him. The grace received enables us to live in habitual union and communion with our risen Lord. In order to be justified it is necessary to go out of ourselves and be in touch with the source of grace. Grace cannot be generated within us-- even our good works are contaminated by sin. Only Jesus, our redeeming Lord can save us. Faith opens us up to receive his outpoured mercy and love.

“For through the law I died to the law, that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ...” (19).

St. Paul attempted to practice the Law of Moses

with all his might. However, he explains that the commandments occasioned the sin of covetousness in him (Rom 7:8). He says, that “when the commandments came, sin became alive...and the commandment that was for life turned out to be death for me” (Rom 7: 9-10). The Old Testament Law did not communicate the grace or moral power to observe it. St. Paul experienced moral helplessness. He writes, “For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is in my flesh. The willing is ready at hand, but doing the good is not. For I do not the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want” (Rom 7: 18-19). In desperation he cries out, “Miserable one that I am! Who will deliver me from this mortal body?” (Rom 7: 24). His encounter with the risen Christ and the superabundant grace that enabled him to overcome his sinfulness gave our saint the happy answer to his question, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 7: 24-25).

St. Paul was frustrated with having given his all to keep the Law but was unable to do so. The Law did not help him. He found the moral power to overcome sin in his life by living in union with Christ, God’s anointed one. As a result, Paul gave up on the Law to sanctify him—it only made him realize more keenly what a sinner he was. So he abandoned the hopes he had set on it—he died, in a sense, to the Law. By dying to the Law and turning to Christ he could fulfill his desire to live totally for God. Through baptism he was given the grace to die to sin and to live for God. The sacrament made him participate in the death of Christ and death to his old sinful life, and the new life of grace with the risen Christ.

This mystical death shared with Christ through baptism is realized very practically in daily life. St. Paul expresses it this way, “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5: 24). We are called to live a spirit-dominant life which calls for self-discipline.

To put it in the words of Jesus, he says, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself

and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9: 23). The gospel love requires great selflessness.

“Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me” (20).

St. Paul was successful in crucifying his sinfully inclined human nature expressed by the word flesh (Gal 5: 24). The old limited human life has been superseded by the life of the Spirit, the life of Christ. Now he lives only for God. Like Jesus, his whole life is oriented toward the Father (Gal 4: 6). The life of Christ has taken over Paul’s life. He still lives in his human body but faith in Christ has opened a new sphere of existence. It has opened him to the divine. A whole new set of spiritual powers has made him into a new creature.

He explains his own new existence in these words, “So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor 5: 17). Paul’s encounter with Christ has ushered him into a whole new world and he wants everyone to share it. He is eager that they come to know Christ and the new spirited life he offers to all who receive him.

Christ’s love for Paul in saving him from his murderous anger and zeal in his futile attempt to further the Law has affected Paul in a drastic way. It was because Jesus loved Paul while still his enemy that Paul could be saved from his misery. It was because Jesus loved Paul to the point of surrendering himself to be crucified for him that his restless passions could be arrested and brought to peace. And Paul is supremely grateful to Jesus. Paul experienced Jesus’ love as current and was inundated like a flood by it. That love sent him all over the known world and prompted him to proclaim it to all. Paul was on fire with that love and he went about setting the whole world into one huge conflagration.

That is what we in Come, Lord Jesus! are being ignited with and inflamed to set others on fire. Are you not also feeling the heat of that love?

“...the Son of God...loved me and [has] given himself up for me” (20).

“I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing” (21).

It was because the Law of Moses was ineffective to save people from their sinful inclinations that Jesus came to our rescue. To want to go back to observing the Law is to go back to a futile existence which would make Christ’s redemptive death useless. Experience proves that being made right with God did not come from the Law—it came from Christ’s saving passion, death and resurrection shared with us through the gift of the Spirit.

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time Gal 3: 26-29

“Through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus” (26).

Faith leads to baptism and immersion in God. We become a new creation. We receive new life, the life of the children of God with all its powers to enter into intimate communion with God as well as share his own eternal life (Jn 17:3). The theological virtues enable us to stay in contact with God. The moral virtues enable us to relate to the world outside us in a Godly manner. For example, temperance enables us to partake of pleasure with moderation in accordance with God’s will so that God remains at the center of our lives—rather than the pursuit of pleasure usurping that center. Fortitude enables us to endure hardship rather than our fleeing from it and God’s will as it is expressed in our daily duties. It is because faith and baptism have plunged us into Christ that we have become children of God. It is because we are “in Christ” and intimately united to him that we draw divine life and share the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4) that we are indeed children of God. It is because the Son shares his divine life received from the Father that we are

sons and daughters of God. The Spirit of Jesus in our hearts inclines us to call God “Father” (Gal 4:6).

“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (27).

Baptism is the sacrament of faith; it completes faith through its ritual that brings us into Christ and actually unites us to God. Through this sacrament all of the heavenly spiritual riches are poured into us (Eph 1:3). What a privilege that is ours to be so closely united to our glorious risen Lord! Apart from all the spiritual riches given to us, Jesus himself with the Father and the Holy Spirit come to dwell in us. We tend to forget this marvelous truth and privilege so easily accessible to us for a continual interpersonal communion.

The expression of being clothed with Christ is an attempt to bring out the sacramental effect of baptism. The white garment with which we are clothed at baptism expresses the purity and sinlessness of our new condition. All our sins have been forgiven. We can now reflect the glorious life of Christ that has become ours. This outer white covering must be extended to convey our being penetrated and permeated through and through with this pure new life of God for a more complete understanding of what happened to us when we were plunged into Christ. This spiritual-graced condition invades our whole body persons. There is no part of us that is not saturated with God’s grace, just as our souls inform every part of us to animate us.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (28). God created Adam and Eve in his image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27). Everyone of every sex, race, nationality and color was created in God’s image. But because Adam and Eve sinned, they lost the likeness that grace brings about through love. Selfishness makes us self-centered to the point of excluding others. The loss of God-centeredness makes individual differences a

distraction and an impediment to love and union. Only the supernatural life and its powers that make us children of God can make us transcend the selfish weaknesses of nature that tend to divide us. Now that redemption has taken place and the grace of likeness to God has been restored, we are again called to that strength of agape love that overlooks the differences in each person that tend to separate us.

We are again called to be one as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one. We must continually grow in grace for the increase of love needed to fulfill this calling to unity. By assimilating the grace in God’s word and sacraments we can live this call to unity and fulfill its challenge. This grace makes us like Christ who loved all, enemies included, and humbly served them, even to the point of suffering and dying for them. Only grace can make the unity we are called to possible. It is for this unity that Jesus prayed so fervently—made possible by his glory, the Holy Spirit, and the grace he gives us: “And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me” (Jn 17:22-23). Without the grace that Jesus gives through the Holy Spirit, the ideal unity called for is impossible. It is through prayerful communion with our indwelling Lord that we obtain that grace.

“And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendant, heirs according to the promise” (29).

We belong to Christ because he purchased us by his blood (1 Cor 6:20). If we are faithful to our baptismal promises we are united to him and belong to him. We have become one with him in a holy marriage (2 Cor 11:2). We are his and he is ours. It is through faith leading to baptism that we become true descendants of Abraham. It was because of Abraham’s faith that he became blessed with righteousness. That is why we can say that we are true children of Abraham—because we have

faith like him. It was because Abraham believed God that he was promised that, through him, all nations would be blessed (Gal 3:8). Therefore, we who have faith are blessed with righteousness like Abraham. We are heirs of God's promised blessing. We too have received the righteousness that makes us children of God with spiritual riches beyond measure through the gift of the promised Spirit (Gal 3:14).

Christ is a descendant of Abraham. Since we are in Christ and become one with him who received the promise, as a descendant of Abraham, we likewise receive the promise through Christ—because faith united us to him and made us a descendant of Abraham with and in Christ (compare Gal 3:16-18).

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time Gal 5: 1, 13-18

“For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery” (5:1).

Jesus, the Christ, has freed us from the Law, its 613 precepts and its burdensome ceremonial requirements. These rules were very demanding but were unable to free those who observed them from sin. Yet, certain members of the early church called Judaizers considered it necessary to observe the Mosaic Law as part of the Christian faith. St. Paul vehemently resisted this teaching. He exhorted the Galatians to stand firm against this demand to submit themselves again to the yoke of slavery. It was such a burden to the people yet was unable to sanctify them. It could only make the people yearn for the coming of the Messiah and the salvation he would bring. Now that he has arrived in Jesus, the Galatians would be foolish to go back to the Old Law. The Council of Jerusalem was called in A.D. 49 to settle the matter and confirm the teaching of St. Paul (see Acts 15).

“For you were called for freedom brothers and sisters. But do not use this freedom as an

opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love” (5:13).

The Galatians (and we) were freed from the endless rules required by the old Law so that religion would consist of a more direct and personal communion with God. Jesus' suffering and death cleansed us from sin. We receive the salvation he won for us through faith and baptism. Thus he brings us into the presence of the Father. The work of our salvation now consists of our keeping ourselves united to Jesus through faith in him and in his New Law. We strive with the help of his grace to live by Jesus' teachings. Our freedom is in living in accord with the Spirit. We must follow his promptings perceived in our consciences and hearts. St. Paul explains that “... the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8: 2). Following these promptings of the Holy Spirit is what keeps us free from the slavery to our sinful inclinations. That makes us children of God who is Spirit (Jn 4: 24). “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (Rom 8: 14).

Freedom from the Old Law does not give license to follow the sinful inclinations that arise from our weak human nature, “the flesh”. St. Paul says, “The concern of the flesh is death, but the concern of the Spirit is life and peace. For the concern of the flesh is hostility toward God; it does not submit to the law of God, nor can it; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8: 6-8). Therefore it is necessary for us to resist the sinful tendencies of the flesh that go contrary to the virtuous promptings of the Spirit perceived and expressed in our spiritual nature, that which is highest in us. Grace gives us the freedom and empowers us to follow these holy promptings. The goal of our living according to the spirit is love; love for God and for one another. The flesh and its selfish tendencies make us slaves to ourselves and our passions. Grace from Jesus frees us from ourselves to live according to the spirit and love. Then we are true children of God who is both love and Spirit (see 1 Jn 4: 16; Jn 4: 24). We can then experience the highest joy because we live

on the level of spirit like God whose nature is love. We become who we were meant to be when we love like God and live according to that which is highest in us, spirit. When we are in the flesh, serving one another is burdensome. But when we are in the spirit, living on the level of spirit, serving one another is a joy because we are living on the divine level of love. We participate in the bliss of the eternal love-life of God.

“For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, you shall love your neighbor as yourself”(14).

Jesus summarized the whole word of God in the great commandment: “you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind....The second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments” (Mt 22: 37, 39-40).

St. Paul puts it simply, “...love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom 13: 10). Everything in our holy faith is to bring us to love. That makes us like God who is love (1 Jn 4: 16). This must be our goal in life and in all our relationships. Jesus expressed the importance of love in this way, “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13: 35).

“But if you go on biting and devouring one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another” (15).

In their concern and argumentation regarding the need to keep the Law of Moses, St. Paul reminds the Galatians that the most important commandment of all, no matter which side you're on, is love. In presenting your point of view, no matter how strongly convinced you are that your view is the correct one, you must present it with love and respect for the other. Without love, no matter if you are right, you are the loser: You hurt the other and yourself. Unloving argumentation is destructive.

“I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh” (16).

Living on the level of spirit is the result of obeying the movements of the Spirit. That means we keep in check the desires of our human nature, the flesh, that are opposed to God. For example, through spirit-assertiveness we discipline ourselves and live temperately. We control our desires for the pleasurable and do not give in to undue self and sense gratification. That enables us to live on a spirit level and in God. We are sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and obey them. We are continually aware of his presence and his least promptings. We purify our hearts through contrition whenever we fail to obey his inspirations.

“For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want” (17).

Our flesh or human nature in its sinful tendencies has strong sense desires that are opposed to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, the inspirations of the Spirit to live in perfect accord with God and truth are in conflict with the desires springing from our human nature. That is why we often fail to follow that which is highest in us, spirit. St. Paul expressed this conflict in these words, “We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold into slavery to sin. What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate....I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want” (Rom 7: 14-15, 19).

That is why prayer and the reception of the Eucharist are so important. They strengthen us with grace to be able to follow the Spirit and resist the sinful inclinations of human nature.

“But if you are guided by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (18).

When we follow the interior impulses of the Spirit out of love we are indeed free. We are not under the external compulsion of the law out of fear

of punishment. It is our desire and joy to follow the higher life of the spirit. We are attracted to it and freely surrender to the lead of the Spirit. Experience has taught us that this is the beginning of the blessed life of heaven.

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time **Gal 6: 14-18**

“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (14).

The Judaizers and those who hold on to circumcision boasted of this bodily sign of the Old Covenant. But that external rite of the Old Law has no value regarding salvation. For St. Paul, the cross, not circumcision is the sign of salvation. What Christ has done for us on the cross through his redemptive suffering and death is the only thing worth boasting. That is the sign of the New Covenant for us Christians. The cross is the source of all the graces we receive to live holy lives. That is how Jesus redeemed the whole world. It is through bearing the cross like Jesus in our own lives that we are true followers of Jesus. That is the sign indicating that we are followers of his (Lk 9:23). That is how the graces Jesus won for us on the cross are effectively employed to crucify our wayward passions (Gal 5:24).

St. Paul felt so indebted to Jesus for loving him and saving him through his death on the cross. He would say, “the Son of God...has loved me and given himself up for me” (Gal 2:20).

St. Paul saw the value of the cross in his own spiritual life. The power of the cross in baptism enabled him to die to himself and the selfish tendencies in human nature. He also died to all that the sinful world had to offer so he could live for Christ. He had found the best and highest life in Christ and would not let the tantalizing pleasures of the world cheat him out of that blessed life. He had died to that world and was now living a new life in Christ.

“For neither does circumcision mean anything, nor does uncircumcision, but only a new creation” (15).

Now that redemption has taken place, circumcision has no more value. Whether one is circumcised or not does not matter. The Old Covenant rite has no more meaning. What really matters is to be connected with Jesus’ work of redemption by means of faith working through love and keeping God’s commandments (Gal 5:6; 1 Cor 7:19).

What really matters as a consequence of Jesus’ redemptive accomplishment is that it has effectively transformed us into new creatures. We have become partakers in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4) and made children of God (1 Jn 3:2). God’s coming to dwell in us (Jn 14:15-17, 23) has radically changed us from mere natural human beings to supernatural beings endowed with spiritual powers. The theological virtues empower us to remain in constant communion with God. The infused moral virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance enable us to relate to the world in a manner holy and pleasing to God. And the gifts of the Holy Spirit perfect all of these virtues. Because of the grace of redemption received through faith we can now live in a divine-like atmosphere. We live in the company of God. Interpersonal communion with the three divine persons is now part of our daily existence.

This is the wondrous mystery that St. John was so excited about: Attend to his words, “We... 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 now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing this so that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn 1:2-4). This is what our new existence with all its new powers makes us capable of achieving. An entirely new existence is available to us if only we would pursue it and live it out in all its fullness.

“Peace and mercy be to all who follow this rule and to the Israel of God” (16).

The mercy of God brings about total forgiveness of all our sins. God’s supreme love and effort to save us through the cross has freed us from sin. Consequently, we enjoy immense peace and tranquility of heart if we but receive the fruits of redemption through faith. That is our rule of life to be able to enter into supreme life.

The Israel of God consists of both Jew and Gentile who receive God’s promise through faith. They open their hearts to God’s outpoured love in giving us the fruits of Jesus’ salvific work on the cross. These are God’s true children who inherit God’s promise to Abraham because they share Abraham’s faith.

“From now on, let no one make troubles for me; for I bear the marks of Jesus on my body” (17).

Animals and slaves were branded to show that they belonged to a particular master; they were his possession. If the Judaizers could boast of the mark of circumcision, St. Paul felt that he could boast of something better. He could proudly boast of certain marks of ownership demonstrating that he belonged to Christ. Circumcision merely showed his opponents to bear a physical likeness to Abraham in the Old Covenant. The marks Paul received were a sign of a faith and allegiance to Jesus. Through a faith like Abraham’s that made him righteous, he showed himself to be a true son of Abraham – unlike those who refused to believe in the Christ for which Abraham had been sent to prepare his people to receive through faith. St. Paul proved that he was connected to the “seed” of Abraham by his faith and allegiance to Jesus as manifested by the wounds he received because of his belonging to him. St. Paul relates, for example, “Five times at the hands of the Jews I received forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned...” (2 Cor 11:24-25). The scars received from these beatings and stonings were a permanent testimony of Paul’s belonging to Christ. They branded him as his slave and possession. St. Paul could say, “let no

one make trouble for me” not only because his brand marks were superior to any others, but also because such trouble makers would have to answer to his owner, the Messiah and God-man Christ himself!

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.” (18)

St. Paul ends his letter with a blessing. Despite the difficulty he had to deal with and remonstrations, he ends with a friendly note. He calls the Galatians “brothers”. He plainly shows himself to be reconciled to them and wishes them well by calling God’s blessing upon them.

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time Col 1: 15-20

The following verses are believed to be a quotation from an ancient Christian hymn in praise of the divine Jesus.

“Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (15).

Jesus is the perfect image of the Father. His human nature reflects the perfections of the divine Father. He is the incarnation of the invisible God. His human actions mirror for us who God is. Jesus said, “If you know me, then you will also know my Father” (Jn 14: 7). “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14: 9).

Jesus shares the divine nature with the Father: “The Father and I are one” (Jn 10:30). Therefore he is a perfect image of God the Father. Adam could only image God in an imperfect manner, in a limited way—unlike Christ who is divine and imaged God’s infinite perfections. Moreover, Adam sinned, he damaged and disfigured the divine image, Christ came to restore it and make it more like his. Adam imaged God by having dominion over the lower creatures. Through his passion for the forbidden fruit he became its slave. Through restoration of the divine image in Christ

he can again become master of creation. Christ perfectly fulfilled his role as head of creation and accomplished his mission as the new Adam, head of a new humanity. He empowers us through the gift of his Spirit to dominate our passions and rule over lower creation as images of God.

“Christ Jesus is...the firstborn of all creation”.

The firstborn means that no child was previously born in the family. The firstborn male could have been an only child. He received a special blessing from the father (Gen 27) and fell heir to a double share of his father’s property (Deut 21: 17). He enjoyed a certain authority over the younger brothers and sisters (Gen 27, 29, 40, 49:8). Since Jesus is the Father’s only begotten Son, he is the heir of the Father’s estate: the entire universe. Jesus has the right to possess and govern all of creation as his inheritance. Firstborn implies a position of supremacy, authority and power over all creation. Jesus is called firstborn of all creation because of his eternal generation from the Father. He has been begotten by the Father from all eternity. The Lord declares to the Messiah, “In holy splendor, before the daystar, like the dew I begot you” (Ps 110: 3)—in other words, before the world began. The Book of Proverbs says of holy Wisdom, God’s eternal Word, “The Lord begot me, the firstborn of his ways, the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago; From of old I was poured forth, at the first, before the earth....” (8: 22-23 see also 24-31).

St. John’s Gospel confirms these passages regarding the eternal generation of the Son when he says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...” (Jn 1: 1-2, 14).

Thus we see that the title given Jesus “firstborn of all creation” means that he was born before every creature. Moreover, it is through him that God created the universe, and sustains all things in existence (Heb 1: 2, 3). The whole cosmos is in his power and control. That is how great he is!

Jesus is firstborn in a unique way by an eternal generation from the Father. But of his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace (Jn 1: 16). In that sense Jesus is the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. He shares his kingdom with us and the eternal life he won for us. Through faith and baptism we are born of God in grace. We become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pt 1: 4). God in his mercy gives us a created participation in his divine life through sanctifying grace.

“For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him” (16).

All the perfections of God are imaged in his Son, the Eternal Word. All creatures made by God come from him. “Then was I beside him as his craftsman and I was his delight day by day” (Prov 8: 30). God looked upon his Son’s perfections to model all that he created. They originate from within his Eternal Wisdom, his Son. No creature came into existence outside of him, whether visible or invisible. This includes the various classes of angels, whether good or evil. All were created through God’s eternal Son and continue to exist and have their being in him. He sustains them in existence. They were created for him in order to give glory to him. And that glory redounds ultimately to the Father.

“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (17).

Jesus the Christ pre-existed all creatures. He is before them in time as well as in importance. By his power he holds all things in existence. They exist in him. He keeps them in their being and prevents them from disintegration. See the excellence and power of our Redeemer!

“He is the head of the body, the Church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he himself might be preeminent” (18).

Now that we have reflected upon Jesus' divine activity in the mystery of creation, we turn to look at his surpassing excellence in the mystery of redemption. He is head of the church and its members with whom he shares his divine life. He is intimately united to each of us, his members. He directs and oversees us by his authority and sanctifying presence. He is the one who incorporated us into his church. He united us as a congregation through his Holy Spirit. He initiated our gathering through the gift of his glorious Spirit. He is the first to overcome death in his human nature and empower us to do the same by the gift of his glorious Spirit. It is his glorious life that we children of God enjoy by his sanctifying grace received in baptism. To him be the glory for his marvelous excellence.

“For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell” (19).

The fullness of power and perfection resides in our glorious Savior. “For in him dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily, and you share in this fullness in him...” (Col 2: 9-10). The more we are devoted to Christ and belong to him we are able to experience that fullness of divine life in us: “You share in this fullness in him”. But if the flesh and its desires dominate our lives, we are incapable of perceiving that fullness of the divine which we share with him. For it is known through the spirit.

“And through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross through him, whether those on earth or those in heaven” (20).

Through his great love for us and sacrificial death on the cross and the shedding of his blood Jesus took away the sins of the world that separated us from God. He reconciled us to the Father and made us one with him again in love and friendship. With the enmity and rebellion of sin repented and forgiven, we are now at peace with God. We have been reunited in love. We have been reestablished in his grace through which we share his divine life. Heaven and earth are reunited.

That grace won by Christ overflows and affects the atmosphere around us. Creation is renewed by our grace-filled activity and love. We change our environment by love and holy discipline. Respect for others' uniqueness and dignity is restored. Peace and joy reign in and around us—to the glory of God the Father through the Son in the Spirit.

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time Col 1: 24-28

“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the Church” (24).

St. Paul is writing while in prison. Since he experienced several imprisonments we do not know exactly where.

The various sufferings he endured as an apostle (2 Cor 11: 23-28), including those related to his imprisonment, were directed for the salvation of his people. “If we are afflicted”, he says, “it is for your encouragement and salvation” (2Cor 1: 6). He tells Timothy, “I bear with everything for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, together with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2: 10). St. Paul could rejoice in his sufferings because they contributed toward the salvation of the Colossians. His sufferings assisted their cooperation with God's grace in living holy lives.

What could be “lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the Church”? Christ suffered adequately for the Church. The graces he attained are superabundant for the salvation of the world. The “afflictions of Christ” in his members are what is lacking. They need to be completed in and by us. Purification from sin can take place only through redemptive suffering. Each member of the body of Christ must suffer like the head for the graces won by him to transform us.

“It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14: 22). What Jesus said of himself is also true for us: “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Lk 24: 26). Jesus stated the condition for discipleship in these words, “whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me” (Mt 10: 38).

The contribution of our afflictions is what is lacking. Jesus identifies our suffering, born in union with him, as his. When Saul was persecuting the early Christians, Jesus encountered him and said “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9: 4, 5). Thus we see that “what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body...the Church” is the sufferings of Christ in us. We must contribute our share to complete Christ’s own personal passion on Calvary. Redemption is not only up to Christ. We have our part to play. He did what he had to do to save us. Now it is our turn. We must accompany Christ in intimate love and fellowship by hanging on the Cross with him. When we accomplish this, then the afflictions of Christ on behalf of the Church will no longer be lacking.

“The Church, of which I am a minister in accordance with God’s stewardship given to me to bring to completion for you the word of God...” (25).

St. Paul is very much aware of his call to proclaim the word of God to all. He is conscious of his serious duty to enlighten everyone about the salvation being offered to everyone in Christ. He will not rest until all know that they are invited into the Kingdom of God. Everyone must know of God’s loving plan to give them eternal life which begins now. Then his task will be completed.

“...the mystery hidden from ages and from generations past. But now it has been manifested to his holy ones...” (26).

St. Paul considered it a unique privilege of his to be enlightened regarding the secret mystery that had been hidden from all previous generations. Now it is being revealed to him and the “holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph 3: 5). And what is this mystery which the apostle finds so intriguing? It is that “the Gentiles are coheirs [with the Jews], members of the same body, and co-partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph 3: 6). This is the mystery of Christ, head and members, who form one body. It is a distinct privilege of ours also to know and be part of the mystery. God does not save us disdainfully at a distance. Rather, in love, he unites us to himself in Christ in a most tender and personal way. We are intimately joined to him in a direct and close manner.

He explains further, “to whom God chose to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; it is Christ in you, the hope for glory” (27).

Jews and Gentiles are being enlightened regarding this mystery by the holy apostles and prophets. “The riches of the glory of this mystery” are a source of astonishment to our apostle. He just can’t get over it! He proceeds to reveal the spiritual richness of this mystery: “It is Christ in you, the hope for glory”. To have the glorified, risen Christ actually living within our very persons is an astonishing fact! If only we can be spiritually disposed to experience its reality: this would give us a foretaste of the glory to come. To put it in other words, “For God...has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of [Jesus] Christ” (2 Cor 4:6).

The glory of God shining on the face of the risen Jesus who is in us gives us a foreknowledge of the glory that we will experience in the heavenly life. The indwelling glorified Christ, in other words, already gives us the hope and expectation of future glory. We already know something of what the glorious life in heaven will be like. We can thus await it with expectant hope.

“It is he whom we proclaim, admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone perfect in Christ” (28).

St. Paul, who continually experienced the risen Jesus within himself, was immensely spiritually enriched by this divine favor so he could proclaim the mystery of Christ as a living experience to us. He saw and experienced this mystery in his very being, making him cry out its reality to us. This vivid experience of Christ within us makes us attentive and alert to live in accord with God’s will. The presence of the risen Christ living in us, along with the spiritual gifts and discernment, make us astute to live according to the spirit while avoiding any contrary movement arising in us. St. Paul admonishes and teaches everyone with all wisdom, “that we may present everyone perfect in Christ”.

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time Col 2: 12-14

“You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (12).

The sacrament of baptism unites us to Christ in his paschal mystery. We are joined to him in the mystery of his death: we are given the grace to die to ourselves when our desires and inclinations are contrary to God’s will. We are graced to go against our sinful inclinations. We are empowered to die to selfish living so we can live for God—like Christ: “as to his death, he died to sin once and for all; as to his life, he lives for God. Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as [being] dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, sin must not reign over your mortal bodies so that you obey its desires” (Rom 6: 10-12).

We see the importance of faith once more. It is the virtue or power that unites us to Christ and

his saving grace. That is how we draw sanctifying grace to live the divine-human life. Through faith and baptism we not only die with Christ—we are also raised with him in the mystery of the resurrection. The grace of the paschal mystery enables us to live a new spiritual life according to God’s will. The old sinful life is replaced by a life of virtue. Purity of heart replaces the old sinful behavior of lust and greed. Patient endurance replaces impatience and short-temperedness. Love replaces hatred and inconsiderateness. The grace imparted by Christ tends to make us like him. It tends to make us think, desire, and act like him.

“And even when you were dead [in] transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he brought you to life along with him having forgiven us all our transgressions...” (13)

Mortal sin causes spiritual death in the sense that such serious sin destroys the life of grace. We go against God’s commandment that is meant to protect us from spiritual harm. This causes us to commit spiritual suicide or loss of sanctifying grace. For example, the law of gravity and the makeup of the human body will punish us with death if we jump off the Empire State Building. Thus, to commit murder and adultery are serious sins against the love of neighbor. Such acts of uncharity destroy the life of sanctifying grace. Uncircumcised flesh is a symbol for unrestrained, sinful behavior. This was an appropriate expression to describe the pagan Gentile Colossians who lived in sin. Their condition was the opposite of circumcision which was a sign of the Covenant, an enduring love relationship between God and the chosen people. This implied that the people would be obedient to God’s commandments. Uncircumcision represents the lawlessness of those who do not know God or obey him.

Through the preaching of the apostle, the Colossians came to believe in God’s love for them by reflecting upon Jesus’ sacrificial death. He loved them and gave himself up for them, even in their

rebellious sinful state. Their faith and repentance made them receptive to God's forgiveness. All their sins were taken away. They were united to Christ at the moment of his resurrection and began to share his risen life. They became children of God and inherited eternal life. St. Paul includes himself with his people as one who also received forgiveness. And we also are gratefully aware of God's merciful forgiveness of "all" our sins.

"Obliterating the bond against us, with its legal claims, which was opposed to us, he also removed it from our midst, nailing it to the cross" (14).

The punishment for eating the forbidden fruit is death (Gen 2: 17). Moreover, in the law it is written "cursed be he who fails to fulfill any of the provisions of this law!" (Deut 27: 26). The result of our eating the forbidden fruit and sinning—as we all have—is death! Failing to fulfill the provisions of the law brings about a curse. These are the punishments contained in the document or bond written against us. In becoming human, Jesus identified himself with our sinful and cursed state. St. Paul says, "Christ ransomed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, 'cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree...'" (Gal 3: 13). Jesus took our place to suffer and make up for our sins. He freed us from guilt and the punishment due for our sins. Everything is forgiven. He destroyed the legal claims against us. He took that legal bond and nailed it to the cross to show that he fulfilled its demands. We, therefore, have been set free from all of its claims. We are free for God, free for righteousness. As St. Paul expressed it, "Christ ransomed us from the curse of the law...that the blessing of Abraham might be extended to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal 3: 13, 14). We are now free to receive, like Abraham, the righteousness that comes from believing in Christ and his redemptive act on the cross. The righteousness brought about by sanctifying grace unites us to God and makes us his children sharing his divine nature. (2 Pet 1: 4). Now we are free to live as children of God, living in love, in union with him, and in doing his will.

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time Col 3:1-5, 9-11

"If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (1).

Baptism unites us to Christ. The grace received conjoins us to him as he rises from the dead. This grace is continually in movement towards the Father with Christ. To be true to this baptismal grace our minds ought to dwell on spiritual matters. Grace has made us companions with Christ Jesus. We are closely associated with him in his resurrection. That is why we ought to often prayerfully dwell on Christ and his heavenly reign with the Father. Now glorified he can also be with us. Our aim in life must be to be pleasing to him so as to keep on living in his presence. We meditate on his words and try to live accordingly. Our baptismal grace urges us to live on the level of spirit and that which is highest in us. We go against our sinful inclinations and self-indulgence so that we can dwell in the spirit where Christ lives.

This implies that to seek the things that are above we must practice the virtues. The virtue of temperance, for example, empowers us to practice self-discipline and self-restraint in dealing with our pleasure appetite. The virtue of fortitude strengthens us to bear with trial, difficult responsibilities or suffer illness with patience. Thus we avoid self-indulgence or fleeing the cross. These holy dispositions enable us to dwell with Christ on the level of spirit.

"Think of what is above, not of what is on earth" (2).

The word of God helps us to think with Christ and of Christ. He is always concerned with his Father's business and doing his will. As he said, "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work" (Jn 4:34). Jesus was sent to establish the kingdom of God on earth. He

devoted his whole life to this task. He detached himself from any preoccupation with the things of this world so he could be free for God, his work and his will.

We tend to be overly concerned and attentive to earthly matters to the forgetfulness of the heavenly. To put it in the words of Jesus, “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). Our baptismal grace challenges us to detach ourselves from preoccupation with the things of this world and to live with Christ and concern ourselves with spiritual matters. We deal with the things of this world in accord with God’s will and insofar as they help us attain our heavenly goal.

“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (3).

The grace of baptism is calling us to die to this world, and to be free from the addictive pleasures that prevent us from loving God with our whole heart and doing his will. We must use the things of this world only to do God’s will – not for self-indulgence. We must die to this world to the extent that it interferes with our loving God. This is what was symbolized in the baptismal ceremony: being under the water poured on us was a sign of our death and burial with Jesus. Our coming up out of the water signified our rising to new life with the risen Christ. This rising with Jesus is meant to be a permanent disposition in which we are “hidden with Christ in God”. Our union with Christ in God cannot be seen with the eye. Ours is a hidden life that goes on unseen. But it is real nonetheless. It is the highest kind of life on earth, the most enjoyable and satisfying.

“When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory” (4).

This hidden life of our union with Jesus in the depths of our soul will be seen in its full splendor when Christ will appear at his second coming.

“Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Mt 13:43). We will appear incorruptible, glorious, powerful and spiritual (1 Cor 15:42-44). “Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one [Adam], we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one [the glorified Christ]” (1 Cor 15:49).

“Put to death then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry” (5).

The baptismal grace which makes us participants in the death of Christ must be directed toward our sinfully-inclined bodies. We must apply that grace to put an end to sinful behavior. The body and its parts can no longer sin when it is dead. Applying our baptismal grace to impure thoughts and desires means that we cease entertaining them; we put a stop to them and turn to God for divine assistance. Only his grace can empower us to overcome our disordered natural inclinations. We can succeed in carrying out death-to-self only with God’s help. But we must make the effort to apply that grace. The same holds true regarding bodily movements towards sexual sins. We must resist using the parts of our bodies inclined to immorality such as viewing pornography, sexual self-stimulation or fornication. Arresting these movements is like putting them to death. It is by putting such lustful bodily movements to death by resisting them that we live spirit-dominant lives which dispose us for union with God. Our union with God is deepened and made stronger each time we die to our self-centered self in this way. The same holds true when we resist various forms of greed. We die to such possessiveness by resisting the inclination. We temper our avaricious desire to possess more wealth, and we give some away through tithing. We forego our overwhelming desire to acquire things until it stops or dies. The disordered desire to possess and accumulate things is a kind of idolatry. We give our heart’s desire to creatures in place of God whom we ought to love with our whole heart.

“Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices” (9).

The old self with its sins was put to death symbolically and buried at baptism; God’s grace now inclines us to end past sinful practices. Through prayer and the help of God’s grace such sinful behavior must be stopped. This includes lying. We were made in the image of God who is truth itself (Jn 14:6). To tell a lie is to make a statement contrary to the truth and deface the image of God which you are. The Catechism teaches, “ ‘A lie consists in speaking a falsehood with the intention of deceiving.’ The Lord denounces lying as the work of the devil: ‘You are of your father the devil,...there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies’ ” (CCC 2482). We can see why, then, there is an urgent need to stop lying. To lie is to image Satan.

“...put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator” (10).

As we become more like Christ, the true image of God, by virtuous living, we come to know God better. By dying to the old self, we are no longer blinded by passion which obstructs the vision and intuitive knowledge of God. The new, virtuous self is single-heartedly devoted to God. It can therefore experience the fulfillment of the sixth beatitude: “Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God” (Mt 5:8). They see God by knowing him through transformation into his very image (see 2 Cor 3:18).

“Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all” (11).

The unifying presence of Christ in each person is what is important and overshadows everything else. Secondary qualities such as race, nationality and social conditions are no longer significant. All social barriers are overcome by the overwhelming love of Christ that inclines us to respect and care for each other. All enmities are put aside. Even uncivilized people such as barbarians, and

the worse of them, Scythians, come to dwell peacefully with the rest of the world. All of this is made possible by the redemptive and sanctifying power and presence of Christ our Lord who is “all in all”.

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time Heb 11:1-2, 8-19

“Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen” (1).

Faith is described as the realization or assurance of what we hope for; it gives evidence and convinces us of the reality of the promises that God has made. God is the one who is revealing himself to us in our hearts, convincing and assuring us that all his promises would be fulfilled (see 1 Jn 5:10).

“Because of it the ancients were well attested” (2). It is because of this interior conviction that our forefathers in the faith were commended and approved. They believed that everything that God promised would be attained.

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was to go” (8).

Abraham is an outstanding example among the ancients of an unusually strong faith. When God spoke to him to “Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk...to a land I will show you” (Gen 12:1), he obeyed him. He went because he believed God and everything he said (Gen 12:2-3). He operated on blind faith, without knowing where he was going.

“By faith he sojourned in the promised land as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise” (9).

Abraham reached the promised land but never settled. He remained a wandering nomad as did his son and grandson. He lived in tents. “...for he

was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and maker is God” (10).

Abraham (and his heirs) never settled because he was looking for something better, a city with a lasting, eternal foundation, the heavenly city, the Jerusalem from on high.

“By faith he received power to generate, even though he was past the normal age—and Sarah herself was sterile—for he thought that the one who had made the promise was trustworthy” (11).

Though Abraham had reached the age of sexual impotence and Sarah was sterile, God made it possible for them to conceive Isaac. Abraham believed God to be all-powerful and trusted that he could fulfill his promise.

“So it was that there came forth from one man, himself as good as dead, descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sands on the seashore” (12).

Abraham’s age and normal inability to father children is accentuated to show that nothing is impossible with God; he can be trusted to fulfill his promises no matter how seemingly impossible. It is under such a circumstance that he became the father of many nations.

“All these died in faith. They did not receive what had been promised but saw it and greeted it from afar and acknowledged themselves to be strangers and aliens on earth” (13).

These men of faith died without receiving the promise as such, but they experienced it from a distance. They looked towards the future for it. Abraham considered himself to be an alien (Gen 23:4), a stranger and a sojourner on this earth. His true home towards which he pressed was heaven. “...for those who speak thus show that they are seeking a homeland” (14).

They were not content with earthly dwellings. They knew that their true home was with God

in heaven. “If they had been thinking of the land from which they had come, they would have had opportunity to return” (15).

The fact that they did not return to their original home demonstrates that an earthly dwelling did not satisfy them. They were longing for and moving toward something better—their heavenly homeland.

“But now they desire a better homeland, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them” (16).

Their yearning for a heavenly homeland pleased God. Their attitude makes him happy to be their God. For he has prepared a city for them. Their desire for it shows them to be worthy of it. They do not allow the passing delights of this world to sway them from their heavenly goal. That is why God proudly says, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex 3:6). God continues to relate to them even after their earthly life. He continues to be their God—they are still alive. He will one day raise them up in glory to enjoy their heavenly home and city.

“By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer his only son” (17).

Isaac’s birth was the beginning of the fulfillment of God’s promise. Now God puts Abraham to the severe test of killing his only hope to all that God promised him. But Abraham had such absolute faith in God’s ability to fulfill his promise—no matter what—he proceeded to obey God’s command to slay his own son! How would God fulfill his promise with Isaac dead and his incapacity to father more children? Could God restore Isaac his life—actually raise him from death? It was beyond Abraham’s ability to understand. Yet he obeyed God’s command “to offer his only son”.

“...of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac descendants shall bear your name’ “ (18).

How can Isaac have children to raise descendants for Abraham if he kills him? But God had endowed Abraham with such total and blind faith that he did not allow his inability to understand stop him from obeying his will. Abraham did not question God. He simply proceeded to carry out his command.

“He reasoned that God was able to raise even from the dead, and he received Isaac back as a symbol” (19).

Abraham was in the process of carrying out God’s command. Only the angel arrested his upraised hand to drive the knife into Isaac’s body. It is as if he actually slayed him. Isaac was given back to him as one who was raised from the dead. He now becomes the symbol of resurrection from the dead. He is a sign of the Father’s sacrifice of his only Son, Jesus Christ, whom he raised from the dead. Abraham’s absolute faith and trust in God is once again seen in his descendant Jesus who trusted his Father unto his dying breath as he gave himself over to him, saying, “Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit’ (Lk 23:46). Jesus could express such trust even if the Father seemed to have abandoned him (Mt 27:46). So we also are called to trust God in our lives, as God came through in his faithfulness to Abraham and Jesus, so we can be absolutely certain in our hope that he will exercise his faithfulness in bringing us to salvation.

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time Heb 12:1-4

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...”

The cloud of witnesses refers to the heroes of biblical history enumerated in Hebrew 11. A large number of Old Testament faithful are mentioned, each in particular, and how they

acted upon their faith, and how effective it was in their lives. “Through faith [they] conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire; escaped the edge of the sword...” (11:33-34).

These witnesses to the power of faith surround us in the communion of saints cheering us on to victory. They are supporting us and sustaining us in our faith life.

“...let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us”.

Our faith life is presented as a race. Runners in a race dress lightly so that their speed will not be hindered the least bit; so we must rid ourselves of the every attachment or sin that would slow us down. Attachments to things encumber the spirit. Sins cause us to deviate from the race track. These slow us down or cause us to stray. We must shed these if we want to “persevere in running the race that lies before us.”

“...while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith”.

Jesus achieved the glory of our heavenly goal through his faithful adherence to his Father’s will. We need to keep our eyes fixed on him as our leader in the faith. He will sustain us and inspire us to do the Father’s will, no matter how difficult. As he was made perfect through suffering (Heb 2:10), so he will bring us to perfection. We must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and remain firmly connected to him so he can sustain us in our earthly trials. He will empower us to persevere in the race.

“For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame”.

Jesus looked beyond the cross to the accomplishment of his Father’s will, the salvation for the multitude that he would make available and the glory that he would ultimately attain. We

too can more easily endure the cross if we keep in mind the great good that it accomplishes. We are sanctified and perfected by it. Crucifixion was the punishment for criminals. Jesus could bear with such a shameful form of suffering and death because of the redemption of the world that it brought about as well as his own glory.

“...and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God.”

Jesus’ obedience in suffering the supreme sacrifice earned him the reward of glorification and to be seated in the place of honor at the right hand of the Father. He is constituted king by God himself and rules with him. He enjoys absolute sovereign power. He sits in a ruling posture, at rest after his victorious sufferings.

“Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart”.

If Jesus, though innocent, endured such opposition from sinners, we who deserve it, should be encouraged to endure our trials patiently. His endurance won for us the grace to bear with persecution.

“In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood”.

Their trials were difficult to bear, yet they were moderate compared to those who had to suffer martyrdom. So their sufferings could be worse. Thank God they were not!

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time Heb 12:5-7, 11-13

“You have also forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as sons: ‘My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reproved by him’” (5).

The Hebrew converts to Christianity seemed to have forgotten their Old Testament. In the midst of their trials, which was leading

them to discouragement, they failed to remember the teaching of the book of Proverbs being quoted in this verse. The author of Hebrews reminds them of it in order to encourage them. Any father who truly loves his son or daughter is going to correct them. He will use some form of discipline to teach them good behavior. “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him takes care to chastise him” (Prov 13:24). The author of the epistle is trying to encourage his people and strengthen their faith. He points out to them that the sufferings they are experiencing are ultimately from God who permits them. They are a form of training that is bringing them to perfection. They will become more vigilant, aware of God and the eternal, self-possessed and strengthened to do God’s will, mindful of his word. Without trial, surrounded by plenty and luxury, our spirits can easily be drowned by self-indulgence (Lk 21:34-36).

Trial whips us into shape. Suffering makes us see how passing earthly pleasures are. It makes us spirit-dominant and capable of practicing virtue. Without trial we tend to go astray, become self-centered, selfish and self-willed. We become independent and think we don’t need God. Just as earthly fathers are counseled to discipline their children so our heavenly Father needs to correct us. “A colt untamed turns out stubborn; a son left to himself grows up unruly. Bend him to the yoke when he is young, thrash his sides while he is still small, Lest he become stubborn, disobey you, and leave you disconsolate. Discipline your son, make heavy his yoke, lest his folly humiliate you” (Sir 30:8, 12-13).

God is a good Father. He loves us and uses our imperfect world that so often fails and tries us in order to make us spiritually mature. We and the Hebrews are urged to see beyond our trials to the spiritual good that God is accomplishing through them. Through patient endurance and resignation to God’s will we will regain our peace and grow rapidly in virtue.

“...for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines; he scourges every son he acknowledges” (6).

It is out of love that our heavenly Father allows suffering to come our way. He allowed his beloved Son, Jesus, to suffer as an example of the great good that comes from it: his glorification and the redemption of the whole world. It is because God loves us that he sends us suffering through our imperfect world. This shows us that we are truly his children that he loves very much. He wants something better for us than this passing world. He wants us to experience deeper, lasting, spiritual joys that never end. Frustrated plans are a call to let go of our own will and surrender to God's. This is an attempt to steer us from our self-centeredness to become more God-centered. It is a movement from self to God to which we must accede.

“Endure your trials as ‘discipline’; God treats you as sons. For what ‘son’ is there whom his father does not discipline?” (7).

Trial is a form of discipline or training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character. Discipline is a form of control gained by enforcing obedience. For example, sickness may force us to give up certain kinds of self-indulgence such as in sugar and salt which are harmful to our health. The accepted abstinence may help us to grow spiritually through detachment from certain tastes which keep us bound to earth.

“At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it” (11).

We do not like being forced to discipline ourselves to do what we dislike, or to give up what we like. But the spiritual fruition of peace, self-control and a keener sense of the presence of God is richly rewarding. This foreseen reward of patient endurance gives us courage to bear with the sufferings that come our way.

St. Paul encourages us further to be patient with

the various sufferings that come our way when he says, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us” (Rom 8:18). He explains further, “For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor 4:17).

“So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees” (12).

The spiritual rewards that are reaped by our efforts should encourage us to expend our energies to cope manfully with the problems that come our way. A bright future awaits us. We need to stand up and embrace the task. We look to the Lord for the strength we need to face the challenge awaiting us. A great adventure is in store for us. The experience will be like that of a great athlete's enjoyment of the challenging championship game. He would not want to miss one moment of it. The excitement and the thrill of giving it his all drives him on. The spiritual battle is just as exciting an adventure. We must muster up our courage and enter into the fray. We will not regret for even a moment making this most important decision of a life time.

“Make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be dislocated but healed” (13).

The wounded athlete must remain active for his wounded body to be healed. His limbs will get well and be made stronger only through exercise. The activity will bring fresh blood and oxygen to the damaged areas for quick healing. The exercised muscles will mend much sooner. So, too, for the person who is spiritually discouraged. Such a one must become active again. He must return to prayer and communion with God, the source of his strength. He must overcome feeling and live by faith. Scripture says, “But my just one shall live by faith, and if he draws back I take no pleasure in him” (Heb 10:38). The mind must ignore any feelings of discouragement and live by what is highest in us. We must obey the Spirit's

call to victory. We must set our minds on the goal and strive toward it with ardent zeal – nothing must be allowed to distract or deter us.

“With closest custody, guard your heart, for in it are the sources of life. Let your eyes look straight ahead and your glance be directly forward” (Prov 4:23, 25).

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time Jas 1: 17-18, 21b-22, 27

“You have not approached that which could be touched and a blazing fire and gloomy darkness and storm” (18).

The author contrasts the nature of the Old Covenant to the New. The Old Covenant which took place on Mount Sinai was a terrifying experience. “There were peals of thunder and lightning, and a heavy cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Mount Sinai was all wrapped in smoke, for the Lord came down upon it in fire...and the whole mountain trembled violently” (Ex 19:16, 18). The people were told, “Take care not to go up the mountain, or even to touch its base. If anyone touches the mountain he must be put to death” (Ex 19:12).

Our passage goes on to say, “and a trumpet blast and a voice speaking words such that those who heard begged that no message be further addressed to them” (19).

God’s voice was so terrifying the people said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we shall die” (Ex 20:19). Moses tried in vain to calm the people, saying, “Do not be afraid, for God has come to you only to test you and put his fear upon you, lest you should sin.’ Still the people remained at a distance” (Ex 20:20-21).

In this scene even Moses does not meet God. He is simply told what to tell the people. The people themselves were warned, and they were too afraid

to approach God. Such was the situation and the atmosphere surrounding the Old Covenant.

But the realities that are experienced in the New Covenant are entirely different. The author wants his Jewish converts to Christianity to understand how blest they are in accepting and entering into the New Covenant which he proceeds to describe. They are not such course elements that could be touched as is the Old Covenant (v.18) but spiritual realities that could be experienced.

He explains, “you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering” (22).

Mount Zion, or Sion, is the hill on which Jerusalem, the capital city, was built. It came to be identified with the city of Jerusalem itself. This was the stronghold that David captured (see 2 Sam 5:6-9) and made into “the city of David”.

Mount Zion, or Jerusalem, is “the city of the living God,” where God can be encountered, befriended and lived with. He is present and makes himself available to each and everyone. This is the place where he maintains the throne of his mercy, the place where he wiped out all of our sins by his merciful act of redemption through his Son Jesus. This is “the heavenly Jerusalem” where the communion of saints takes place. Through the sacrifice of Jesus made present by the ritual he left us at the Last Supper, we join the heavenly liturgy being constantly offered to God by the angels and saints. In a real sense, heaven is made present to us. We are empowered to transcend time and take part in eternity. We can truly be said to be already there with those who have left this earth to be continually with God. We have indeed arrived at the heavenly Jerusalem toward which Abraham would not rest or turn aside until he had arrived (Heb 11:13-16).

At every Mass, the preface reminds us in whose company we are, as we join in the heavenly worship of God. Here are some examples:

Preface of the Holy Eucharist I: “Now, with angels and archangels, and the whole company of heaven, we sing the unending hymn of your praise.”

Preface for Sundays in Ordinary Time IV: “And so, we join the angels and the saints as they sing their unending hymn of praise.”

Preface of Holy Men and Women I: “With angels and archangels and the whole company of saints we sing our unending hymn of praise.”

The Mass opens us up to the heavenly realities. We are not isolated in our worship of God. We are part of the communion of saints. St. John describes for us still more. He says, “I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb.’ All the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures [the Cherubim: see Ez 10:4, 20]. They prostrated themselves before the throne, worshiped God, and exclaimed: ‘Amen. Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor, power, and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.’” (Rev 7:9-12). “I heard a sound...like that of harpists playing their harps. They were singing what seemed to be a new hymn before the throne” (Rev 14:2-3).

The passage in our epistle continues, “[You have approached...] the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect” (23).

The Hebrew Christians are now in the company of all “the firstborn enrolled in heaven”: all of those who have gone before us and stand before God and the Lamb in praise and joy. They are the just, those who are right with God and clothed with his righteousness, his sanctifying grace. Those

of old have patiently awaited the coming of the Messiah who redeemed them and opened heaven for them. They are with the other firstborn who have entered into heaven, such as the apostles and all those who were faithful to the word of God. They lived by faith and remained faithful to the promises of God. This multitude of saints has entered heaven to inherit their full share of the “land,” the possession of God and his heaven.

These, like the apostles, were enrolled in heaven. Here we recall Jesus’ words to the apostles upon returning from their mission to “rejoice because your names are written in heaven” (Lk 10:20). St. Thomas Aquinas tells us that “The book in which this is written is the knowledge God has within himself of those to be saved...infallibly. Hence, that book is called the book of life” (see his commentary on Hebrews).

The Hebrew community has come into the presence of God himself, the judge of all. He is kind and merciful. He knows their weaknesses and need for mercy. He sent his Son to suffer and die for them. But he also is a holy God who calls them to holiness of life.

In the communion of saints, the Hebrews are in the company of “the spirits of the just made perfect.” Their spirit of longsuffering in the midst of the trials of life have purified them and made them ready for heaven. St. James explains the perfecting value of trial in our lives – if only we can endure them with accepting patience. He writes, “Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance be perfect, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Blessed is the man who perseveres in temptation, for when he has been proved he will receive the crown of life that he promised to those who love him” (Jms 1:2-4, 12).

Our epistle passage concludes with, “[You have approached] Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant” (24a).

What a privilege! We and they have free access to Jesus through faith (Rom 5:2), the mediator of the new covenant – the glorious Son of God who, in his love for us, has come to dwell within our very hearts (Jn 14:23). That glorifying presence of his is all ours – if we choose to dispose ourselves to be with him and live in his sanctifying presence. We are not speaking here of a Moses who mediated a discarded, outdated old covenant because of its inability to sanctify the people. We have come upon the magnificent Redeemer of the whole world who has poured out his Spirit of life and joy upon all of us! How privileged we and the Hebrews all are!

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time **Phlm 1:9-10, 12-17**

“I urge you out of love, being as I am, Paul, an old man, and now also a prisoner for Christ Jesus” (9).

This is St. Paul’s shortest letter. It is his most personal and touching letter. He wrote it during his first imprisonment in Rome (61-63). This letter is addressed to Philemon. He was a wealthy convert to Christianity from Colossae. He owned an early Christian “house-church”. Paul had converted him in Ephesus. They were old friends and one of Paul’s helpers in preaching the gospel in Colossae.

Paul uses his age and his imprisonment to appeal more strongly to his friend for a favorable response. Paul considers himself to be an old man, which means he was between 50 and 60 years old.

Paul also appeals to Philemon’s love to comply with his request regarding Onesimus. He was Philemon’s run-away slave.

“I urge you,” Paul writes, “on behalf of my child Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment” (10).

Somehow, Onesimus, who may have known Paul before, since Philemon and Paul were friends,

ended up coming to Paul in prison. He had listened to Paul’s teaching and was converted to Christianity. He befriended St. Paul and ministered to his needs in prison. Paul convinced Onesimus to return to Philemon. He was to accompany Tychicus who was carrying an epistle to the Colossians. Onesimus carried this letter in which Paul begs Philemon to forgive Onesimus and welcome him as a dear brother. Paul feels a special love for his “child” in Christ whom he had baptized. He expresses his keen sentiment toward him in these words, “I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you” (12).

He had gotten very close to Onesimus who served him so well while he was imprisoned. In sending Onesimus back, he in a sense, was sending his own heart. Surely, Philemon could only respond with kindness and accede to Paul’s request. The letter continues, “I should have liked to retain him for myself, so that he might serve me on your behalf in my imprisonment for the gospel” (13).

Paul would have liked to retain Onesimus to help him spread the gospel as part of his prison ministry. But he did not want to force this service on his friend. He writes, “but I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that the good you do might not be forced but voluntary” (14). Paul is sensitive to Philemon’s rights. He respected his friend and did not want to abuse their friendship. This shows a delicate sensitivity on Paul’s part in relating to his friend. It also brings out the virtue of humility in the saint. Paul wants the gift of Onesimus’ service to be entirely voluntary—however forceful his appeal to Philemon was. He writes, “Perhaps this is why he was away from you for a while, that you might have him back forever” (15).

Onesimus’ providential escape worked out a great good. He is no longer simply a slave, bonded temporarily to Philemon in this legal manner. Now he is a Christian and a brother in the faith with eternal implications. Both of them are brothers and children of God and will be connected to each other for all eternity.

“...no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a brother, beloved especially to me, but even more so to you, as a man and in the Lord” (16).

These two, master and slave, have become one in Christ. These secondary qualities have been transcended by the Christ-life that has made them new creatures. “There is neither...slave nor free person...for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). The divine life received in Christ makes us all one, children of God, sharing the same life. We belong to one family, each bearing the same dignity, and having the same Father.

“So if you regard me as a partner, welcome him as you would me” (17).

Paul and Philemon were partners in bringing the gospel to others. They were close friends. Now that Paul and Onesimus have become close friends, Paul asks Philemon to welcome Onesimus as he would Paul himself. Such a strong persuasive letter must have been effective in convincing Philemon to welcome Onesimus as a brother and fellow Christian. It is likely enough that he would have acceded to Paul’s request to the fullest extent and send Onesimus back to Paul in Rome to help him spread the gospel.

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time **1 Tim 1: 12-17**

“I am grateful to him who has strengthened me, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he considered me trustworthy in appointing me to the ministry” (12).

St. Paul is a very grateful person. He often expresses his gratitude to God in his letters (compare Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 1:4). He is very much aware that the superabundant strength he exerted in his ministry of the Gospel comes from Jesus who is Lord of all of us. Jesus as Lord knew Paul through and through. He knew that remarkable zeal for the Law was a sign of something very genuine in Saul soon to become

Paul. His thorough training as a Pharisee had blinded him to the truth of Jesus and his Gospel.

Jesus knew that once Saul had experienced the truth of his divinity he would direct all of that former zeal for the Law toward making Jesus and his Gospel known. And Paul is filled with gratitude that Jesus appointed him to that ministry. He felt quite unworthy of having received such a call. He explains, “I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and an arrogant man, but I acted out of ignorance in my unbelief” (13).

We learn here that St. Paul was once a blasphemer. In its glossary explaining various terms, the Catechism of the Catholic Church describes blasphemy as “speech, thought, or action involving contempt for God or the Church, or persons or things dedicated to God. Blasphemy is directly opposed to the second commandment (2148).” The Acts of the Apostles tells us that Saul (Paul) “was trying to destroy the church; entering house after house and dragging out men and women, he handed them over for imprisonment” (8:3).

We can understand, then, why Paul calls himself a blasphemer, trying as he was to destroy the church and “breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:11).

We can also see why St. Paul calls himself an arrogant man. Arrogance is described as a feeling of superiority manifested in an overbearing manner and disposed to exaggerate one’s own worth or importance. This is a true description of Paul’s disposition and activity before he met the glorified Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9: 3-9). But he can be excused through ignorance because he was so wrapped up in his knowledge as a Pharisee. He did not realize that the old Law was merely a preparation for the new. His encounter with the risen Christ changed all of that.

He continues to explain to Timothy, “Indeed, the grace of our Lord has been abundant, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (14). Paul’s abrupt face to face meeting with

Jesus as a blinding light (Acts 9:3) flooded his whole being with Christ's redeeming grace which continued to increase throughout his life. His former unbelief was replaced by the testimony of God revealing himself within Paul's own heart (1 Jn 5: 10). He continually experienced himself as being "in Christ" for the remainder of his life. Thus, his whole being was also filled with the love of Christ: love for Christ and those he redeemed.

"This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of these I am foremost" (15).

Paul experienced the trustworthiness of this statement for himself. Jesus had freed him from his overwhelming anger that had caused him to inflict so much havoc and pain on the first believers. He had concurred in the killing of Stephen (Acts 22: 20). Now he could see what a sinner he had been. And now his soul was inundated with the peace that comes through forgiveness. Paul was exceedingly grateful to Jesus for saving him from his terrible anger and arrogance. He truly considered himself to be the worst of sinners and we can see why.

"But for this reason I was mercifully treated, so that in me, as the foremost, Christ Jesus might display his patience as an example for those who would come to believe in him for everlasting life" (16).

Paul believes that Jesus treated him with so much patience and mercy to show all other sinners his attitude toward them. If he forgave Paul, the worst of sinners, he will also forgive them. Anyone must be assured, that no matter how evil and sinful a person had been, he will find mercy and forgiveness in Christ. A sinful past is no obstacle to acceptance by God. It is to save sinners that Jesus came to suffer and die. The greatest sinners can become the greatest saints. Converted sinners can become the best proclaimers of God's mercy and the good news of the arrival of his kingdom now present among us.

"To the king of ages, incorruptible, invisible, the only God, honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (17).

St. Paul ends this section of his letter, and our epistle for this Sunday, with a doxology—as he frequently does (see Gal 1: 5; Rom 9: 5). A doxology, as described in the glossary of the Catechism, is "Christian prayer which gives praise and glory to God, often in a special way to the three divine persons of the Trinity" (CCC 2639, 2255). Our prayer "Glory be..." is an example of a doxology.

St. Paul is so taken up with God and his marvelous deeds he often breaks out in praise of him as occasions occur. God the Father is called king of the ages that is, eternal ruler; he is everlasting, spiritual and therefore incorruptible. There can only be one God who is all perfect. St. Paul concludes the wonder of God's mercy in Christ with this eulogy of praise. It was probably taken from the primitive liturgy borrowed perhaps from the Jewish synagogue. Such doxologies are preserved by the Church in the divine office. St. Paul may very well be using such doxologies as an indirect way of combating emperor worship.

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time **1 Tim 2:1-8**

"First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone" (1).

St. Paul writes to Timothy whom he had converted to Christianity and appointed Bishop of Ephesus. He instructs him about leading his religious congregation in public prayer. The terms that are used for various prayers are almost synonymous and were put together for emphasis. We also ought to acknowledge to God in thanksgiving the gifts we have already received. We, like St. Paul, must be a grateful people (compare Phil 4:6). We are called to include everyone when we pray. Jesus himself expressed

this when he said, “Give us...forgive us...lead us not...deliver us from evil” (Mt 6:11-13).

“...for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity” (2).

St. Paul is respectful of all authority—for it comes from God (Rom 13:1-7). Even if the ruling government is pagan and worship false gods, these magistrates must be prayed for. Through such prayer God may move those in authority to allow Christians to live in peace and practice their faith according to their consciences. Prayer may enlighten these rulers to make wise laws for the good of all the people. They may come to know the truth and eventually come to worship the true God.

“This is good and pleasing to God our savior” (3).

Such large-heartedness in prayer is pleasing to God. In this way he gives his people an opportunity to work with him for the salvation of all. This kind of prayer opens the heart of the pray-er to a universal sort of love. We pray in this way in the liturgy of Good Friday and somewhat also in the prayer of the faithful at each mass. In this way we are taught to love all people and participate in the universal salvific will of God.

“...who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth” (4).

Humans were created by God in his image. They are his children. He loves them very much – even to the point of sending his Son to be one with them so he could suffer and die to bring them his saving grace. Salvation comes with the knowledge of the truth. In this way people know God’s plan for our salvation and what they must do to attain it. They must come to know The Truth, Jesus, the true image of God, and become his disciples. He teaches the truth and how to live in conformity with God’s will. The truth is proclaimed by the Gospel. It teaches that God is the center of the

universe, and by the example lived for us by Jesus, he must be loved above all. His truth is eternal and brings us to everlasting life. We must prefer God and his will even before ourselves. True happiness and the highest life attainable on earth consist in giving God our total allegiance and devotion. That is the knowledge of the truth which brings salvation.

“For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus himself human...” (5).

The Catechism teaches, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord...” (Deut 6:4; Mk 12:29). “The supreme being must be unique, without equal... If God is not one, he is not God” (Tertullian...), (CCC 228).

“Faith in God leads us to turn to him alone as our first origin and our ultimate goal, and neither to prefer anything to him nor to substitute anything for him” (CCC 229). St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that we can prove that God is one from the infinity of his perfection – “God comprehends in himself the whole perfection of being. If then many gods existed, they would necessarily differ from each other. Something therefore would belong to one, which did not belong to another. And if this were a privation, one of them would not be absolutely perfect; but if a perfection, one of them would be without it. So it is impossible for many gods to exist” (S.T. Pt. I, Q11, Art. 3).

This one God created everyone. He loves us all and wants to bring us all to share eternal life with him in heaven. There is only one perfect mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus. In Jesus, the divine nature and the human are united in the unique Person of the Word, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. As mediator he comes between God and us. As human he speaks to God for us. Since he is a divine Person, his sacrifice on Calvary was given infinite value to make up for the sins of the world. Thus he was able to reconcile us to the Father as no one else could. Since he experienced our humanity as Incarnate

God, he could understand our weakness and be merciful toward us. This verse five is believed to be a formula of Christian faith taken from the Ephesian liturgy. It is a brief creed that summarizes two great themes of St. Paul's theology of salvation (soteriology): Christ's solidarity with us whom he redeemed; and his work of redemption as a mediator for all human beings. St. Paul stresses the oneness of God (monotheism) as opposed to the belief among pagans in the plurality of gods (polytheism). In accentuating the reality of Jesus' human nature, perhaps St. Paul is combatting the heresy of Docetism which denied that Jesus' human nature was real.

"...who gave himself as ransom for all. This was the testimony at the proper time" (6).

St. Paul does not take Jesus' act of redemption for granted. He holds Jesus' self-giving act as very precious. He tells the Galatians, "I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me" (2:20).

The suffering and death of Jesus on the cross for the redemption of the world was done personally for each individual: for Paul, for you, for me. We must take Jesus' self-sacrificing act very personally. He did it for each of us as a sign of his personal love for each one. We were in bondage to sin, helplessly entrapped, unable to free ourselves. He gave himself up for us, to free us. The only human life he had, he generously forfeited for us, cut short in the prime of his human life – because he loved me and you enough to suffer and die for us.

"This was the testimony at the proper time" refers to Jesus' death suffered for all of us. In this way he gave testimony to God's will to save the whole world: In other words, the Father's will that Jesus should die to make up for the sins of the world gives testimony to his universal salvific will. "The proper time" is the "fullness of time" (Gal 4:4) chosen by God for the salvation of humankind.

"For this I was appointed preacher and apostle (I am speaking the truth, I am not lying), teacher

of the Gentiles in faith and truth" (7). After Jesus encountered Paul on the road to Damascus, he appeared to Ananias and said, "...this man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles..." (Acts 9:15). St. Paul took this commission very seriously: he must announce God's plan of salvation attained through Christ. He solemnly affirms it by asserting in parentheses that he speaks the truth and is not lying. He is a preacher insofar as he heralds the saving acts of God through Christ. He is an apostle insofar as he is sent by Christ himself – even as the twelve. He is a teacher insofar as he must explain the saving acts he proclaims so that the people will understand and gladly accept them through faith. The object of their faith is the truth, which is Jesus himself (Jn 14:6), as well as the revelation of the gospel truths proclaimed.

"It is my wish, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger or argument" (8).

St. Paul returns to the subject of prayer as he advises Timothy, the overseer of prayer in the community over which he has been placed. His "wish" is a courteous word for a fatherly command. The uplifted hands are a posture for prayer established in Old Testament times and adopted by the primitive Church. The raised hands with palms open and facing upward are a receptive gesture ready to receive divine gifts. Holy hands stand for their moral integrity. Without anger or argument means that one is at peace with the neighbor, a necessary condition to be heard by God.

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time **1 Tim 6:11-16**

"But you, man of God, pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness"(11).

The title "man of God" was applied to Moses and the prophets. It is a title aptly applied to Timothy who had dedicated himself to the service of God. He had devoted

himself to the preaching of the word of God and is now Bishop of the Church of Ephesus.

St. Paul is urging Timothy to strive for holiness, singling out certain specific virtues for him to practice. The first favor deals with his own holiness of life: righteousness—being right with God, opening himself to God’s sanctifying grace through word and sacrament; devotion—having religious fervor expressed in acts of piety such as prayer and spiritual exercises; faith—believing and accepting God’s word and self-gift; love—selflessly spending himself in giving himself to God and his people through acts of devotion and service. The final two virtues deal with relating to others: patience—bearing with others through long-suffering; gentleness—being meek and gentle in relating to others.

“Compete well for the faith. Lay hold of eternal life, to which you were called when you made the noble confession in the presence of many witnesses” (12).

There is a serious war being waged between good and evil. Timothy must struggle with all his might to fight against the forces of evil. Preaching the word of God is a way of wielding the sword of the Spirit to destroy the lies of the devil. In this way he will keep his people from falling for the lies of the evil one. Timothy himself must strive to be faithful to the truth of the Gospel. How does one “lay hold of eternal life”? Timothy was called to eternal life, he is told, when he made his noble confession at his baptism. In other words, faith and baptism opened him to receive the beginning of eternal life. As Jesus put it, “Amen, Amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life” (Jn 6: 47). We begin to share God’s eternal life at baptism when we became partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1: 4). St. John’s Gospel goes on to explain, “now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ” (Jn 17: 3). Sanctifying grace and the indwelling presence received at baptism bring us into intimate communion with God himself so that we come to know him personally. We are called to guard

carefully this precious gift so that we will not lose it through mortal sin. We must keep this eternal life throughout our lives by virtuous living. Then when we end our lives at death we will lay hold of eternal life without any fear of ever losing it.

It was on the occasion of his baptism as a young adult that Timothy made his noble confession in the presence of many witnesses. These were Christians present for the occasion. A public ceremony is implied here when he accepted the Christian doctrine he had learned from St. Paul during his first missionary journey.

“I charge you before God, who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus, who gave testimony under Pontius Pilate for the noble confession” (13). Paul makes Timothy aware of God’s presence before whom he places this charge. It is also before Christ the risen Lord who is also present that he calls Timothy to be responsible for the task to which he has been placed as bishop over the Ephesian Community. This is the Jesus who exemplifies boldness and strength as he stood before Pilate. He did not hesitate to give witness to the truth, even if it meant forfeiting his life (Jn 18: 36-37). He stood calmly as he was condemned although perfectly innocent (Jn 19: 4, 6). But Jesus was ready to face crucifixion and death for the redemption of the world. Timothy must take Jesus as his model, ready to die for the truth by his “noble confession”.

“...to keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ” (14).

Timothy must guard what has been entrusted to him (1 Tim 6: 20). The truths of the faith are precious and are to be protected from those who would thwart them. He tells Timothy to “remain faithful to what you have learned and believed” (2 Tim 3: 14). He is to be true to that word and remain innocent as he lives it out. Jesus could appear at any moment. We must all be ready and innocent for his arrival at his second coming. The word appearance or

manifestation was often used in reference to false gods or pagan emperors, including Romans, who claimed divine honors. Perhaps Paul used the term in opposition to these mere human and empty appearances that amounted to nothing in comparison with Jesus' glorious appearance that would shake the whole world at his final coming.

"...that the blessed and only ruler will make manifest at the proper time, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (15).

The structure of this verse and the next indicates that they were taken from an ancient Christian hymn. Jesus is the blessed, i.e. supremely happy, and only ruler. All others are faint images of him until he arrives and demonstrates the fullness of power that is his. The proper time of his appearance at the second coming is the one designated and fixed by God which no one else knows. Jesus is the only true King of kings and Lord of lords in that he has proven his superiority by overcoming death through his glorious resurrection. He is king of love in that he became the Suffering Servant and gave himself up to suffering and death that those who sinned against him could be delivered from sin and eternal damnation. His authority and power sustains the whole world in existence (Heb 1:3). All others who claim the titles of king and lord are only faint reflections of Jesus' true kingship.

"...who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, and whom no human being has seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal power...Amen" (16).

Jesus, the God-man, is by nature immortal—he is a divine Person, His glory is so bright it is blinding. The sixth beatitude says that the clean of heart will see God (Mt 5:8). Grace makes it possible through purity of heart to have some direct, contemplative knowledge of God. And the light of glory given in heaven will enable us to see him—but that is only in heaven. St. John tells us, "they will look upon his face, and his name will be on their foreheads" (Rev 22: 4). And again, "we

shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure" (1 Jn 3: 2-3). St. Paul himself tells us, "at present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known" (1 Cor 3: 23). The catechism also states, "Those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live forever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they 'see him as he is,' face to face" (CCC 1023). Our doxology in praise of God ends with "Amen." It is the response of the Christian community confirming the doxology and that, "yes" "To him be honored eternal power."

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time **2 Tim 1:6-8, 13-14**

"I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands" (6).

St. Paul is writing to Timothy from his Roman prison during his second and last term in 66/67 AD. Paul is anxious that Timothy should come to him in Rome (2 Tim 4:21). He was ordained a priest when Paul and the Presbyterate imposed hands on him (see 1 Tim 4:14 and New American Bible footnote). He has been given a permanent grace through Holy Orders, but he must work to make that grace operative. It is like a fire that will die out unless it is stirred up and made to burn. This sacrament has great power, but it requires prayer and asceticism to be brought to full fruition. He must keep in touch with God for the grace to set it in motion to help him preach and teach. Paul wants the timid and youthful Timothy to realize what great power he has in the divine office that he possesses.

"For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control" (7).

Paul is encouraging Timothy to be bold in exercising the power that has been given to him. There is a special grace of power in the

sacrament he has received. It will enable him to be forceful in his ministry. He must not let it rest dormant. It can embolden him to confront his adversaries or challenge the faithful members of his congregation toward greater spiritual heights. He must ask God for the grace to engage this dynamism residing in him. This force need not be abrasive, for he also possesses the greatest of all virtues to accompany it – the energy to love. In this power God shares his own agape love with him. Thus might is exercised with benevolence, goodness and loving kindness. So Timothy will be firm and forceful but loving. For, these virtues of power and love are accompanied by self-control. That is another virtue that is part of the supernatural organism with which he has been endowed. By living in intimate communion with God, Timothy will draw the grace he needs to maintain holy discipline. He will be self-possessed and enabled to act with self-control. For example, when he expresses the passion of anger, it will be in proper measure – not too much, not too little – just right! Any inclination toward cowardice will be overcome. The other virtues will override it. “So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for his sake; but bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God” (8).

Preaching Jesus and his message of truth requires moral courage because those who are leading selfish lives are indisposed to receive such a spiritual message and will reject it. They will even attack the speaker and attempt to extinguish the light so that they may persist in their darkness. So Timothy must be prepared to preach the truth unashamedly. As a result of his preaching he will be imprisoned (Heb 13:23), but that must not discourage him. The very word, testimony, “*marturion*” in Greek, implies martyrdom. But he must be brave and face the possibility of giving that highest kind of witness. Neither must Timothy be ashamed of his father in Christ who was a prisoner in Rome because of the Gospel of Christ. Paul was proud to be in chains for Jesus. Timothy, too, should be proud of his teacher and the chains he wears for having preached

the gospel. Timothy must be ready to accept whatever hardships the preaching of the Gospel will bring him. His living in close communion with God will enable him to draw divine power to withstand any trial that he has to face.

“Take as your norm the sound words that you heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (13).

The teachings that Timothy heard from Paul are sound – without error or fault. Exalted as they are, yet they are in accord with right reason. They are intellectually and morally sound and correct. Timothy must use such sound teaching on which to model his own life as well as to teach it to others. These teachings are what we believe. They are to be practiced with love. They will help him to continue to live in Christ Jesus. These truths will foster that faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

“Guard this rich trust with the help of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us” (14).

The Holy Spirit dwelling within Timothy and all of us will assist him in guarding the rich deposit of faith contained in all of the Christian teachings that have been handed down to him. Jesus promised, “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name – he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you” (Jn 14:26). “When he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth” (Jn 16:13).

Jesus’ teachings were handed down (the word for tradition) through the apostles to their successors, the bishops, such as Timothy. They, in union with Peter and his successors, were guided by the Holy Spirit to preserve the truths of faith handed down to them through oral teaching.

The Catechism puts it this way, “The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus

Christ.' This means that the task of interpreting has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome" (CCC 85).

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time **2 Tim 2:8-13**

"Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David: such is my gospel" (8)

This short statement of belief coined by St. Paul is a kind of summary of the faith. Jesus is the Messiah according to God's promise to David: "I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm. Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever" (2 Sam 7:12, 16). This promise was renewed and fulfilled at the annunciation when the angel said, "...the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father...and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk 1:32-33). Thus this Jesus was "...descended from David according to the flesh, but established as Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead" (Rom 1:3-4).

This is the good news, what Paul calls "my gospel": God has fulfilled his promise. This son of David is also Son of God who suffered and redeemed us; having been raised from the dead, he has poured out his Spirit upon us through which we share the very life of God.

"[...such is my gospel], for which I am suffering, even to the point of chains, like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained" (9).

Paul suffered for promoting the gospel. It was such a passion of his even persecution and imprisonment could not silence him. One would think he was a criminal the way he was treated. But if they chained him, they could not chain the word of God. He was actively engaged in evangelization even when imprisoned or under

house arrest or when he stood before judges. (Acts 26:27-29) Paul tells the Philippians, "My imprisonment has become well known in Christ throughout the whole praetorium and to all the rest, and so that the majority of the brothers, having taken encouragement in the Lord from my imprisonment, dare more than ever to proclaim the word fearlessly" (Phil 1:13-14). I pray that we also can become so impassioned about the good news and new life in Christ that we also will boldly speak out that word.

"Therefore, I bear with everything for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, together with eternal glory" (10).

St. Paul teaches us that his patient endurance of the sufferings and hardships entailed in proclaiming the gospel obtains the grace for those who are called to accept the salvation Jesus offers. Jesus invites him and us to suffer with him for the salvation of others. He tells the Corinthians, "Christ's sufferings overflow to us.... If we are afflicted, it is for your encouragement and salvation...which enables you to endure the same sufferings that we suffer" (2 Cor 1:5-6). He also tells the Colossians, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake...." (Col 1:24) All of this helps us to understand the value of our daily sufferings and hardships patiently borne: they contribute to the salvation of others. We suffer with Jesus for the salvation of the world. This helps us to understand how priceless our accepted sufferings are. It is also encouraging to know that our daily sufferings accepted in obedience to God's will are personally transforming. St. Paul explains that "this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor 4:17, see also 2 Cor 3:18). We may want to direct our sufferings in prayer to God for certain family members who we know are in special need of them. We are concerned that they be disposed by the grace of our accepted suffering to share eternal glory with us.

“This saying is trustworthy: If we have died with him we shall also live with him” (11).

Scholars tell us that these words were borrowed from an ancient hymn of that time. If we mystically die with Christ in the baptismal ceremony, we will begin to live a new life, the life of Christ. This dying and rising carries into daily living. If we die to selfish living by accepting the sufferings life presents to us, we will also share the glorious life of Jesus both now and when we are taken home to heaven. We will live in close friendship with Jesus now and in eternity. This is surely an encouragement for us to bear with sufferings and persecutions because of our faith in Jesus and his teachings. The hymn continues, “...if we persevere we shall also reign with him. But if we deny him he will deny us” (12).

This is an exhortation to persevere to the end, despite persecution. We may have to suffer for a time, but we will be rewarded by sharing the reign of Jesus. That means living the glorious life for all eternity in the presence of our glorious Savior. That statement that he will deny us if we deny him simply repeats what Jesus himself stated: “Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father” (Mt 10:32-33). We in Come, Lord Jesus! take Jesus’ words very seriously. That is why we ask you to give an account of how you witnessed your faith every week. It is an important matter!

“If we are unfaithful he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself” (13).

Jesus must remain true to himself. He stated that he would deny whoever would deny him. He will not go back on his word. He warns us before we are tempted that acknowledging him before others is an important matter. He is The Truth. Others must become aware of that by our witness. It is only through him that people can attain salvation. Even if it costs our lives, we must stand up for this truth. The world must be shocked into realizing that Jesus is divine and the only Way.

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time **2 Tim 3:14—4:2**

“Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed, because you know from whom you learned it” (3:14).

St. Paul exhorts his disciple Timothy to remain faithful to the truths of faith that he learned. At certain times these truths may require much fortitude in order to be able to keep them. Strength of character is needed to persevere in our commitment to live by them. Human nature is weak and sinfully inclined. It often inclines us to pull back. We need each other’s encouragement to remain faithful.

It was St. Paul himself who taught Timothy these truths of faith. He had first received that faith from his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois. St. Paul deepened and extended that knowledge of the faith so that Timothy himself would become an apostle and teacher of it.

“...and that from infancy you have known the sacred scriptures, which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (15).

Jewish parents were obliged to instruct their children in the Law as soon as they reached the age of five. Timothy was instructed in these Old Testament Scriptures at that early age. In this way he attained knowledge as well as holy wisdom: he received religious formation and was trained in how to live a morally good life. This training in knowledge and holy living prepared Timothy to be open to receive Christ who is the fulfillment of the promises of scripture. He enjoyed the salvation given in Christ through faith in him. For faith connected him to Christ, the very source of salvation. In St. Paul, Timothy had the perfect teacher who both knew the Old Testament and who experienced personally the salvation available in the glorified Christ. Paul was instructed by Jesus himself. He realized that Jesus was Son of David and Son of God, the fulfillment

of all the teachings of the Old Testament. He experienced him as the long-awaited Messiah.

“All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (16).

Every passage of sacred scripture and all of the books are inspired. On this occasion St. Paul was speaking of the Old Testament writings. Later on the Church decided which inspired books made up the New Testament.

God is the principal author of the Bible with the writer as the human collaborator. Thus the scriptures are the word of God in human language. The authority of the Bible comes from God himself. In these writings God reveals himself and how we ought to live morally good lives. These inspired words can be used for teaching with authority what we must believe, the truths of faith. It can be used to refute error. Its power convinces those who were in the wrong or whose lives were not in accord with the truth.

The word of God can also be used for correcting those who had gone astray. It is enlightening to the sinner. That word contains in itself the very righteousness of God (Rom 1:17), and it communicates that holiness to those who receive it in faith. It empowers the believer to live that faith through the practice of the virtues.

“...so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (17).

The sacrament of baptism consecrates us to God. We belong to him. Timothy was also consecrated through ordination to the sacred priesthood in such a way that he acts in the person of Christ. The inspired scriptures will make him competent and well equipped to minister to his people. He is completely endowed with all the virtues needed for his work. The authoritative word of God will enhance that power. “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingly power” (4:1).

Paul places a very serious responsibility upon Timothy. This can be seen when Paul solemnly charges him with the task of preaching the truth on every occasion. He issues this command in the presence of God and Jesus Christ – the majestic Christ who will appear in the fullness of his power and glory. St. Paul is using every means to impress upon Timothy (and all of us) the supreme importance of speaking – even more, proclaiming – the truth to all. That truth is contained in the definitive word of God which is at his disposal in the sacred scriptures. Christ is going to appear as judge of the living and the dead with that fearsome kingly power of his to pronounce sentence on every single human being. There can be no more serious matter than this! The salvation or damnation of everyone for all eternity is at stake. Everyone must be warned and exhorted to prepare for that all-important moment.

“...proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching” (4:2).

Timothy must take advantage of every situation to proclaim that word of truth. He must be zealous and seize every available opportunity to speak that truth. This is an urgent necessity. Those in error or sin must be reprimanded. Others will need his encouragement to prepare for the Lord’s coming in all seriousness – this he must do whether he is inclined or not. At times it will require much patience. He must be tireless in proclaiming that word. The love of Christ and his people demands this of him.

30th Sunday of Ordinary Time 2 Tim 4:6-8, 16-18

“I am already being poured out like a libation, and the time of my departure is at hand” (6).

St. Paul senses that his death through martyrdom will soon take place. He looks upon the shedding of his blood as a libation

to God, and a libation is a sacrificial ceremony in which a liquid such as wine or oil is poured out on the ground as an offering to God (See Ex 29:38-40; Phil 2:17). In this way St. Paul sees his martyrdom as paying homage to God and has value for the salvation of his people (2 Tim 2:10). This letter is often considered as a farewell address and even his last will and testament.

“I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith” (7).

St. Paul looks upon his strenuous work in proclaiming the good news of Jesus as a valiant athlete who totally exerted himself to win the event in which he competed. He was like a savage boxer who won the fight, a fast and hard runner who won the race. The Lord had told Ananias regarding “A man from Tarsus named Saul,” “I will show him what he will have to suffer for my name” (Acts 9:11, 16). Paul had done just that. He had accomplished his task in a mighty way, and he had “...kept the faith...”. He had proclaimed Jesus as Messiah and fulfilled the task he had been assigned. He had faithfully taught the true faith received from Jesus and proclaimed it in conformity with the other apostles (Gal 2:1-2, 6-10).

Despite all the persecutions and hardships he had to endure to bring the good news of Christ everywhere (2 Cor 11:23-28), he did not flinch one bit from proclaiming the whole truth. He was careful to instruct Timothy to teach the same faith (2 Tim 1:13-14; 1 Tim 1:18; 4:6, 11-16).

“From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance” (8).

Those who won athletic contests were awarded with a crown of laurel, pine, or olive. Those who struggle to do God’s will and proclaim Jesus and the salvation he offers will also receive a crown,

but in their case, the crown of righteousness. This is true for all who long for Jesus’ appearance on the last day. As just judge he will reward his faithful followers with the crown of righteousness. Sanctifying grace is our participation in God’s own holiness or righteousness. It is the beginning of eternal life (see Jms 1:12). The crown of righteousness in eternal life is the life of glory in heaven.

On earth, persevering in the trials of life requires virtue and growth in love of God. Such virtue is crowned with God’s righteousness (see Rom 5:3-5). This righteousness in heaven becomes glory, which is the crown of heavenly life. Through the light of glory we see God – face to face! Thus, the difficulties braved to live a holy life are fully rewarded. St. Paul assures us, “For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor 4:17).

“At my first defense no one appeared on my behalf, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them!” (16).

How lonely St. Paul must have felt when everyone deserted him! This occurred at the preliminary hearing in his second Roman trial. No one was present to defend him. He knew how Jesus felt when his friends fled and left him all alone. His desire, as a true saint, was that their abandoning him be not held against them. Who were these people? Earlier in this letter, or epistle, St. Paul tells Timothy, “You know that everyone in Asia deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.” But he was not without some supporters. He says, “May the Lord grant mercy to the family of Onesiphorus because he often gave me new heart and was not ashamed of my chains. But when he came to Rome, he promptly searched for me and found me...” (2 Tim 1:15-17).

“But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the proclamation might be completed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was rescued from the lion’s mouth” (17).

Paul felt Jesus' ongoing presence and protection. Jesus had told him, "Do not be afraid. Go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you. No one will attack you or harm you..." (Acts 18:9-10). On another occasion Jesus stood by him and said, "Take courage. For just as you have borne witness to my cause in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness in Rome" (Acts 23:11). Jesus was true to his word, he so assisted Paul that he was able to give witness that Jesus is Messiah even before those who were trying him. He used the moment of his defense to proclaim the Gospel to his judges and to all who were present. To proclaim the Gospel before the imperial court was an ultimate triumph for Paul in his mission to the Gentiles. This brought him to the height of his career and a supreme witness to Christ. To be rescued from the lion's mouth is a metaphor for deliverance from extreme peril (compare Psalms 7:2-3; 17:12; 35:17; 57:5; 58:7).

"The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen" (18).

St. Paul is fully confident that Jesus will deliver him from every evil threat. He had had many narrow escapes (2 Cor 11:23-27) – and the Lord preserved him from death on these occasions. When his mission is finally finished, the Lord will bring him safely to his heavenly kingdom. On that occasion death will be a great good – for at last, Paul will be freed from the burden of facing hostile crowds to be with his Lord forever in heaven – that was his great longing: "For to me life is Christ, and death is gain...I long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better" (Phil 1:21-23).

Paul gives glory to God and to Jesus, his Lord, for everything. That was his whole life – to give glory, praise and honor to Jesus who had delivered him from his former life and had given him such joy.

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time **2 Thes 1:11—2:2**

"We always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and powerfully bring to fulfillment every good purpose and every effort of faith" (1:11).

St. Paul kept his Thessalonian converts continuously in mind and prayer. He wrote two letters to them in 51 A.D. a year after he had founded the church there. These are considered the earliest writings of the New Testament. These Thessalonians had been called to Christianity from paganism. It is only by the grace of God that they would properly respond to their calling whose goal is eternal life. They needed to do their part to cooperate with God's grace. That required ongoing effort on their part. Paul was interceding for them that they might take their call seriously and apply themselves to follow it. Grace in abundance is needed to help them make the necessary sacrifices to maintain a prayerful life, the daily reading of Holy Scripture (Acts 17:11) and the worthy reception of the sacraments. The practice of the faith requires effort.

"...that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, in accord with the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ" (12).

The name stands for the person. To praise and honor Jesus' name is to praise him. Moreover, we have become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4); Jesus has shared his name with us in that sense. When we grow in holiness, we show the divine beauty and perfections in our very persons. This redounds to the glory of God and Jesus. It is his grace that shines forth in us. This helps us understand St. Paul's exhortation, "Therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:20). Let his purity and love shine through your body-person. Others will see God in you and praise him for it. That is all "in accord with the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ." It is Jesus the God-man's grace that brings this glorification about.

“We ask you, brothers and sisters, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling with him” (2:1).

The subject that is being addressed here is Jesus’ second coming, the parousia: the glorious return and appearance of Jesus as judge of the living and the dead, at the end of time, when history and all creation will achieve their fulfillment (CCC 1001; 668, 673).

“Our assembly with him” refers to our being gathered together with Jesus when he returns (see 1 Thes 4:17; Mt 25:31-32). Jesus promised that he would return to bring us to heaven with him: “I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be” (Jn 14:2-3).

“[I ask you] not to be shaken out of your minds suddenly, or to be alarmed either by a ‘spirit,’ or by an oral statement, or by a letter allegedly from us to the effect that the day of the Lord is at hand” (2:2).

A serious disturbance arose in the community. Somehow word got around that supposedly Paul said that the parousia was beginning to take place, “...that the day of the Lord is at hand...”, actually arriving! How did that false rumor arise? There seems to be uncertainty as to the source. Perhaps it was a “spirit” which inspired a prophecy announcing the arrival of the parousia. Secondly, it may have been “an oral statement” such as a charismatic discourse of wisdom or knowledge. And thirdly, the belief that the parousia was taking place may have been caused by “...a letter allegedly from us...” that is, Paul. Forged letters were common problems for the early Christians.

We are not sure as to how the word got around that brought such a disturbance to the community. Some had even stopped working for a living! Paul was writing to correct this misconception and set things straight. (He explains to them certain things had to happen before the end could occur.

For example, he writes, “For unless the apostasy comes first and the lawless one is revealed...” (2 Thes 2:3)).

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time 2 Thes 2:16—3:5

“May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting encouragement and good hope through his grace (2:16), encourage your hearts and strengthen them in every good deed and word” (17).

Our epistle begins with a prayer. St. Paul’s dependence on God expressed in prayer teaches us how to rely on Jesus and his Father for all our endeavors—as Jesus taught us, “...without me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). He tells us this as the reason why we must continually abide in him as the branch remains connected to the vine. We also must have that unceasing dependence on the Lord. Paul mentions Jesus first, perhaps, because he is sent by the Father as our immediate source of life: he is the vine and we are the branches. He is Lord: he triumphed over death by his marvelous resurrection. He is our shepherd who leads us and directs our way by his Spirit. The Father, too, is invoked for his great love: he is the ultimate source of all our good. The encouragement he gives us is not limited to this life only—it is eternal. Our devotion to duty carried out in love and our accepted trials and sufferings are redemptive. They are spiritually purifying and dispose us for a closer union with God and transformation into Christ-likeness. The grace that is given to us by God that sustains us goes far beyond this life. It looks beyond this present human existence toward the glory to be revealed in us. Such spiritual enrichment from simple daily activities accomplished for love of God can be an exciting motive toward good deeds and loving words. Our own encouragement prompts us to share the good news with others.

“Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may speed forward and be glorified, as it did among you” (3:1).

Paul asks for prayers for himself and his companions as proclaimers of the holy word of God. They need insight and boldness; they need the gift of understanding so that they can penetrate more deeply the mysteries of faith that are proclaimed by the word. Paul's hope is that the prayer will give the grace of a forward motion to the word so that it will reach more people more quickly. The word contains the very power and righteousness of God (Rom 1:16-17); it stirs faith (Rom 10:17) and causes the Kingdom of God to grow. It is so important that we possess that word and use it as a two-edged sword (Heb 4:12) to conquer people and bring them to holiness of life.

Paul prays that the word may be glorified, that people will understand the mysteries the word proclaims and glorify that word with praise and thanksgiving. They will accept it with joy and appreciation. The transition from sin to holiness of life glorifies the power of the word. The fact that the word can bring about the miracle of deep conversions glorifies it. The marvelous transforming effect of the word causing people to go from lukewarmness to a fervent life of holiness glorifies it. The value of the word and its dynamism can then be clearly seen, acknowledged and praised.

When one loves that word, commits it to memory, reflects upon it and lives it, that word is glorified. It is the word of God, coming from his mouth effecting holiness of life and creating saints: it must be glorified! Its purifying power cleanses us and exhilarates us and then prompts us to glorify the word. (Jn 15:3).

"...and that we may be delivered from perverse and wicked people, for not all have faith" (2).

St. Paul has frequent confrontations with those who rejected his proclamation of the Messiahship of Jesus. They were not open to that marvelous saving truth. They were blind to the scriptures announcing his qualities, such as those depicting the suffering servant in Isaiah. Moreover, the call to conversion was beyond them. They were too committed to selfish living to be open to truth.

They loved the darkness of sin so much; they did all they could to extinguish the light of truth proclaimed by the word. The odds were against their acceptance of the faith proclaimed by Paul.

"But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one" (3).

The Lord Jesus is a faithful lover; you can count on him to love you to the end. We are always impressed that Peter continued to be Jesus' chosen leader although he denied him three times. He showed this when he appeared to Peter personally after his resurrection (Lk 24:34). And he stuck to Peter as the one on whom he would build his Church (Mt 16:18; Jn 21:15-17). Jesus foresaw Peter's denials and yet still commanded him to strengthen his brethren when he would return to his right senses (Lk 22:31-32).

Jesus is solicitous for us as he was for his Apostles: for example, he protected them when he was arrested. When he pronounced his divine name, the soldiers fell to the ground. They were helpless before the divinity in Jesus. He would not surrender himself until he was assured that the Apostles would not be arrested, "...if you are looking for me, let these men go", he said (Jn 18:6-9).

Jesus will surely guard us from the evil one, Satan. That was his prayer at the Last Supper. He said, "Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me. I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one" (Jn 17:11, 15). He is truly protective of those he loves. Jesus was very much aware of the presence of the evil one in our lives. He made us conscious of the tempter who enticed Adam and Eve to sin (Gen 3:1-7) and who is "...prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). That is why he included this petition in the Our Father, "deliver us from the evil one..." (Mt 6:13). We can trust Jesus' readiness to "strengthen and guard us" from the evil one if we call upon him.

“We are confident of you in the Lord that what we instruct you, you are doing and will continue to do” (4).

St. Paul was close to his people. He knew them well. His confidence in them came from personal knowledge. He had no doubt that they would obey his teachings. His union with Jesus and the wisdom that comes from being “in the Lord” gave him that assurance.

“May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the endurance of Christ” (5).

Again St. Paul shows himself to be deeply immersed in Christ as he calls upon him to direct the hearts of the Thessalonians to the love of God. Only God’s grace can effectively point them in the direction of love for God. He also prays for the grace for them to endure with the patience of Christ the sufferings that come their way. Suffering is so redemptive and purifying. We will want to use it to its fullest potential to sanctify us in daily trials.

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time **2 Thes 3:7-12**

“You know how one must imitate us. For we did not act in a disorderly way among you” (7).

St. Paul showed his people how they ought to live and act by his example. He worked hard night and day to support himself while he ministered to them. He did not want to be a burden to anyone, although he had a right to be supported by those he evangelized. His close union with Jesus was expressed by his devout life. He lived a blameless life before them. He was righteous in all his ways. He treated each one as a father treats his children. He encouraged them to live holy lives to be worthy of God (see 1 Thes 2:9-12). He was highly disciplined and his life was well-ordered. His deep union with God provided him with the strength needed for self-mastery.

“... nor did we eat food received free from anyone. On the contrary, in toil and drudgery, night and day we worked, so as not to burden any of you” (8).

St. Paul was certainly a hard worker. His preaching in itself required much energy. But he chose to support himself by his tent-making talent (Acts 18:3). He continued his practice of self-support as he had done in Corinth. He said, “I preached the gospel of God to you without charge ...and when I was with you and in need, I did not burden anyone” (2 Cor 11:7, 9). This is what Paul was inspired to do regarding this community. Later on he will write to Timothy and say, “Presbyters who preside well deserve double honor, especially those who toil in preaching and teaching. For the scripture says, ‘...a worker deserves his pay’” (1 Tim 5:17-18). Jesus himself told his apostles, “... eat and drink what is offered you, for the laborer deserves his payment” (Lk 10:7).

“Not that we do not have the right. Rather, we wanted to present ourselves as a model for you, so that you might imitate us” (9).

St. Paul was very much aware of his right to be supported by the community to which he ministered. But he abstained. He wanted to be a model of hard work for them and self-supporting. In this way he was providentially led to shame those who were attempting to live off the labor of others. He challenged these lazy people to imitate

himself, as it is written, “By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat” (Gen 3:19). St. Paul was a true father for them and a model to pattern their lives.

“In fact, when we were with you, we instructed you that if anyone was unwilling to work, neither should that one eat” (10).

Those who believed the rumor that the second coming of Jesus was beginning to take place had stopped working and were living off others. They had ceased working and depended on others for food. St. Paul had to intervene and put an end to this abuse. Such people were definitely not to be encouraged in such sinful laziness: They were to be refused to be fed! Their idleness led to other abuses that disturbed order in the community. Their idleness was opening them to sinful behavior. God created human beings for work.

“The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it” (Gen 2:15).

This occupation is holy and healthy and called for even before the first sin of man. Man and woman were made to develop their faculties by engaging them in healthy activity. Otherwise, the mind and body given to idleness will be taken over by vice, bad habits. The mind must be used for creativity. It is meant to co-create with God, that is, to develop what God started. The earth must be cultivated to produce food. The trees must be cut and made into homes. The seed must be planted to produce vegetables and fruits of various kinds. Other seeds must be made to grow flowers to beautify the environment. There is no end to all the various goods that can come from man’s work. Meanwhile, as he works, his mind is perfected as well as his body. We can see, then, what a terrible waste idleness brings about.

“We hear that some are conducting themselves among you in a disorderly way, by not keeping busy but minding the business of others” (11).

These Thessalonians are using their minds and bodies in sinful ways because they are not applying them in holy, constructive activities. If they do not use their mental and bodily powers for doing good, they will end up using them in ways that are harmful to the community. Their powers become instruments of destruction. In this light we can understand why it is said that an idle mind is the devil’s workshop. The mind is meant to be in communion with God as the body is kept busy doing his will. When the body is at work and the mind is taken up with contemplating God, it is not interested in minding other people’s business. It has found something much better. The person who acts in this way is fulfilling his vocation, is at peace with himself, and serving the common good.

“Such people we instruct and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and to eat their own food” (12).

St. Paul was quite conscious of his habitual union with Jesus. He was “...in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Baptism has permanently plunged him into Christ. He was ever aware of where he was, that is, “...in Christ...” as he so often writes. Thus he operated from Christ’s wisdom and inspiration. He likewise speaks words of love, gently urging his spiritual children to listen to him and to do the reasonable thing, which was God’s will for them: to work and provide for their own nourishment and sustenance.

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe Col 1:12-20

“Let us give thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light” (12).

St. Paul feels deeply indebted to the Father and exhorts the community in Colossae to join him in thanking the Father. He is the source of all their blessings. It is he who sent his

beloved Son, Jesus, to redeem them and reconcile them to the Father. He won for us the grace of adoption, making us children of God. Since we are children of God by his transforming grace, we inherit with the divine Son—he shares his inheritance with us. We begin to participate in our heavenly inheritance even now by the indwelling Spirit (Eph 1:13-14). He gives us a foretaste of the spiritual riches of salvation. He accomplishes this through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He brings this about in the pure of heart, that is, those who single-heartedly live to please God. This blessed experience of God in his kingdom by those who are pure of heart is what Jesus referred to when he said, “Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God” (Mt 5:8). The pure of heart see or experience God even before they die. It is in this way that they have a foretaste of heaven, their inheritance. It is in this way that we “...share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light”. Many other versions of the Bible translate “holy ones” with the word “saints”. Thus it would seem to refer to the people who are already seeing God face to face in heaven. This term “holy ones” could also refer to the angels who share God’s holiness. They also, with the saints, are in the light of God’s glory (see Rev 22:5).

“He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (13).

Through Jesus, his beloved Son’s redemptive suffering and death, the Father “...delivered us from the power of darkness”. Sin is an enslaving darkness. It holds us captive to itself. “[E]veryone who commits sin is a slave of sin” (Jn 8:34). Without the freeing grace of Christ, we are helplessly caught in its grips. We are no longer free to live in the light of God’s presence. We are enshrouded in darkness. Moreover, we are oppressed by the evil spirits, “...the world rulers of this present darkness” (Eph 6:12). We live in spiritual pain, discomfort, and the loss of peace. But if we cry out for deliverance, Jesus comes to our rescue. He sees our contrite hearts, forgives us, and transfers us to his kingdom where we find peace and joy.

“...in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins.” (14).

Baptism unites us to Jesus by immersing us in him so that we are intimately joined to him. We know that he is in us and we are in him. We lose this intimate union with Jesus when we commit mortal sin. Through repentance and absolution we are forgiven and restored to divine intimacy in Christ.

“Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (15).

Jesus is the perfect image of the Father. His human nature reflects the perfections of the divine Father. He is the incarnation of the invisible God. His human actions mirror for us who God is. Jesus said, “If you know me, then you will also know my Father” (Jn 14:7). “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9).

Jesus shares the divine nature with the Father: “The Father and I are one” (Jn 10:30). Therefore he is a perfect image of God the Father. Adam could only image God in an imperfect manner, in a limited way—unlike Christ who is divine and imaged God’s infinite perfections. Moreover, Adam sinned, he damaged and disfigured the divine image; Christ came to restore it and make it more like his. Adam imaged God by having dominion over the lower creatures. Through his passion for the forbidden fruit he became its slave. Through restoration of the divine image in Christ he can again become master of creation. Christ perfectly fulfilled his role as head of creation and accomplished his mission as new Adam, head of a new humanity. He empowers us through the gift of his Spirit to dominate our passions and rule over lower creation as images of God.

“Christ Jesus is...the firstborn of all creation” (15).

The firstborn means that no child was previously born in the family. The firstborn male could have been an only child. He received a special blessing from the father (Gen 27) and fell heir to a double

share of his father's property (Deut 21:17). He enjoyed a certain authority over the younger brothers and sisters (Gen 27: 29, 40; 49:8). Since Jesus is the Father's only begotten Son, he is the heir of the Father's estate: the entire universe. Jesus has the right to possess and govern all of creation as his inheritance. Firstborn implies a position of supremacy, authority and power over all creation. Jesus is called firstborn of all creation because of his eternal generation from the Father. He has been begotten by the Father from all eternity. The Lord declares to the Messiah, "In holy splendor, before the daystar, like the dew I begot you" (Ps 110:3)—in other words, before the world began. The Book of Proverbs says of holy Wisdom, God's eternal Word, "The Lord begot me, the firstborn of his ways, the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago; From of old I was poured forth, at the first, before the earth...." (8:22-23 see also 24-31).

St. John's Gospel confirms these passages regarding the eternal generation of the Son when he says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us..." (Jn 1:1-2, 14).

Thus we see that the title given Jesus "...firstborn of all creation" means that he was born before every creature. Moreover, it is through him that God created the universe, and sustains all things in existence (Heb 1:2, 3). The whole cosmos is in his power and control. That is how great he is! Jesus is firstborn in a unique way by an eternal generation from the Father. But of his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace (Jn 1:16). In that sense Jesus is the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. He shares his kingdom with us and the eternal life he won for us. Through faith and baptism we are born of God in grace. We become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pt 1:4). God in his mercy gives us a created participation in his divine life through sanctifying grace.

"For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether

thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him" (16).

All the perfections of God are imaged in his Son, the Eternal Word. All creatures made by God come from him. "Then was I beside him as his craftsman and I was his delight day by day" (Prov 8: 30). God looked upon his Son's perfections to model all that he created. They originate from within his Eternal Wisdom, his Son. No creature came into existence outside of him, whether visible or invisible. This includes the various classes of angels, whether good or evil. All were created through God's eternal Son and continue to exist and have their being in him. He sustains them in existence. They were created for him in order to give glory to him. And that glory redounds ultimately to the Father.

"He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (17).

Jesus the Christ pre-existed all creatures. He is before them in time as well as in importance. By his power he holds all things in existence. They exist in him. He keeps them in their being and prevents them from disintegration. See the excellence and power of our Redeemer!

"He is the head of the body, the Church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he himself might be preeminent" (18).

Now that we have reflected upon Jesus' divine activity in the mystery of creation, we turn to look at his surpassing excellence in the mystery of redemption. He is head of the church and its members with whom he shares his divine life. He is intimately united to each of us, his members. He directs and oversees us by his authority and sanctifying presence. He is the one who incorporated us into his church. He united us as a congregation through his Holy Spirit. He initiated our gathering through the gift of his glorious Spirit. He is the first to overcome death in his human nature and empower us to do the

same by the gift of his glorious Spirit. It is his glorious life that we children of God enjoy by his sanctifying grace received in baptism. To him be the glory for his marvelous excellence.

“For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell” (19).

The fullness of power and perfection resides in our glorious Savior. “For in him dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily, and you share in this fullness in him...” (Col 2: 9-10). The more we are devoted to Christ and belong to him we are able to experience that fullness of divine life in us: “You share in this fullness in him”. But if the flesh and its desires dominate our lives, we are incapable of perceiving that fullness of the divine which we share with him. For it is known through the spirit.

“And through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross through him, whether those on earth or those in heaven” (20).

Through his great love for us and sacrificial death on the cross and the shedding of his blood Jesus took away the sins of the world that separated us from God. He reconciled us to the Father and made us one with him again in love and friendship. With the enmity and rebellion of sin repented and forgiven, we are now at peace with God. We have been reunited in love. We have been reestablished in his grace through which we share his divine life. Heaven and earth are reunited. That grace won by Christ overflows and affects the atmosphere around us. Creation is renewed by our grace-filled activity and love. We change our environment by love and holy discipline. Respect for others’ uniqueness and dignity is restored. Peace and joy reign in and around us—to the glory of God the Father through the Son in the Spirit.

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