



Understanding the Sunday Old Testament Readings

CYCLE A

by Father Conley Bertrand

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

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1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Is 2:1-5

Isaiah is considered to be the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. He lived in Jerusalem. His prophetic activity extended at least from 742 B.C. to 701 B.C. His contemporaries included the prophets Amos, Hosea and Micah. Isaiah was a citizen of Judah and prophesied during the reigns of four kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. For at least forty long and testing years Isaiah performed his task as God's spokesman. His mission was to attempt to guide Judah through one of the most critical periods of her history. In his own lifetime Isaiah saw the northern kingdom of Israel destroyed by the Assyrian armies. Its population was deported and foreign settlers were brought in. Judah itself began to rely on political alliances rather than on God. The prophet condemned this betrayal and foretold the doom which awaited Judah if they did not return to God. He was ignored, and the people of Judah ended in exile and slavery by Babylon. And yet, the prophet makes many messianic prophecies of a glorious age in the future when God will fulfill his promises to the patriarchs. God will yet have a chosen people who will be faithful to him.

2. "In days to come", that is, at some time in the future during messianic times. This will ensure Judah's restoration. "The mountain of the Lord's house": The temple was built on Mount Zion. "Shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills." Mount Zion is by no means physically the highest mountain but it is so in 'prestige' and importance. The presence of God, and his temple the center of worship, made it highest in importance. "All nations shall stream toward it". The prophet foresees that in the days to come, all nations, the Gentiles—not only the Jews—shall go in pilgrimage to Mount Zion, the New Jerusalem.

"Many peoples shall come and say: 'Come, let us climb the Lord's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob.'"

Many people of different nations will encourage one another to climb the mountain where the house of the God of the Jews stands.

"That he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths."

They realize that the true God lives there. It is he who speaks the truth, and they will want to live according to his teachings.

"For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

The day will come when Zion, the mountain on which the capital of Jerusalem is built, will become the center of attention. The word of God will flow from the holy city to teach the nations of the world.

"He shall judge between the nations and impose terms on many peoples."

In those days the Messiah will be present to judge and settle disputes between nations. He will bring about justice and peace.

"They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks;"

Weapons will no longer be needed. These will be converted to farming equipment—such will be the harmony among nations. The focus will be on producing food to feed the hungry and to promote good will and assistance to the needy.

"One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again."

Peace will reign. God's word promoting love and peace will triumph.

"O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!"

In light of what is to come, the prophet exhorts his fellow Jews to live by God's word which is illuminating their path. This great heritage of theirs one day will be sought after by all the nations. They are indeed a privileged nation!

2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Is 11:1-10

Jesse is King David's father. After the Babylonian exile only a stump of the Davidic dynasty will remain; from it will arise the new shoot, the messianic king.

2 God will anoint the messianic king with the Holy Spirit so that he can fulfill his mission. We see this fulfilled when Jesus was baptized (Mt. 3:16). The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to the Messiah to equip him for his role. These are the gifts he will bestow upon us when we are confirmed. The Greek and Latin versions of the Bible translate the first gift of fear of the Lord as piety. Thus the total number of different gifts is seven.

3 The term "fear of the Lord" refers to a deep reverence for God moving one to living in communion with him, ... cherishing and keeping his word. The Messiah's deep insight into hearts and thorough knowledge of each human being will enable him to judge rightly without fail. He will have a heart for the poor and the downtrodden. He will bring evil men to justice and put an end to their evil doing.

5 The band or girdle was a loincloth worn next to the body. The belt also clung tightly to the body. Justice or righteousness as well as fidelity and faithfulness would be as close to the messianic king as these garments and belt. We can say that righteousness will be a very intimate part of him, his whole being will be diffusive of grace, that is, the righteousness of God.

6-8 Isaiah then proceeds to present an ideal picture of the world once the messianic rule has been established. The harmony of paradise will be restored. Natural antipathies will no longer exist. The concord in the animal world will express the perfect peace that exists everywhere.

9 With the coming of the messiah and the destructive power of sin nullified by the redemption, peace will be established—not only

on Mount Zion, but over the whole world. This will come about because of everyone's intimate knowledge of the Lord through conformity with his will. Union with God will satisfy all of man's desire. Thus united to God, he will need nothing else and will be perfectly content within himself.

3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Is 35:1-6A, 10

The prophet now becomes a poet as he uses poetical expressions to convey the future joy of the people when God delivers them from captivity. Just as God delivered his people from Egyptian servitude with Moses' leadership, so in the days to come he will use the benevolence of Cyrus, the Persian king, to deliver his people from Babylonian captivity. They spent sixty years there (598-538 B.C.) doing penance for their sins.

2 All of nature will participate in the joy of this deliverance. Even the dry desert which separates Babylonia from Jerusalem will "*bloom with abundant flowers and rejoice with joyful song*".

The glory of Lebanon was its majestic cedar trees which grew to 60-70 feet and some even to 100 feet. There was an abundant growth of trees and vegetation. Its glory also consisted of a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. The splendor of Carmel refers to its height and prominence covered with forests. Sharon is a plain that was fertile and well watered and produced luxuriant vegetation. The desert will be transfigured like these places to welcome those returning from captivity. Those returning from exile will experience the glory of the Lord and his splendor as seen in the transformed and welcoming desert become oasis.

3 This upcoming deliverance ought to be a great encouragement to these exiled people. This new hope in God's mercy toward them will strengthen and enliven them.

4 Let the fearful muster up their courage and strength. They must no longer fear because God is coming to deliver them and set them free.

5 The weakest among them will be healed: the blind will see again; the deaf will be able to hear again. They will be able to experience the glory of God as they see and hear all of nature come alive to welcome them on their way back home. The sight of the varied colored blooming flowers and the singing birds will thrill them.

6 The lame will leap with joy and the speechless will break out into song—such will be their happiness.

10 Yes, indeed, the Lord will ransom his people; they will return and enter Zion, Jerusalem, singing. Sorrow and mourning will flee; joy and gladness will be theirs forever. God did fulfill the promise he made through his prophet. They were freed and allowed to return in 538 B.C. The poetic expression of the sentiments of the returning exiles was fulfilled in their hearts.

The joy of deliverance was truly captured by the prophet. And yet the fullness of this promise could only be brought to perfect literal realization when the Messiah arrived. Jesus gave sight to the blind, made the lame walk, the deaf hear, and the lepers clean; he even raised the dead to life; and an impoverished humanity had the joy of receiving the good news of the gospel.

We all have been freed from our sinful exile from God. We have been brought to our promised land, the possession of God. We have truly been delivered from enslavement and captivity. We have been freed as we joyfully make our final journey to heavenly glory.

4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Is 7:10-14

Ahaz was king of Judah from 735-715 B.C. Almost immediately after he became king, the kings of Damascus and Israel invited Ahaz to join a coalition against the advance of the Assyrians. When he refused, the two kingdoms invaded Judah and Ahaz appealed to the Assyrians for help, offering submission and tribute. The Assyrians took Samaria in 734 B.C.

and Damascus in 732 B.C., and Ahaz was saved by becoming a vassal of Assyria. This policy was stoutly opposed by Isaiah, who counseled political inactivity and faith in God, which he offered to strengthen by a sign. Ahaz refused the sign and received instead the sign of Emmanuel with a threat that his policy would prove disastrous (see *Dictionary of the Bible* by John L. McKenzie S.S., p.16). Ahaz lacked faith in God. He preferred depending on the might of Assyria rather than upon God. He pretended, as an excuse, not to want to tempt God by asking for a sign.

13 Isaiah used the term “house of David” to remind Ahaz that he was a descendant of the dynasty of David. And God had promised David through the prophet Nathan (2 Sam 7:12-16) that the kingdom of Judah was always under God’s protection. The future king, a descendant of David, would reign forever. Ahaz’s attitude, his refusal to trust God and ask for a sign to confirm God’s protective promise, tried both Isaiah’s and God’s patience.

14 The prophet proceeded to give Ahaz a sign from God anyway: “the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel”. The Hebrew word “virgin” (alma) refers to a young unmarried woman. The immediate context seems to refer to the wife of Ahaz: A son, Hezekiah, was born to them. But then he is not named Immanuel (Although see Isaiah 8:8). In that case the name may simply signify that the birth of this child is a sign of God’s favor.

This explanation, however, falls short of the full meaning of this prophesy. The Jews of the time before Christ expected this prophesy to be fulfilled in the eventual birth of the Messiah. He would liberate Israel once and for all. The prophet Isaiah himself would not have been able to foresee the complete fulfillment of this prophesy.

The Gospel of St. Matthew read on this same Sunday quotes this very passage (Is 7:14) to show its fulfillment in Mary’s virginal conception of Jesus (see Mt 1:22-23). St. Matthew, following the Greek version of Scripture, the Septuagint, uses

the word *parthenos* instead of *alma* to signify that Mary was a virgin in the strict sense. This brings out the fact that she conceived Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit (Mt 1:20). God is his Father. The name Immanuel means God is with us. It simply expresses who this child is: he is divine. His personal name given by the angel is Jesus. This explains his spiritual mission, which is to save his people from their sins. (Mt 1:21).

THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH

Sir 3:2-6, 12-14

The first reading tells us that, “God sets a father in honor over his children; a mother’s authority he confirms over her sons” (Sirach 3:2). In other words, God is the one who has given parents authority over their children and calls them to obey. That is a divine order. The New Testament confirms this: “There is no authority except from God ... therefore, whoever resists authority opposes what God has appointed ...” (Rom 13:1-2). Obedience is a valuable virtue: Adam and Eve lost all the blessings that came with their friendship with God through disobedience. Jesus and Mary regained the blessings and friendship with God through obedience.

Through obedience, we submit that which is highest in us to God, our wills and all of our other faculties, which are under the command of the will. Thus, we submit our whole persons to God through obedience. In this way, we open ourselves to direct communion with God. We believe that God himself directs us through those he has given authority over us. That’s the truth whether we are talking about parental authority, spousal authority, civil authority or ecclesiastical authority. We look beyond the immediate authority over us to see God commanding us through them.

One of the worst sins is pride. Submissiveness in obedience overcomes pride and opens us up

to God. Humility is required for this. Respect for parents goes far beyond obedience. We must honor them, and love them, and care for them. Holy Scripture is very strong in its condemnation of those who dishonor their parents. Here are just a couple of them: “Whoever curses his father or mother shall be put to death” (Ex 21:17).

“The eye that mocks a father or scorns an aged mother, will be plucked out by the ravens in the valley; and eaten by the vultures” (Prov 30:17). An evil end is indeed promised to those who dishonor their parents!

But notice in the first reading all the blessings that are received from honoring our parents:

1. We atone, i.e., make up for sins.
2. We preserve ourselves from sin.
3. Our prayers are heard (twice mentioned).
4. We store up riches.
5. We are gladdened by children.
6. We will live a long life.
7. We will thus comfort our parents.

We must continue to be respectful of our parents when they are old or when their minds fail.

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Is 60: 1-6

The Book of the Prophet Isaiah is divided into three parts, according to different inspired authors: First Isaiah—eighth century and later additions (1-39); Second or Deutero-Isaiah: sixth century and later additions (40-55); Third or Trito-Isaiah: sixth century, return from Babylon and post-exilic Period (55-66).

Today’s reading is Third Isaiah. *The International Bible Commentary* describes this part in these words, “In a magnificent and radiant text describing how the nations of the world and all their riches converge toward the Temple, Jerusalem is invited to exult before the glory of God that is arising and covers it with splendor. The great gathering begins that will make the city ‘a light to the nations’”. ...

1 The prophet foresees the days when Jerusalem will be a light for the whole world. Her teachings will enlighten all nations. Now we see why: The Messiah will come from her and bring the Old Testament revelation to completion. Moreover, the glory of God will shine forth from the Messiah to enlighten and transform all people who are open to receive it. We are reminded of Jesus' words, "The glory you give me I gave them" (Jn 17:22).

2 Those who are without the knowledge of God, his revelation and grace live in darkness. Humanity without divinity is incomplete. Flesh without spirit has no life. Those without the hope of eternal life live under a cloud of gloom. God's favor shines upon his chosen people. The luminous cloud which once shone upon the people will reappear to enlighten the whole world. The teaching and grace coming from the Messiah will accomplish this marvel.

3 The nations (the Gentiles) will follow this light in the form of divine revelation and enlightening grace. Kings and world leaders who are open to receive it will be illumined with grace and interiorly transformed to lead the people wisely.

4 Let the people raise their eyes and look to the future when all of this will begin to happen. Children will come to the center of salvation from the ends of the earth. They will come to see God's Messiah and submit themselves to his gentle rule and guidance.

5 What a delight it will be for God's chosen people to realize that through them the whole world will be enlightened and graced by the Messiah born of a Jewish woman from the family of David. People will come from afar over land and sea to offer their riches and gifts to honor their Messianic king.

6 St. Matthew sees the Magi from the East coming to Jerusalem with gold, frankincense and myrrh to fulfill this prophecy. And we continue to fulfill this prophecy as we come from afar to the new Jerusalem, the Church, to offer our gifts to the king in the offertory procession.

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Is 60: 1-6

This passage is the first of four suffering Servant Songs or oracles. The others are Is 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12. All four of these are read during Holy Week.

They speak of this mysterious servant of the Lord who ministers to God's people by his word and who suffers for them to make up for their sins. This first of the Suffering Servant passages is read on the occasion of Jesus' baptism. The Fathers' voice proclaims Jesus as his beloved Son. The word son in Greek may be translated as son or servant. Thus Jesus is pointed out by the Father as that mysterious suffering servant prophesied by Second Isaiah. Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of these four servant oracles of Isaiah. Jesus begins to take upon himself the sins of the world as he immersed in the waters of the Jordan. He presents himself as if he, the Holy One of God, were a sinner.

1 The Father felt a need on this occasion to proclaim to all the world how pleased his is to see his own Son, obedient to his will, humbly present himself as a sinner. It is on this occasion that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in an external manner to set him apart for his messianic mission. He, the Incarnate Son of God, filled with the Holy Spirit since his conception, is now manifested to all as the anointed one of God. His mission is to bring justice or righteousness to all the nations of the world.

2 Unlike the abusive despots of the world who force their own wills harshly upon the people they lead, this Servant is gentle and kind. He wins over people through love.

3 He relates to people with merciful goodness. He treats people with infinite compassion.

4 In this way he establishes the earth in righteousness. He communicates it through his love. That love and righteousness will reach the furthest coasts and corners of the earth.

6 God himself has called his Servant-Son to overcome all evil through the abundance of his righteousness, his justice. His grasped hand empowers him infinitely to defeat the sins of the whole world. This Servant has been divinely formed from infancy. Thus he is equipped to form a covenant, an enduring love relationship between God and his people. He will be a light leading the nations to greatly desire to enter into this loving relationship with God.

7 He will open the eyes of those who are blind to the spiritual world and the eternal life, blind also to their sin and its contaminating effect. He will free those who are prisoners to their disordered, dominating passions and their demanding addictions. The Servant will also bring out those who are enshrouded in the darkness of sin. He will free those entrapped in the dungeon of unredeemed self and the selfish, self-centeredness that goes with it. They are so far from the brightness and illuminating glorious love and the selflessness of altruism—these also will be freed by the selfless, self-sacrificing love of the Suffering Servant.

2ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME **Is 49:3, 5-6**

This passage is the second Suffering Servant Song. The Servant addresses the Gentiles, these “distant peoples”. He received his mission—even from his mother’s womb he received his name (compare Luke 1:26-31).

3 God will use the Servant to show his glory. The word Israel seems to be a gloss added on later inappropriately. The Servant is distinct from Israel because he will bring back Jacob (Israel) from its waywardness and exile (v.5). These were prophecies uttered during the Babylonian exile to encourage the Jewish exiles to persevere in their trust in God who would liberate them. He would eventually send them the long-expected Messiah.

5 The Lord speaks to his Servant. He is in close contact with him. He had been forming him even before he was born. He has made him into a

prophet to gather his chosen people to himself. His labors will not be in vain, for they are transforming. The end of his task will be glorification. He constantly draws strength from the Lord to accomplish his labors. God himself has become his strength.

6 The end result of his prophetic mission will go far beyond the Jewish people. The tribes of Israel (Jacob) he will raise up and restore—but the Servant’s work will become a light to the nations of the world. He will bring salvation to the ends of the earth (compare Luke 2:32).

3RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME **Is 8:23-9:3**

This reading is from first Isaiah written some eight centuries before Christ. It looks forward to the coming of the Messiah. Zebulon and Naphtali were two of the twelve tribes who settled in the region of Galilee after the Exodus from Egypt. This area is northern Palestine which was first to be attacked by the Assyrians. Galilee was the first part of Palestine to suffer deportation and become an Assyrian province in 734 B.C. Nazareth was in Zebulon. Naphtali lay along the Jordan east of Zebulon.

The Seaward road was the trade route from Damascus to the Mediterranean passing through Galilee. The northeastern corner of Palestine had been populated for the most part by pagan Assyrian settlers who had been brought in there after the fall of the northern Kingdom (Israel) in 722 B.C. Paganism had control, and the few chosen people thinly scattered in the region, found it difficult to retain their faith in the true God, and more difficult still to practice it. The darkness consisted of idolatry and ignorance of the true God.

That darkness will be dispelled when the Messiah appears. St. Matthew quotes this passage when Jesus, the Messiah, begins his ministry and settles in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulon and Naphtali. In it, Matthew sees the fulfillment of

this prophecy. Jesus will bring light to this whole area by his presence and his teaching. We see this light appearing even at the birth of Jesus when the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds: “the glory of the Lord shone around them” (Lk 2:9). We also see that light in the brilliant star that illumined the way and led the Magi to the place where Jesus was (Mt 2:9-11).

The prophet foresees the abundant joy that Jesus, the Messiah, will bring to this pagan land that does not know the light of truth. It was particularly at harvest time and the attainment of great victories that the people experienced great joy. The appearance of the Messiah, the joy of his presence and the enlightenment of his revelation are compared to the farmer’s joy at his rich harvest and that of the victor’s rejoicing over the spoils gained from his battle.

The joy-filled excitement of the first disciples who discovered Jesus as Messiah can first be seen in John’s Gospel 1:35-51. And as Jesus gave joy to the people he was ministering, we see that “the whole crowd rejoiced at all the splendid deeds done by him” (Lk 13:17).

THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

Mal 3:1-4

God announces through the prophet Malachi that he is sending “*my messenger to prepare the way before me*” (1). According to 3:23 that messenger is Elijah. We learn in 2 Kings 2:11 that Elijah was taken heavenward in a fiery chariot. Verse 23 seems to be saying that the prophet’s return to earth is being foretold. But Jesus declares that Elijah’s return took place in the person of John the Baptist (see Mt 17: 10-12).

“And suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek, and the messenger of the covenant whom you desire.” This seems to refer to Jesus who is the mediator of the New Covenant (Lk22:20). This passage is very appropriately read

on the Feast of the Presentation when Jesus the messenger of the New Covenant suddenly appears in the temple (Lk 2:22-38).

“Yes, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts”.

We see why the Messiah was talked about as the one who is to come” (Mt 11:2-3). And on the Feast of the Presentation we joyfully celebrate the arrival of Jesus the Messiah who is arriving.

“But who will endure the day of his coming? and who can stand when he appears? For he is like the refiner’s fire, or like the fullers’ lye”.

Here we seem to look towards Jesus as judge: *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne ... Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ... and these will go off to eternal punishment.” ... (Mt 25:31,41,46).*

“He will sit refining and purifying silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, refining them like gold or like silver that they may offer due sacrifice to the Lord”. (3)

We read that “For our God is consuming fire” (Heb 12:29). His presence cleanses us from sin. This reminds us how Jesus’ presence cleansed Zacchaeus the tax collector from sin (Lk 19:1-10) or the sinful woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears (Lk 7:36-50). And Jesus explained how his words cleansed the apostles: “You were already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you” (Jn 15: 3). (RSV). Thus through his purifying presence and words we are able to offer hearts cleansed from sin to the Lord (compare Lk 5:8) and “offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5).

“Then the sacrifice of Judah and Jerusalem will please the Lord, as in the days of old, as in years gone by”. (4) This will take place when Jesus will have sacrificed himself on the cross for the sins of the world. And we, purified from sin through his mercy, will join him with pure hearts in the Mass and offer a pure sacrifice with him.

5TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 58:7-10

The chosen people were wondering why it is that God was not pleased with their fasting and personal penances. Third Isaiah explains that it was because they did not accompany their penances with love of neighbor. They still continued to live selfish lives, ignoring the severe needs of their neighbors. The self-discipline needed to carry out personal penances such as fasting and abstinence strengthens our moral fiber and makes us more spiritual and selfless. It tends to open us up to God and the love of others. Personal penance is spiritually healthy and fosters spiritual growth. But in this passage the people stopped short of seeing and tending to the needs of their neighbors. Fasting is meant to quell our passions and fighting. It tends to bring about self-control and self-mastery in order to be able to relate patiently and charitably toward our neighbors.

The prophet, therefore, is helping the people to see the need to share food, clothing and shelter to those in need. We must do whatever we can to assist them. We can do this directly, or through charitable institutions. This is the kind of thing the Bishop's Services Appeal tends to as well as other religious organizations.

Such selfless giving in charity opens us up to God who is light so that we begin to live in an atmosphere of mystical light. Such an attitude of selfless love unites us to God who is love and light (1 Jn 1:5; 4:16). The virtue exercised in extending such active charity will heal our wounded and weak human nature. It will become strong again, concerned with the love of neighbor. The glory of God will permeate such a person's whole being and throw off an aura of light.

This kind of loving communion with God disposes him to readily hear us when we pray or cry out to him. He will help us in our need. We will no longer oppress others by hurtful words or actions.

By comforting and alleviating the afflicted in their needs we will illuminate our world. Our very own gloom will be turned into light. Our somber humanity, thus complemented by divinity, will become joyous light.

6TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Sir 15:15-20

Sirach (once called Ecclesiasticus), is one of the Wisdom books of the Old Testament. It was first written in Hebrew between 200 and 175 B.C. and translated sometime after 132 B.C. into Greek by the author's grandson. Sirach has always been recognized by the Catholic Church as divinely inspired and canonical. But it is excluded from the Protestant Bible, neither is it included in the Hebrew Bible after the first century A.D. (see the *Sunday Readings* by Fr. Kevin O'Sullivan).

15 God created man and woman in his own image and likeness (Gen 1:26). That means they have a free will and an intellect to know and love like God. God gave us the commandments so that we could know his will and live in his company. He wants us to relate to him in knowledge and love. We are free to choose to obey God's commandments. We can be loyal to him. We are called to do the good in this way.

16 We have a choice to do good or bad, represented by water and fire. Water gives life; fire destroys. Doing God's will by obeying the commandments unites us to him. This union is life-giving; it is both enlivening and enlightening: "In him was life and the life was the light of men" (Jn 1:4 RSV). Disobeying God's will by refusing to carry out his commandments separates us from God and causes us to die spiritually. It is like being burned to death.

It is up to us to choose what is good for us. Through the commandments we are free to choose life by obedience to them, or to choose death by disobeying them.

God's wisdom is all encompassing. He knows the whole universe through and through. He sustains the whole cosmos by his power (see Heb 1:3).

19 God sees and knows all creation. He knows us: we are always in his loving sight (compare Ps 139; Heb 4:13).

20 "God is love" (1 Jn 4:16); "God is light, and in him there is no darkness" (1 Jn 1:5). Everything about God is good: He would never command us to do evil or sin. God is truth, he can neither deceive nor be deceived. He inclines us always to be truthful (see 1 Jn 5:20; Jn 14:6).

7TH Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lev 19:1-2, 17-18

Leviticus is the third book of the Torah or Pentateuch. The name refers to the content which is almost exclusively of a cultic or ritual character. It is, therefore, related above all to the priestly tribe of Levi. The content of the book is almost exclusively legislative. Generally speaking, the laws contained in this book serve to teach the Israelites that they should always keep themselves in a state of legal purity, or external sanctity, as a sign of their intimate union with the Lord. The central idea of the book is contained in its often repeated injunction. "You shall be holy, because I, the Lord, am holy". This book is the work of the priestly school during the period of cultic reorganization after the Babylonian exile (538 B.C.). The purpose of Leviticus was to supply directives on all aspects of religious observance for the post-exile community, the Temple liturgy.

1-2 The Lord said to Moses, "*Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them: Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.*"

The holiness called for here exceeds mere legal purity and embraces moral rectitude as well, without which holiness is incomplete. The holiness called for must be like the transcendent sanctity of God. The people were created in God's

image and likeness; they must therefore strive to imitate his holiness and goodness.

Holiness describes what is divine and pertains to God. It is his most intimate essence in which he radically transcends all that is created. Holiness extends to whatever is in relationship with the divine. The people have been consecrated to God and thus become a holy people. Holiness implies separation and opposition to what is profane and common. Thus the people who are holy maintain this holiness by following the commandments given to them by God. This separates them from a sinful world. Through keeping the commandments they unite themselves to the holiness, the wisdom, and the will of God.

17 "*... you shall not bear hatred for your brother in your heart. Though you may have to reprove your fellow man, do not incur sin because of him*".

This commandment exemplifies how the people are to be holy like God who loves both the good and the bad. We must hate the sin but love the sinner.

18 "*Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your fellow countrymen. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord*". This commandment is another example of what holiness consists. The people must not seek vengeance nor bear a grudge against their fellow countryman. They are to love all even as God loves. It is to be noted that this passage considers the neighbor to be a fellow Israelite. This extends to an alien who lives in their land. They are told to "*have the same love for him as for yourself*".

19:34 We should note here that Jesus extended this notion of neighbor to anyone in need; this includes foreigners (compare Lk 10:29-37: the Parable of the Good Samaritan). Moreover, Jesus united this commandment to the first and greatest one which is to love God with our whole heart (see Deut 6:4-5; Lk 10:27).

8TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 49:14-15

This passage is from second Isaiah. This part of the message is one of consolation. The Jews were exiled in Babylonia. They were discouraged and felt abandoned by God. But the prophet assures them that God still loves them.

“Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.’”

Zion is another name for Jerusalem, the people of God. The capital city representing the people was built on Mount Zion. The people were exiled in Babylonia from 587 to 538 B.C. Perhaps around 545 B.C. the prophet consoles his people that God is going to deliver them through Cyrus the Persian King (44:28; 45:1). By that time, the people had suffered enough for their sins; they had been sufficiently purified. God was soon to deliver them (compare 40:1-2).

15 *“Can a mother forget her infant; be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you”.*

One of the strongest kinds of love is the love that a mother has for her child. The tenderness she expresses toward her child is beyond expression. On rare occasions that motherly love may fall short so that she might even abandon her child. God’s love for his children is even greater than the love that a mother has for her child. He will never abandon his children. If he momentarily allows them to go into exile, it is only his way of expressing tough love. He must discipline his wayward children so that they will no longer fall into idolatry and disobey his commandments.

1ST SUNDAY IN LENT

Gen 2:7-9; 3:1-7

Genesis, a word meaning beginning is the first of the five books of the Pentateuch and the Torah or Law of Moses. The book is a complex work, not to be attributed to a single

original author. The first eleven chapters recount the origin of the world and of man. They are known as primeval history. The truths are expressed through elements prevailing among the people at that time. For this reason, the truths themselves must therefore be clearly distinguished from their literary garb.

Certain of the matters recounted from the time of Abraham onward (Gn 11:27-50:26) can be placed in the actual historical and social framework of the near East in the early part of the second millennium B.C. (2000-1500), and documented by non-biblical sources (see *New American Bible Introduction to Genesis*).

7 God created man and breathed into him the breath of life. Man is different from the rest of the animals. God breathed into him a higher kind of life. To put it in another way, “God created man in his image, in the divine image he created him ...” (Gen 1:27). So we see God created man and breathed into him a spiritual soul with an intellect and a will. Then he ...

8 ... placed man in the beautiful garden that he prepared especially for him. The trees God planted there for human beings provided food and shade for them. They were beautiful to look at as well.

9 One of these trees, located in the middle of the garden was the tree of life. This tree enabled them to live forever (3:22). But there was another tree close by which gave knowledge of good and bad. Man was free to eat of any of the trees in the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and bad. Eating of this tree would cause them to die (2:16-17). God wanted to prevent man from hurting himself. If he only ate from the Tree of Life he would live forever. But eating the bad fruit would cause him to die. This was a way of saying that God as creator knows what is good for man and what is bad for him. He was trying to save man from experiencing the evil of sin. This disobedience might mean spiritual suicide.

1 The tempter is introduced as a serpent. The reason for this seems to be that the serpent was associated with the fertility cults. These cults were a constant source of temptation to the chosen people. This was a way of warning God's people: beware of fertility cults. It is only later that Scripture identifies the serpent as the devil (Wis 2:24).

4 He introduces doubt into Eve's mind about God's truthfulness. He makes her believe that God is hiding something from them; he is trying to keep them from becoming equal to himself. The devil lies in saying they will not die—death was the result of man's disobedience and becoming separated from God.

5 The devil presents eating the fruit of knowledge of good and bad as a good, making them like God. But man's deciding for himself what is good or bad has resulted in getting himself embroiled in the harmful effects of sin. It has led him to the endless deleterious effects of evil. Their eyes are now opened to their guilt and shame.

6 The woman was attracted to the forbidden fruit as presented under the lie of the devil. This knowledge moved her to desire it, so she indulged in the forbidden fruit, in disobeying God—and lured her husband to do the same.

7 Now the couple realizes that they are naked—their guilt and shame are exposed to God. Their consciences make them aware of their sin. Sewed fig leaves covering them cannot hide their guilt. They remain exposed to God in their shame.

2ND SUNDAY OF LENT

Gen 12:1-4A

After the sin of Adam and Eve, wickedness steadily increased. Cain killed his brother Abel (4:8). Things got so bad that God regretted he had made man (Gen 6:5-6). He decided therefore to wipe out all those he had created except Noah who found favor with him.

1 Eventually God called Abram (later named Abraham (17:5), a descendant of Noah, Shem and Terah to leave Haran and go to a land God would show him. God was setting Abram apart for a new beginning. For it is through Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David that the Messiah would eventually be born of Mary. God would continue to reveal himself to Abram as the one true God. And Abram believed in him and obeyed his every command, no matter how difficult. God had Abram leave his surroundings and the false gods so he would come to understand that there is only one true God.

2 God promised Abram that he would make of him a great nation. He also promised that he would bless him in a special way; his name would become very great and he would be a blessing to many. We have come to see how truly God fulfilled his promise. Even to our day, we, living so many years and miles away from him, still praise Abram's name. He is our father in faith.

3 God also promised to bless all of us who reverence Abram whose children we are. All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in Abram. It is through him that Jesus the Messiah will come. All of us gentiles, or nations who have been baptized, have come to receive the abundant blessings that come to us from our being united to Jesus, our glorified Lord, Abram's descendant.

12:4 Abram obeyed God and, however difficult it might have been, he left the familiar lands and environment he knew so well to go to the unknown lands that God would give him.

3RD SUNDAY IN LENT

Ex 17:3-7

The Israelites ran out of water. They confronted Moses and began to quarrel with him. They grumbled and complained against him. They blamed him for making them leave Egypt. They thought that they might die of thirst in the desert—they, their children and their livestock.

The Sinai Peninsula was 260 miles long by 150 miles wide at the northern. They forgot that it was out of love that God had freed them from slavery. They failed to trust him, that somehow he would provide water for them. They were being tested to rely on the Lord, and then they failed miserably. God had proven his love for them by the ten plagues and opening the Red Sea for them, saving them from Pharaoh's wrath. But that was not enough for them. They did not believe in his love for them despite his presence by day leading them in the cloud and the pillar of fire by night. They were too attached to the pleasures of sense that they had left behind. They could not patiently bear with their thirst and trust that God would once more come to their rescue. So they took their impatience out on Moses, God's representative.

4 As a result of the attack Moses experienced, he cried out to God. He feared they would stone him.

5 God responded by ordering Moses to gather the elders or leaders of the people and to go in front of the them, holding the staff with which he had struck the river.

6 God assured Moses that he would be standing in front of him on the rock in Horeb (Mt. Sinai). God commanded Moses to strike the rock and the water would flow from it for the people to drink. According to this account Moses did as God had directed him.

The book of Numbers gives us a more detailed account: Moses said to the community, "Listen to me, you rebels! Are we to bring water for you out of this rock? Then, raising his hand, Moses struck the rock twice with his staff, and water gushed out in abundance for the community and their livestock to drink. But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you were not faithful to me in showing forth my sanctity before the Israelites, you shall not lead this community into the land I will give them'" (Num 20:10-12).

The footnote explains, "*The sin of Moses and Aaron consisted in doubting God's mercy toward*

the ever-rebellious people. In showing forth my sanctity" God's sanctity consists in his sacred power and glory. Moses struck the rock twice perhaps because he had not sufficient faith to work the miracle with the first blow.

7 Today's passage ends with identifying the place where this event occurred: Massah and Meribah, which means in Hebrew, the place of the test and of the quarreling. Our passage explains, "*because the Israelites quarreled there and tested the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord in our midst or not?'*"

4TH SUNDAY OF LENT

1 Sm 16:1B, 6-7, 10-13A

When the twelve tribes enter the Promised Land there is no central government. The Lord would raise up a great leader called a "Judge" when one of the tribes is attacked by an enemy. He would overcome their persecutors and free the chosen people once more. Samuel is the last of these judges. The people are dissatisfied by the lack of unity among the tribes and want a king to rule them like the surrounding pagan nations. So they appeal to Samuel to give them a king. Samuel reluctantly gives in to their demand. Saul is appointed their first king in 1030 BC. He is successful in battle. But the Lord is displeased with him because he does not carry out the ban of destruction as commanded by God. And he offers sacrifice rather than wait for Samuel as he has been told to do. So the kingship is removed from Saul and given to David.

1b The Lord sends Samuel to Bethlehem with a horn of olive oil to anoint one of Jesse's sons to replace Saul as king.

6 Samuel thought Eliab would be the one. He stood out by his tall stature. But God had rejected him. Samuel was told, "*not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart.*"

10 Jesse presented seven of his sons to Samuel but the Lord did not choose any of these.

11 Only one of Jesse's sons remained, the youngest, who was tending the sheep. He was thought too insignificant to attend the gathering. Samuel then told Jesse to send for him. The sacrificial banquet could not be carried out until he arrived.

12 The young man was David. He was brought to them. He was a handsome youth and made a splendid appearance. The Lord commanded Samuel to anoint him.

13 Samuel anointed David with the horn of oil in the midst of his brothers; And from that day on the spirit of the Lord rushed upon David.

We learn of David's daring and strength when he describes his adventures in caring for his father's sheep. Whenever a lion or bear would carry off a sheep, he would go after it, attack it, and rescue the prey from its mouth. If these animals attacked David he would seize and kill them (1 Sam 17:34-36). He once killed a lion and a bear in this way.

5TH SUNDAY OF LENT

Ez 37: 12-14

Ezekial was a prophet who lived during the Babylonian exile. There he was active from 593-571 B.C. He was a priest, sharing the exile with his people after being deported from Jerusalem in 598 B.C. He was an educated man and married. By his preaching he prepared his fellow exiles for the fall of Jerusalem; divine judgment was coming for their past sins. After judgment, however, would come salvation.

God introduced the prophecy of our passage today with a vision of bones spread throughout the plain. God had the prophet prophesy over these dry bones. As he did, they came together, rattling as they were joined together. Then sinews and flesh and then skin came upon them. He prophesied again and spirit came unto them.

They came alive and stood upright. God had the prophet speak to the people who had lost hope of ever returning to the Holy Land.

12 *"O my people," he said, "I will open your graves and have you rise from them and bring you back to the land of Israel."*

This was symbolic language to tell the people who had lost all hope that God would see to it that they would return to their land from their exile.

13 When the moment arrives then the people will realize once more that God is real and alive. He had not forgotten them. They needed to be purified from their sins and restored to true worship of the living God.

14 He revived them by putting his spirit into them. They will be given new courage and vitality to return to the Holy Land. This whole experience and miraculous deliverance will convince them beyond any doubt that God loves them and is still with them. They remain his chosen people.

6TH SUNDAY OF LENT (PALM SUNDAY)

Is 50: 4-7

This is the third song of Second Isaiah regarding the Suffering Servant. God inspires the Servant with life-giving words that stir the people. The Servant receives the Lord's word each morning when he goes to prayer. The Servant receives God's inspiring words when he enters into deep and intimate prayerful communion with him.

5 The Servant realizes that suffering and adversity await him. But, fortified by his closeness to God, he is determined to proceed with his mission—his divinely ordained call.

6 The prophet speaks the truth coming straight from God; For he lives in direct communion with God. But he is speaking to a selfish world which is too proud to submit to the truth. They are too hardened in their own ways. Therefore they

attack the Servant of the Lord. They will not take correction. They do all in their power to angrily snuff out the light. They persecute the Servant so that he will stop enlightening their consciences, which in turn keeps remonstrating them.

7 The Servant relies totally on God who strengthens him so that he does not become discouraged and desist carrying out his mission. He is determined by the power of God to persist in his holy mission. He knows that he will triumph by the grace of God. He is confident in his defender.

EASTER SUNDAY

Acts 10:34A, 37-43

The Acts of the Apostles was written by St. Luke. It continues where he left off in the third gospel which he also wrote. He probably wrote the Acts around 63 A.D. soon after Paul's house arrest in Rome recorded in the closing chapter (28:16). Luke writes about the first thirty years of Christian history from the Ascension of Jesus in Jerusalem to the imprisonment of Paul in Rome. He continues the story of Jesus through the life and mission of his first disciples. Chapters 1-12 narrate the leadership role of Peter in establishing the Church; chapters 13-28 tell about the missionary efforts of Paul in expanding the church (see *Introduction to the Acts of the Apostles in Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*).

Peter begins to address Cornelius, his relatives and close friends (10:24). An angel had appeared to Cornelius in answer to his prayers and almsgiving. He told Cornelius to send men to summon Peter (10:4). Meanwhile Peter had a vision (10:9-16) which convinced him that he should not call any person profane or unclean (10:28). The Holy Spirit told Peter to accompany the three men who were sent to him (10:20). Having arrived at Cornelius's home, Peter now speaks to those awaiting him. Peter explains that

in every nation, whoever fears or reverences God and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.

37 Much has been happening all over Judea. After Jesus was baptized by John, the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus (10:38) and anointed him with power for his Messianic mission. "He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him."

39 Peter and the other apostles are the designated ones to bear witness of all that Jesus did among the Jews. Despite his goodness and innocence they put him to death by crucifixion (hanging him on a tree).

40 God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day. He was made visible to special witnesses, the apostles and holy women (10:44).

41 They ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead, concrete evidence of Jesus' bodily resurrection.

42 Jesus commissioned these apostles to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead; he is the God-man who came to teach people the truth, how to live. They will be judged according to the truth.

43 The whole Old Testament awaited the Messiah. For example, Moses spoke of a prophet like him that God would raise up (Deut 18:15,18). "All the prophets who spoke, from Samuel and those afterwards, also announced" (Acts 3:24). They announced that "everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name," for faith unites the believer to Christ in whom redemption is received.

2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2: 42-47

Jesus promised that he would send the Holy Spirit once he had been glorified (Jn 14: 15-17, 26). Now, at Pentecost he fulfilled

his promise: the Spirit appeared to the apostles as tongues of fire, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). Peter explained to them the evidence that the Jesus they had crucified had been glorified in fulfillment of Scripture (Acts 2:14-36). The people responded in a positive fashion: “they were cut to the heart” and asked what they should do. Three thousand were baptized in response to Peter’s exhortation to “*save yourselves from this corrupt generation*” (2:41). Through the sacrament of baptism, the believers were united to the risen Christ and began to share his divine life. (2 Pet 1:4).

“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread, and to the prayers” (2:42). They searched the scriptures as the apostles explained them. For example, they reflected on how Joel had prophesied about the outpouring of the Spirit that Peter preached in his homily (Joel 3:1-5). They saw how Jesus’ resurrection fulfilled David’s prophecy in Psalm 16:8-11 and 110:1. It all made sense to them as they saw for themselves through investigating the Scriptures. These early believers experienced close fellowship and supported each other in their meetings and in various other ways (see Acts 4:32-37). They met in their homes for the “breaking of the bread”, that is, for the celebration of the Eucharist (2:46). Prayer was an important part of the first Christians’ lives. We learn that the apostles and some women met with Mary and Jesus’ relatives in the upper room to pray as they awaited the gift of the Spirit (Acts 1:13-14). We see that Peter and John would go to the temple area for the three o’clock hour of prayer (3:1). After Peter was freed from prison by an angel, “*he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who is called Mark, where there were many people gathered in prayer*” (12:12).

43 *“Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles”* (43). We see that Peter cured the man crippled from birth (3:1-10). Even Peter’s shadow cured the sick (5:12-16).

44-45 The believers were generous in sharing their goods. They lived in close community. The Spirit of love moved them to be self-giving. Remnants of this type of living in close communion and sharing possessions can be seen in religious communities such as, the Benedictines, Carmelites, Dominicans, etc.

46 The disciples continued to meet in the temple—separation from their original roots had not yet taken place. But they also met in their homes to celebrate the Eucharist as Jesus commanded at the Last Supper. They also had agape meals (see 1 Cor 11: 17-22 for certain abuses that took place).

47 The members of believers greatly increased as a result of seeing the miracles and the fervor of the early Church. The presence of the Holy Spirit and his power influenced many to join the Christian community.

3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2:14, 22-33

Our reading today is part of Peter’s Pentecost homily in explanation of the apostles being filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in different tongues. This outpouring of the Spirit is the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (3:1-5).

22 Jesus had been in their midst and they knew him as one who had performed many miracles. God was with him.

23 Yet God allowed Jesus to be taken captive and crucified. God used the free will of evil men to fulfill his plan for the salvation of the world. In his love for enslaved humanity, his plan was to have his Son Jesus to suffer and die for the redemption of the sins of the world.

24 Having accomplished his mission, God glorified Jesus and raised him from the dead. Death could not restrain Jesus because he is a

divine Person who had assumed our human nature so he could suffer and die for us. He is supreme, eternal life.

25 Peter proceeds to quote and explain Psalm 16:8-11 to the people gathered for the celebration of Pentecost. In this Psalm, David is speaking of his Son, Jesus, the Messiah. He was aware of God's presence strengthening him by his power.

26 Deep within his heart Jesus was sustained and gladdened by the presence of the Father as he went through his ordeal. He was filled with hope regarding the outcome.

27 He was firmly convinced that the Father would not abandon his soul to the world of the dead; nor would he allow the body of his holy one to experience corruption in the grave.

28 Jesus knew that the way to life was to entrust himself to the Father's will. That is where true life can be found. Being so united to his will, Jesus knew with certitude that he would be filled with joy in the glorious presence of the Father.

29 Peter continues to explain that David could not have been referring to himself in this Psalm since his body remained entombed in their midst.

30 Rather, David spoke as a prophet and he knew that God had solemnly sworn that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne.

31 In this prophecy, David foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, who would be David's son or descendant. He was not abandoned by God in the grave among the dead, nor would he allow his Son to undergo corruption.

32 Peter and the other apostles are witnesses that God raised Jesus from the dead. They experienced him in his resurrected body as he appeared to them through a period of forty days. They conversed with him and ate with him (Acts 10:41). He presented himself alive to them by many proofs after he had suffered, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the Kingdom of God.

33 This outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the result of Jesus' exaltation of the right hand of God to show that he was God's favorite. There he received the promise of the Holy Spirit through which he was glorified. Having been filled by the Father with this glorious Spirit, Jesus has now poured him forth upon all who were receptive.

4TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Peter continues to explain to those gathered for the feast of Pentecost the fulfillment of Divine promises. The outpouring of the Spirit and Jesus rising from the dead testify that God has made, both Lord and Messiah, Jesus whom they crucified.

37 Peter's inspired words have a powerful effect upon his listeners. The people are deeply touched and grieved to realize the evil they have done. They inquire, therefore, what they should do.

38 Peter says that they must repent, have a change of heart, and be baptized. Their attitude toward Jesus has to be completely reversed. Their contrite hearts will bring forgiveness. Their sins will be wiped away by baptism. They will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and the new life of the glorified Christ. To be baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ" is not a formula used for baptism. It is not a substitute for baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). The *Didache* (the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles), which was written around 100 A.D., states that Baptism should be given in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Baptism "in the name of Jesus Christ" expresses one's faith in the divinity of Jesus. The sacrament unites a person to the risen Lord who is one with the Father in the Holy Spirit. This phrase clearly distinguishes the baptism of Jesus from that of John the Baptist. Because of Jesus' obedience to death on the cross, he received the name that is

above every name, that is, Lord, God (see Phil 2:8-11). There is no other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved (Acts 4:12).

39 In Isaiah God promises peace to the Gentiles who are far away as well as to the Jews who are near (Is 57:19). This promise is now being fulfilled through the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. “The prophet Joel promises “Then everyone shall be rescued who calls on the name of the Lord” (3:5).

40 Peter confirms the faith of his hearers with many proofs from Scripture which Jesus has taught him and the twelve (Lk 24: 27, 44-45).

41 Peter exhorts his people to save themselves from their corrupt generation. Some 3,000 accept baptism as a result of his powerful homily, inspired as he is by the Holy Spirit.

5TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 6:1-7

As the number of disciples increase, difficulties arise in the distribution of food to the needy widows. In these days, there is no such thing as Social Security. Men often die at an early age, leaving women without support.

1 There are two groups of Jews in the Christian Community. The Hellenists are those who speak Greek—some are native and others are born outside of Palestine who return and settle in the Holy Land. The Hebrews are Palestinian Jews who speak Hebrew or Aramaic. The Greek speaking Jews (the Hellenists) feel that their widows are being neglected in the daily distribution of food.

2 As a result of this problem, the Twelve Apostles call a meeting in the community to solve the difficulty. The apostles realize that their first responsibility is to preach the word of God. Yet they are concerned about the needy widows and momentarily have to see about their needs. But this preoccupation leads to the apostles neglecting the proclamation of the Word of God.

3 They come to see that the solution to the problem is to select men of good reputation to appoint them to the task. They have to be men filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

4 This will free the apostles from the duty of administration so that they can devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. We have similar challenges in our day. It often happens that pastors are overly burdened with administrative duties so that they do not spend enough time in prayer and in homily preparation. The word of God is somewhat neglected for the sake of the parish needs. We pray that the insight offered by the apostles might also be implemented in our day.

5 The solution to the problem proposed by the apostles is accepted by the whole community. As a result, they choose seven men to fulfill this function of food distribution to the widows. Among them, it is pointed out, that Stephen is particularly filled with faith and the Holy Spirit. Another man mentioned in particular is Nicholas of Antioch. He is a convert to Judaism. He had become a disciple of Jesus also.

6 These chosen men are presented to the apostles who pray and then lay hands on them, dedicating them to the task for which they are ordained. This laying on of hands for a blessing goes back to the Old Testament (Gen 48:14-15). Jesus also lays his hands on children to bless them (Mk 10:16). Barnabus and Saul are laid hands on, after fasting and prayer, to set them apart for their mission (Acts 13:2-3). This is a customary Jewish way of designating persons for a task and invoking upon them the divine blessing and power to perform it. These come to be known as the Seven (Acts 21:8).

7 The word of God continues to be spoken by the disciples. As a result many join them (compare Acts 1:15; 2:41; 4:14; 6:7; 9:31; 12:34; 6:5; 19:20; 28:31). We hope that we ourselves have been so blessed by the word that we also will continue to speak that word to those we associate with so that they will be graced by it and become

fervent believers (compare Rom 1:16-17); they too will be inclined to share that word and give others new life in Christ. There is a large number of priests who serve in the temple in turns. The many witnesses to Jesus' resurrection, including the five hundred who see him (1 Cor 15:6), will have convinced these men that Jesus is indeed the Messiah who has conquered death. Large numbers of them become believers.

6TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

Philip is one of the seven men filled with the Spirit and wisdom who is chosen to distribute goods to the needy widows. But he also goes about preaching the word (Acts 8:4). He goes to the city of Samaria proclaiming Jesus as Messiah.

6 Philip is a successful preacher. He attracts crowds who were attentive to what he is saying. The fact that he is able to perform miracles makes him all the more credible.

7 Here are some examples of the marvels Philip has performed. He exorcizes people of unclean spirits. They cry out in a loud voice as he drives these evil spirits out of possessed people. Moreover, Philip also cures many paralyzed and crippled people.

8 With so many miracles happening and so much good being done to many paralyzed and crippled people, the community is filled with great joy.

14 For the first time the word of God goes beyond Jerusalem. It comes to them through Philip's preaching. We recall how Jesus has spoken to the Samaritan woman. She is so impressed by Jesus that she goes to the town to tell the people about him. They, in turn, go to see Jesus for themselves. Jesus accepts their invitation and remains two days with them (Jn 4). This visit by Jesus will have

prepared these Samaritans to believe in Jesus. The apostles send Peter and John to Samaria when they hear that the people believe Philip's preaching.

15 These people have only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, an expression used to distinguish them from those who are baptized by John the Baptist (compare 19:1-7). These Samaritans have received the Holy Spirit when they are baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". But they have not received him in the sacrament of confirmation. This sacrament confers the Spirit upon those who are not present on the feast of Pentecost. The Spirit comes down upon the Samaritans in a new way, strengthening the grace of baptism, so they can witness their faith to the world.

17 The manner in which this is done is by the laying on of hands by the apostles upon these Samaritans. The Holy Spirit comes upon them as a result. Receiving the Spirit will cause these Samaritans to glorify God by acts of praise in joyous, enthusiastic languages (compare 10:44-46).

7TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 1:12-14

After Jesus ascends to heaven, the disciples return to Jerusalem. St. Luke's gospel tells us that Jesus has led his disciples as far as Bethany (Lk 24:50), which is also the area called Olivet. It is located just a bit more than a half mile from Jerusalem. Jesus often spent the night there when he was in Jerusalem. John's gospel reveals that Lazarus, Mary, and Martha live in Bethany (Jn 11:1).

13 Jesus has told his disciples not to go back home in Galilee but to stay in Jerusalem to await the promise of the Father, the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). They go to the Upper Room where the disciples have prepared the Last Supper (Lk 22:12). Apparently, this is the house of Mary, the Mother of St. Mark (Acts 12:12). Mary and the

disciples gather there for prayer. The list of the apostles is the same as the other lists, except for the order in which they are given. Here, as in all the others, Peter is listed first (see Mt 10:2-4; Mk 3:16-19; Lk 6:14-16). Judas Iscariot is the only one excluded.

14 All these disciples faithfully carry out Jesus' instructions to wait for the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). "All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer ..." These nine days of prayer is a model novena for us. The Intercessions that we recite in the Breviary each day, morning and evening, are directed toward praying for the coming of the Spirit. It is good for us to imitate this model set by the early Church to pray for the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. We must strive to remove any obstacles we perceive in ourselves that would impede our receiving the Spirit. Now that Jesus has been glorified, he and the Father can send their Holy Spirit into our hearts. We see here that the model set for us is a community effort. They are gathered together for this holy purpose. We see the holy women who have ministered to Jesus and the apostles during their apostolic missions (Mk 15:40-41) still among those who are gathered in prayer. Even Jesus' relatives who originally do not believe in him (see Jn 7:3-5) have become his disciples and are among those praying for the outpouring of the Spirit. We also see Mary, Jesus' mother, present among these fervent disciples, praying for the gift of the Spirit. We would expect the disciples to be gathered around her who is mother of the Church.

PENTECOST SUNDAY

Acts 2:1-11

While Jesus was appearing to the Apostles after his resurrection, he told them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father. "In a few days", he told them, "you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). Now that Jesus had been

glorified and ascended to the Father, he could fulfill his promise. This took place on the feast of Pentecost.

Pentecost took place fifty days after the Passover. This was a festival of thanksgiving to God for the wheat harvest and for the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. It was on this feast, when the Apostles were all in one place, that the Holy Spirit came down from the sky as a strong driving wind which filled the entire house in which they were gathered. There appeared to them tongues as of fire which parted and came to rest on each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

The flames of fire remind us of the signs of God's presence seen in the Old Testament such as the burning bush (Ex 3:2), Mount Sinai (Ex 19:18), and the pillar of fire which led the people through the desert (Ex 13:21-22). This fulfilled John the Baptist's promise that the Messiah would baptize the people with the Holy Spirit and fire (Mt 3:11).

This Pentecost fulfills God's promise of a new Covenant when he would place his law within them and write it upon their hearts (Jer 31:31-34). He said, I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes ..." (Ez 36:27). At last "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ" (Rom 8:2) was given to free us from the law of sin and death. As a result, the Spirit prompted the Apostles to praise God exuberantly, with joyous and enthusiastic emotion. They also began to speak in different or foreign languages. This was a symbol of the worldwide mission of the Church.

The sound of the strong driving wind, similar to that of hurricane force winds, caused a large crowd to gather. They were surprised by the fact that each one heard the Apostles speaking in his own language. There were people from many other regions and countries present for the feast of Pentecost. The Apostles spoke in their own language but these visitors understood it—in theirs! It is also possible that the Apostles were given the ability to speak in these foreign

languages. This shows us the unifying gift of the Spirit; He enables us to understand each other and to live in love and peace with each other. The effects of the gift of the Spirit rectified the confusion of languages that took place at the building of the tower of Babel (Gen 11:5-9).

THE SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY—TRINITY SUNDAY

Ex 34:4b-6, 8-9

“Early in the morning Moses went up Mount Sinai as the LORD had commanded him, taking along the two stone tablets.”

The word LORD is used rather than Yahweh out of respect for the divine name given Moses by God (see NAB footnote 3:14). Moses is taking two stone tablets on which he will write the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments (Ex 34:27-28). God has originally engraved them himself (Ex 32:16), but Moses has thrown the tablets down and broken them on the base of the mountain when, out of anger, he sees the people worshipping a golden calf (Ex 32:19).

5 “Having come down in a cloud, the LORD stood with him there and proclaimed his name, ‘LORD’. The LORD told Moses ... “You have found favor with me and you are my intimate friend” (Ex 33:17). Moses then asked God, “Do let me see your glory!” The LORD replied that he would make all his beauty pass before him and pronounce his name, LORD, but his face he cannot see, “for no man sees me and still lives” (33:18-20). He only allowed Moses to see his back (33:23).

6 *“Thus the LORD passed before him and cried out, ‘the LORD, the LORD, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity ...’”* Despite the people’s infidelity and worshipping a golden calf, God mercifully forgives them. He continues to love them. He reveals himself as a kind and loving God, always faithful to his covenant.

8 *“Moses at once bowed down to the ground in worship”.*

Moses felt the need to bow down to the ground because he experienced the awesome presence of God. Being near him inspires deep reverence.

9 Moses then said, *“If I find favor with you, O LORD, do come along in our company.”*

Moses was respectful in his request, but since God told him that he found favor with him and was his intimate friend (33:17), he felt free to invite God to “come along in our company”. God continues to reveal himself as one who loves us humans and desires to be in a loving relationship with us. Moses continues to speak for his people, admitting their obstinate nature yet requesting God’s pardon and friendship.

CORPUS CHRISTI SUNDAY

Deut 8:2-3, 14b-16a

“Remember how for forty years now the Lord, your God, has directed all your journeying in the desert, so as to test you by affliction and find out whether or not it was your intention to keep his commandments.”

Remembering how God delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery and led them through the desert will lead the people to be grateful to God. This will encourage them to remain faithful to him and avoid the worship of false gods. Remembering God’s many kindnesses and favors helps us to love him and live in his presence. God tested his people to see how committed they were to him and whether they would remain faithful to him. He was faithful to them and always remained true to his covenant of love.

3 When the people ran out of food, God proved his trustworthiness by feeding them with the miraculous manna for forty years. Holy dependence on God proved to be rewarding. Trusting in God’s word brought about divine sustenance. God sustained his people by their

trusting in his word. The same is true for us. We must live by his word and he will sustain us in life. Jesus countered the devil's temptation to turn the stone into bread by quoting this very passage (Mt 4:3-4).

14 *“Remember the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery”.* It is by remembering God's loving deeds toward us that helps us to remain faithful to God. When we forget him and his favors we tend to go astray. We become proud and begin to be consumed by the works of our hands. They become like false gods to which we become devoted. They begin to take God's place in our lives. We no longer have time to worship the true God. We begin to believe that our prosperity is solely the work of our hands. We forget that God is the source of our blessings and prosperity.

15 Through Moses God guided the people through the vast and terrible desert. God is ultimately the one who guided them safely through it all. There were many dangers to pass through, such as poisonous serpents and stinging scorpions; the dry, waterless desert. And yet, God brought them safely through it all. He even caused water to flow from the flinty rock, enough for the thirsty people and all of their animals. Surely God proved himself to be a loving Father who provided for their needs. He wanted to gain their trust and showed them the value of depending on him for our lives.

16 While in the desert, the land produced no food, so God miraculously fed his people with manna. No other people ever experienced such loving care. God produced food when there was none, when there was no other means of procuring it. We, too, are called to a holy dependence on God. Our self reliance must be complimented by relying on God for all of our needs.

SAINTS PETER AND PAUL, APOSTLES

Acts 12:1-10

Herod Agryppa I ruled Judea A.D. 41-44. He was the grandson of Herod the Great. He supported Pharisaic Judaism. We recall that they were the ones who stoned Stephen. They were led by Saul who was intent on destroying the Church (Acts 7:54-8:3). Herod had the Apostle James, the brother of John and the Son of Zebedee, killed by the sword, that is, beheaded. This occurred in 44 A.D. Herod intended to do the same for Peter, whom he had arrested and put in prison. He intended to bring Peter before the people after the feast of Pentecost to avoid bloodshed on a holy day. Peter was heavily guarded with four squads of four soldiers. The only defense the early Christians had was to intercede for him: “prayer by the Church was fervently being made to God on his behalf”.

Peter is very important to the Church. He is the one designated by God to keep it intact. It is upon him that Jesus determined to build his church (Mt 15:18). Therefore, no human power can interfere with God's plan. Peter is needed for the church at this time. God will allow him to be martyred later—some twenty odd years later. Now, however, his leadership is needed. So God sends an angel to free Peter from prison. The night before he was to be brought to trial, when Peter was sleeping between two soldiers secured by double chains, an angel of the Lord came to him—even as guards kept watch outside the door of the prison. His presence caused a light to shine in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and awakened him. He commanded Peter to get up quickly. At that, the chains fell from his wrists. Peter was then told to put on his belt and sandals, and then his cloak, and to follow the angel. Peter did not realize at the time that what was happening was real. He thought he was dreaming. They passed the first guard, then the second—without alerting the soldiers to what was happening. They came to an alley outside of the prison when the angel

departed from Peter. At that moment he came to his senses and realized what happened. “Now I know for certain”, he said, “that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people had been expecting”.

14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Zech 9:9-10

Zechariah is one of the twelve Minor Prophets. He is called minor because he wrote less than the four Major Prophets. He, along with Haggai and Malachi, returned from Babylon with the exiles about 520 B.C. When the people were depressed, and almost in despair on seeing the city and the Temple of Jerusalem in ruins, they encouraged them to rebuild and to settle down. They assured them that there was a great future—the messianic future—in store for the remnant of the Chosen People. We have one of those encouraging messianic prophecies in today’s reading. Whether it was written by a later author makes no difference. (Many present day Scripture scholars hold that Chapter 9-14 are the work of a Deutero-Zechariah) It was certainly written long before Christ came and is therefore a prophecy concerning him.

9 Our passage begins with, *“Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion, shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem”*. The prophet has called all those who live in Jerusalem to rejoice and shout for joy. The terms daughter of Zion or Jerusalem speak of Jerusalem as a person. Zion is the mountain on which Jerusalem is built. Zechariah excites the people to joy because he foresees that the Messiah is going to come through them to the nations.

“See, your king shall come to you; a just savior is he.”

The messianic king will be a son of David as promised by God through the prophet Nathan (2 Sam 7:11-17). He will sit on David’s throne and reign forever. He will be a “just savior”, a

righteous savior of the people. He will do God’s will and rule according to God’s commandments. A further quality is mentioned: he is meek and comes riding on a donkey. He is a gentle Messiah. He is also humble, riding on a lowly beast of burden. He comes without the majestic pomp of royalty. The fact that he comes mounted on a donkey shows his peaceful intention (the horse was the mount in time of war). The Evangelists see a literal fulfillment of this prophecy in the Savior’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Mt 21:4-11; Jn 12:13-16).

10 This messianic king will bring about peace, banishing the instruments of war such as the chariot and the warrior’s bow. He will proclaim peace to the nations. Ephraim refers to the main tribe of the Northern Kingdom, Israel.

“His dominion shall be from sea to sea...”

The phrase is used to indicate totality or universality. This would include not only the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (Israel and Juda) of Palestine, but also the entire civilized world from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf.

“And from the River to the ends of the earth”.

The dominion of the Messianic King will be universal, extending from the Euphrates River, the most easterly point then known, “to the ends of the earth”, the most westerly extreme. The fulfillment of the age-old messianic prophecies in the person of Christ is one of the proofs that Christ was the Messiah, the anointed King whom God had promised to send to the chosen people.

15TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 55:10-11

Through Isaiah the prophet, God answers his people, which include us, of the effectiveness of his word. This encourages us to take that word daily into our hearts so we can experience its transforming effects. The Lord

compares the power of the word when we receive it to the fruitfulness of water: It causes plants to grow and produce their fruits. Without rain, the crops die and are helpless to produce a harvest. Without the word of God, we do not produce sanctity. This shows us the value of reading and meditating on the word of God. The importance of our assimilating God's word can be seen in the following inspired words: "Give ear, O heavens, while I speak; let the earth hearken to the words of my mouth! May my instruction soak in like the rain, and my discourse permeate like the dew, like a downpour upon the grass, like a shower upon the crops" (Deut 32:1-2).

The prophet Isaiah assures us, as he speaks for God, "For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful. So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth ...". The word accomplishes its end, for example, by nourishing us. "... not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord" (Deut 8:3). The word is life-giving: "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life", Jesus said (Jn 6:63). Jesus gives evidence of the life-giving power of his word. He addresses the dead son of the widow of Nain: "Young man, I tell you, arise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak..." (Lk 7:14-15). It is evident, then, that God's word accomplishes what it was sent for by God. We need to consume the word so it can sanctify us, Jesus said, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (Jn 17:17, RSV).

16TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Wis 12:13, 16-19

There is only one God, one Supreme Being who created the universe. He sustains everything he created and extends loving care over all. He is totally just and condemns no one unjustly.

16 The supreme power of God is the source of his

righteousness, for his being is totally perfect. God has control over all creation. He manages it with ease and is lenient toward all and is of a mild and tolerant disposition.

17 God shows his power toward those who doubt it. He demonstrated it toward Pharaoh and his people. The ten plagues demonstrated that he can do what he wants (see Exodus 7-11). Among the chosen people, God does not hesitate to rebuke temerity or rashness of behavior (see Numbers 16).

18 Although God is fully endowed with infinite power, he judges and deals with clemency, mercy and leniency. We only have to look at how kindly he deals with us sinners. We all have personal experience of this. He governs us with kindness. He uses his power, which is always available, whenever it is necessary.

19 God's example of clemency towards us sinners teaches us to treat each other in the same way. To be righteous like God requires that we deal kindly with each other.

The history of God's dealing with the chosen people with such merciful forgiveness gives us good ground for hope: he will also forgive us when we sincerely repent of any wrong-doing (compare Exodus 34:6-7; Gen 18:22-32).

17TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

1 Kgs 3:5, 7-12

Solomon went to Gibeon, the most important high place, for the tabernacle, the Tent of the Meeting, and the ancient bronze altar was kept there. The king offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.

5 It was on this occasion that God appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream. Solomon succeeded David as King in Jerusalem in the year 970 B.C. He reigned 38 years and built the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem as well as a sumptuous palace for himself. God said to Solomon, "*Ask something of me and I will give it to you*".

6 In response, he expresses his gratitude to God for favoring his father David as well as himself for seating him on his father's throne.

7 But he recognizes his youthfulness.

8 He is being put in charge of the whole country with little or no experience. Some estimate that his subjects numbered about 800,000. Realizing how inadequate he was prepared for the tasks of governing this vast number of people, Solomon asked God for an understanding heart.

9 With this he would be equipped to judge God's people and to distinguish right from wrong.

10 Such a request pleased God very much. He could have asked for a long life, for riches, or vengeance on his enemies. Instead he asked for understanding to be able to judge rightly.

12 God did fulfill Solomon's request. He gives him *"a heart so wise and understanding that there has never been anyone like you up to now, and after you there will come no one to equal you."*

13 Besides, God also gives him *"such riches and glory that among kings there is not your like"*. God also promises Solomon long life if he will keep his commandments.

An example of Solomon's wisdom can be seen in his discerning who was the real mother of the child whom both claimed to be theirs (1 Kgs 3:16-28).

Besides being noted for his wisdom, he is remembered for his writings, including poems (psalms) and proverbs, wealth, commercial success, and magnificent buildings.

18TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 55:1-3

"All you who are thirsty, come to the water!"

God's salvation is freely offered to all peoples and nations. The water he offers is life-giving; it gives all who drink it divine

life. It is the Holy Spirit gushing from Jesus' open side, exalted on the cross, cleansing the world of sin.

The Lord is offering a free gift to all who desire it. He invites us to COME and receive the lavish meal he has prepared for us. It symbolizes God's superabundant love poured out upon all who welcome it.

The eschatological banquet is being offered in the end-times in which we are now living. It is given to all without cost, to all who desire it. It represents our feeding on the divine word and Eucharist, as well as the plentitude of grace flowing from Jesus' infinite love. God's love given out so freely is often presented as a banquet: The Passover out of Egypt is celebrated with a banquet (Ex 12), as well as the Sinai Covenant (Ex 24:5,11); the abundance of the eschatological age is often laid out as a banquet (Is 25:6; 65:11-15, Ps 22:5); Proverbs 9:1-11 draws upon these Isaian passages to portray the wondrous banquet of divine wisdom); the Song of Songs (5:1) sings of a mystical banquet for God and Israel. Deutero-Isaiah writes from a rich biblical tradition that will flow over into the New Testament: Nuptial banquet (Mt 9:15; Rev 19:9); paschal banquet (Lk 22:16-18; and eschatological banquet (Mt 4:6; Lk 22:29) (see *Jerome Biblical Commentary*).

2 We often spend money lavishly on material goods, but we are left dissatisfied: our spiritual nature is not nourished. God's word and Eucharist can provide substance for our craving hearts.

"Heed me", God says, "and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare".

If we listen to God and obey his word, we will be spiritually nourished. As Jesus said, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (Jn 6:63). Man lives on every word that comes from the mouth of God (Mt 4:4). Listening to God and obeying his word makes us one with God and his will. In this union our hungry souls are nourished by God himself. He becomes our rich fare!

“Come to me heedfully, listen, that you may have life.”

Nothing less than divine life! But we must listen and obey.

“I will renew with you the everlasting covenant, the benefits assured to David.”

God is so pleased with Solomon’s attitude he promises to renew his commitment to David. He told David through Nathan the prophet, “Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever” (2 Sam 7:16). This promise was perfectly fulfilled in Jesus. The angel told Mary of her Son, “the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Lk 1:32-33). Through the resurrection, Jesus’ human nature was glorified so that he reigns as King forever.

19TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

1 Kgs 19:9,11-13

Elijah had Ahab gather the people at Mt. Carmel to witness a contest between him and the false prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18). The Lord manifested himself as the only true God when he consumed Elijah’s sacrifice. The people fell prostrate and cried out, “The Lord is God! The Lord is God”. Elijah had the people seize the 450 false prophets and execute them. When Jezebel heard of this, she was determined to kill Elijah. Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He was miraculously fed by an angel. He was strengthened by this mysterious food and empowered to walk for 40 days to the Mountain of God, Horeb. This is the same mountain called Sinai that Moses encountered God in the burning bush and later received the commandments. The prophet found a cave there and took shelter in it.

When God asked him why he was there, he explained that the Israelites had forsaken the covenant and killed God’s prophets. Only Elijah remained and now they want to kill him.

God then tells the prophet to go outside and stand on the mountain before the Lord who will be passing by. Elijah experienced a strong and heavy wind rending the mountains and crushing rocks—but the Lord was not in the wind. Then there was an earthquake—still, the Lord was not present. After that fire appeared. But the Lord was not in the fire. That is strange, because these are the signs through which God manifested himself originally to Moses on Mt. Sinai (Ex 19:16-19). Finally, God did manifest himself to Elijah in the form of a tiny whispering sound.

“When Elijah heard this, he hid his face in his cloak and went and stood at the entrance of the cave.”

Did Elijah hide his face in his cloak so that he could give his whole attention to God in a contemplative stance? Or was he afraid to see his face?

When Moses asked to see God’s glory, God responded, “But my face you cannot see, for no man sees me and still lives” (Ex 33:20).

Elijah was asked, “Why are you here?” He answered, “I have been most zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts ...” (19:10,14). The prophet had engaged in a violent struggle against the forces of evil, even to the point of slaying the 450 prophets of Baal.

Through the tiny whispering sound, the gentle whisper of a breeze, God seems to be saying that in his own way, without great fanfare he will work his will for Israel. In due time, he will bring about the overthrow of Jezebel’s crusade.

20TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 56:1, 6-7

Our reading today is taken from Third Isaiah (Chapters 56-66). It is probably the work of the disciples of Second Isaiah. Second Isaiah (Chapters 40-55) was set in Babylon on the eve of the return from the Exile. Third Isaiah is slightly later in date and reflects the problems of the Jewish Community after the return.

1 Third Isaiah exhorts his people and us to observe what is right and to do what is just because God's righteousness is about to be revealed: a new level of salvation will soon be given by God. For example, even the eunuchs and foreigners who were formerly excluded from the temple worship are now included. This foreshadows the new salvation of the gospel when the gentiles are received into the Church on an equal footing with the Jews. The righteousness of God will then be fully revealed. Little by little God's plan for salvation of humankind is gradually taking place. Perhaps this helps us to appreciate more our living in the fullness of time. God began to reveal himself to Abraham in 1850 B.C. It is estimated that Jesus was born in 6 B.C. All of these years of waiting took place before these happy times of ours when Jesus accomplished our salvation in the paschal mystery (his passion, death, and resurrection) in the year 30 A.D. How grateful we ought to be! Through the mystery of Pentecost the Holy Spirit of Jesus has been lavished upon us.

6 This prophecy of foreigners joining themselves to the Lord through faith and baptism is being fulfilled in us. And we are ministering, serving him in the liturgy and fulfilling his will in our daily duties. Loving the name of the Lord after our seeing the Incarnate God in Jesus work out our salvation with such atrocious suffering is a precious and privileged obligation. He who is love, revealing himself fully in the paschal mystery, draws us to love him in return. We want to become his servants. Love wants to give itself in whatever manner it can.

Keeping the Sabbath meant Saturday in those days. It meant no servile labor so that rest would assure reintegration and a restoring of energies for when work would be resumed. In this restful environment all could focus more exclusively on God through prayer and worship. That is what the covenant, this enduring love relationship between God and humans, called for—as it still does today. Of course, now our day of rest

is Sunday because Jesus entered into his rest in the resurrection after his great work of salvation through his marvelous passion and death.

7 God promises that he will bring those foreigners, who were formerly forbidden, to come to Mount Zion on which the Temple was built. They will experience the joy of God's presence there. They will be free to pray and worship with the rest of the community. Their holocausts (a sacrifice wholly consumed in fire) and various other kinds will be acceptable on the altar. In our case, we will join our daily sacrifice to the unique sacrifice of Jesus made present on our altars at Mass. God is revealing here that he wants the Temple to be a house of prayer for all people. It is no longer necessary that they be Jews. Converts of all peoples will be welcomed. We see this promise fulfilled in Jesus' time. He hinted at this when he quoted this passage at his cleansing of the Temple, saying, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Mk 11:17). John's Gospel goes still further saying that when the old temple will be destroyed his own risen body will become a new temple for all people to worship the Father (Jn 2:19).

21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME **Is 22:19-23**

Shebna was master of the palace (15). He is a disgrace to his master's house (18). He was a social climber, a man proud of his weapons and his pro-Assyrian politics, swollen with self-conceit. Isaiah was sent to reprove this high dignitary of the Court, prophesying his degradation.

Isaiah, speaking for the Lord tells Shebna, "*I will thrust you from your office and pull you down from your station.*"

20 He will be replaced by his servant Eliakim. He will demote Shebna to the position of a mere scribe and confer his authority of majordomo on Eliakim. The symbol of this authority is expressed

with the words, “I will clothe him with your robe, and gird him with your sash, and give over to him your authority.”

22 Particularly, the key is a symbol of authority over all of the royal palace. Eliakim has the authority to grant or deny admittance to the royal presence. Our passage says, “*I will place the key of the House of David on his shoulder; when he opens, no one shall shut, when he shuts, no one shall open*”. Being of wood and much bigger than our keys it was borne on the shoulder.

This scene reminds us of Jesus’ words to Peter, “I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Mt 16:19).

The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible comments on this passage saying: “Jesus here evokes Is 22:15-25, where the prime minister’s office is handed on to a successor by the symbolic act of handing on the ‘key of the house’ [i.e. Kingdom] of David” (Is 22:22). In Matthew, Jesus is the new Davidic King, who appoints Peter the prime minister over the Kingdom of Heaven in the Church. As in Is 22, Peter’s position is designed for him and his successors; the office is meant to endure as long as the Kingdom itself. Entrusted with the keys, Peter wields Christ’s own royal authority.”

23 Our Isaian passage ends with, “*I will fix him like a peg in a sure spot, to be a place of honor for his family*” (23).

The peg is like a nail on a wall on which vessels are hung. The next verse (24) explains that “on him shall hang all the glory of his family”. In other words, a family participates in the prerogatives of the high official even future generations when the post is hereditary.

22ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Jer 20:7-9

Our passage begins with these very strong words, “*You duped me, O LORD, and I let myself be duped*”.

Jeremiah was in the midst of a severe interior crisis. He gave vent to the strong feeling that welled up from within him. He felt that God had enticed and tricked him into become his prophet. It was a torture for him to have to reveal to the people what God was telling him. He was by nature a gentle, quiet and peace-loving fellow. And yet he had to foretell the terrible results that would come from their revolt against the power of Babylon.

The prophet continues, “You were too strong for me, and you triumphed.” He complains that God forced himself upon him. God was too powerful a force for Jeremiah to resist. He had to accept God’s call.

He explains the trial that he is experiencing: “*All the day I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me.*” The people don’t believe Jeremiah. They laugh and make fun of him. He is made to look like a fool. He prophesies but nothing happens.

8 He states, “*Whenever I speak, I must cry out, violence and outrage is my message;*”

What he is prophesying seems incredible—they can’t believe what he is saying to be true. So they ridicule him. Jeremiah complains, “The word of the LORD has brought me derision and reproach all the day.” But there is nothing he can do about it. He must speak the truth that God is revealing to him. He cannot ignore it, even though he tries.

9 Jeremiah expresses it in these dramatic words, “*I say to myself, I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more. But then it becomes like a fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it.*”

God was trying to save his people; the prophet is forced to speak his word. He cannot restrain himself. God overpowers his attempts to resist him.

23RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Ez 33:7-9

Ezekiel prophesied from 593-571 B.C. He was deported from Jerusalem to Babylon in 597 B.C. with many of the leaders of the country. During his exile, God appointed him to speak to his fellow exiles. He told them that it was because of their infidelity to God that they were brought into exile.

Furthermore, Jerusalem and its temple would be destroyed. The people would be carried as slaves to Babylon. This actually occurred in 587 B.C. In the second half of his ministry, he began to console the people. After their just punishment, they would be restored to their homeland. A new Jerusalem and temple would be built.

Having been purified, the people would serve God with a new heart and spirit. Ezekiel gives prophets the understanding that they have a grave responsibility for their people's salvation.

7 Ezekiel is addressed as "son of man", a lowly human being is addressed by the transcendent God. He is expected to be respectful and attentive (cf 2:1). God is appointing the prophet as "watchman for the house of Israel." The term watchman conveys the image of a sentry, a soldier standing guard on a high vantage point to warn others of approaching danger. In this case, whenever Ezekiel hears God say anything, he must warn the people.

8 God expects the prophet to tell a wicked person that he will die spiritually when he sees him commit a serious sin. If God's spokesman does not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his sinful life, he will die spiritually for his sinful life. But the prophet will be held responsible for his death.

9 If, however, the prophet warns the wicked man that he is in danger of losing eternal life so as to turn him away from his evil way, but the sinner refuses to turn away from his sin, he will die spiritually, but the prophet will save himself.

We see from this how God is concerned for his people. He seeks their love and friendship. He desires to keep them from sin which would separate them from him. He sends spokespersons to warn those who are straying about the spiritual danger they are in.

THE EXULTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

Nm 21: 4b-9

The Israelites were tired from their journey and began to run out of patience. As a result they began to complain against God and Moses. They had become very vulnerable. These times are dangerous ones. They were running out of forbearance. Fortitude comes from God drawn from faith and communion with God. The Israelites' fortitude had run out. When that happens to us, we must go to God through faith expressed by prayer. Then as believers who pray we will be empowered to regain our patience. It is better to be silent when we have lost patience. Complaining begins when we run out of the virtue of fortitude. That is when sin begins and we lose possession of ourselves. Jesus said, "In your patience you will possess your souls" (Lk 21:19).

The people began to blame Moses for bringing them out into the desert where there is no food or water. They failed to appreciate the manna and had even become disgusted with it. They still craved the fleshpots that they once enjoyed during their slavery days in Egypt. God was trying to spiritualize them by the practice of virtue and detachment, but they would not let go of the pleasures of sense. They no longer looked forward to the promised land of the spirit—they could only look back at the earthly.

At that time, providentially, the people came upon seraph serpents, so named because of the fiery pain caused by their poisonous bite. Many died from this. These poisonous bites made the people realize that they had sinned through their complaining

and blaming, so they begged Moses to ask God to remove these serpents. Moses prayed to God. God then told him to make a bronze serpent and mount it on a pole. If anyone bitten looked at (with faith in God's word) he would recover and so it happened. This foreshadowed Jesus being mounted on a cross whom when we look upon him through faith would be saved from the poisonous bite of sin (Jn 3:14-15).

25TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 55:6-9

We recall that in this Second Isaiah, the prophet is living among the Jewish exiles in Babylon. He speaks words of consolation for the despairing exiles.

6 In this passage the prophet urges the people to “*Seek the LORD*” while he may be found, call him while he is near”. God makes himself available through faith expressed in prayer. It is necessary to renounce sin to be free for God. Then believers will be disposed to attain God. “When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with all your heart, you will find me with you” (Jer 29:13-14). “It is the heart that prays. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain” (CCC 2562).

7 Therefore, it is necessary for the scoundrel to forsake his way and the wicked man his thoughts in order to be able to contact God. He must be sorry for his sinful life and turn to the Lord for mercy. God is generous in forgiving.

8 God is not like mankind. He readily forgives others. We must not be afraid to approach him with their sins for which we are truly sorry. He is not reluctant to forgive like mankind sometimes is.

9 Humans, tinged with original sin and limited, are very different from God. He is so loving and merciful. He dearly loves his people, even with all their sinful ways. He still wants to relate to them.

All they need do is regret their sinful past and begin anew. He will gladly receive them. “*As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are his ways and his thoughts above theirs*”. It is difficult for humans to comprehend God's infinite love and mercy. He is a compassionate Father who desperately desires to be in a living relationship with his children.

26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Ez 18:25-28

The prophet Ezekiel, speaking for God, explains that if a virtuous person falls into mortal sin he commits spiritual suicide. He loses the sanctifying grace by which he participates in God's own life (2 Pet 1:4). This spiritual death causes him to be separated from God. He loses all the good and merit he had acquired before (24).

25 This caused some to say, “The Lord's way is not fair!” God is trying to help the people to understand that each person is responsible for his own sins. Even if he has lived a virtuous life for some time, it is possible to fall away and become God's enemy. This will occur if he commits a grave sin and separates himself from God, the source of his spiritual life. To turn away from God in this way and remain unrepentant is to regrettably lose all the good he has done. But if he sees his wrong and regrets it, he will regain all the good he had done. His past virtuous living will incline and assist him to return quickly to God. His virtuous disposition will help him to see the contrast between virtue and vice. With sin, the peace and communion with God through virtuous living is often lost and exchanged for disturbance and turmoil. This will assist him to be repentant and return to God.

26 Each person is responsible for persevering in virtuous living. But if he commits a mortal sin he will die spiritually. He will lose the sanctifying grace that gives him a share in divine life.

27-28 On the other hand, a person who separated himself from God through a wicked life may repent of the evil he has done and be reunited to God. Repentance will open him to God's merciful forgiveness. God will infuse his divine life into his receptive heart. This is an exhortation for everyone to persevere in virtuous living. But if one falls into serious sin, God is very merciful and moves a person to turn back to him through repentance. God's great desire is to live in communion and friendship with his children. Yet he respects a person's free will and the possibility of his decision to reject God. This is most disappointing and even heart-breaking to God. We see this expressed in seeing Jesus weep over the unrepentant people of his day (Lk 19: 41-42; Mt 23:37).

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time **Is 5:17**

Isaiah may have sung this song during his early ministry on the Feast of Tabernacles. In this way his words would be easily remembered and sung by the people. The prophet sings of his friend, his "beloved" (RSV), indicating his intimate love relationship with God. His song is in the form of a parable to express the relationship between God and the unfaithful people. The vineyard represents the chosen people. In the Old Testament, they are often symbolized by the vine (Hos 10:1; Jer 2:21; Ez 15:1-8). And Jesus himself used the vineyard in parables to describe how he and the prophets were mistreated and rejected by the leaders of the chosen people. (Mt 21:33-42; Mk 12:1-10; Lk 20: 9-18).

5:2 The divine vine grower took the loving initiative and great care to prepare the vineyard; he did everything he could to make it fruitful—but in vain—because of their lack of cooperation and resistance to his love. The watchtower was used by watchmen to be on the lookout for thieves, especially when the grapes ripened. The winepress was the vat into which the grape juice

flowed when the grapes were trodden. After all that preparation, the vine yielded only wild, that is, "stinking" grapes which rotted before they were ripe.

3 We are asked by God to judge between him and Jerusalem, the people of God.

4 God did everything he could for the vine to produce a choice crop. Yet it only brought forth foul grapes.

5 God is going to teach his people a lesson. He will remove the hedge and break down the protective wall. They will then become vulnerable to enemy attacks.

6 God will no longer tend his vineyard, he will abandon it to be taken over by weeds and briars. He will no longer grace the land with rain. This is actually what happened after the Assyrian invasion.

28TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME **Is 25:6-10a**

On this mountain, that is, Mount Sion or Zion on which Jerusalem was founded, the Lord will provide for all peoples—not only the Jews. In the image of a rich banquet, the prophet describes the abundant blessings and the happiness the Messianic Kingdom will bring. It was on Mount Calvary in that city that Jesus the Messiah won such blessings poured out on the people at Pentecost and later distributed throughout the world.

"On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples."

What is this veil? It is the veil of ignorance, darkness and sorrow that covered all peoples. It is the veil of mourning inflicted by death. The Messiah will destroy this veil by the light of his gospel shining and enlightening all through his glorious resurrection. The paralyzing effect

of death is like a web rendering all fearful and helpless.

8 When the Messiah comes he will destroy death, which keeps the whole earth in a state of mourning. Easter Sunday morning and the appearance of the risen Christ will bring the prophet's words to fulfillment. The joy of the disciples at the sight of their risen Lord wipes away all their tears. When the Lord comes he will remove the "reproach" and disgrace of their former days of enslavement and captivity because of their sins. These will be remembered no more. This will truly come about—it is certain, because the Lord himself has said it.

9 When that day comes, God will manifest himself. It will then be said in all truth, "Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us!" Who could have believed that God became a human being who actually appeared in the flesh so that he could actually be seen? We can truly say of Jesus, "This is the Lord for whom we looked". We who have seen this prophesy realized in our Incarnate Christ must continue to be amazed over this astonishing reality.

"Let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!"
We have been saved from our sins and death and damnation as well.

"For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain."
God's protective hand will keep us out of harm's way. Nothing will ever interfere again with our peace and joy.

29TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME **Is 45:1, 4-6**

Cyrus was king of Persia (559-529 B.C.) and conqueror with Babylon (538 B.C.), who liberated the Jews, permitting them to return to their native land and to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.

1 Cyrus is called the Lord's anointed because he is God's agent to free the Jews from captivity. Originally only the Kings of Israel were called anointed. Cyrus was inspired by God to set the Jewish exiles free; he gave them permission to rebuild their temple and city, even returning the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple.

The prophet tells us that the Lord grasps Cyrus' right hand. He is the one who endowed this king with such military genius to conquer lands and subdue kings to his service. God is the one who empowered this king, "Opening doors before him and leaving the gates unbarred." He is the one giving Cyrus such astonishing success to his military campaigns.

4 It is for the sake of God's chosen people that God called Cyrus into his service. It is he, God, who called him by name and made him king, although he did not know the true God.

5 The Lord reveals that he alone is the true God and there is no other. He it is who gave Cyrus military power, although the king did not know him.

6 God put Cyrus in this position so that the gentiles and all peoples from all parts of the world might know that there is only one Lord—there is no other.

30TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME **Ex 22:20-26**

Aliens were foreigners who came to live in Israel. Since they were outsiders and without clan protection, they were vulnerable and often poor. They easily became victims of oppression. God commanded the Israelites not to oppress such people, reminding them how they were once slaves in a foreign land. God commands Israel to be hospitable to these unfortunate people.

21 God also expresses concern for widows and orphans. Any wrong done to the unprotected widow and orphan would incur his wrath as their avenging kinsman; for they had lost their protector and breadwinner. The economy depended on the male heads of the household. Widows and fatherless children were exposed to the greatest dangers.

22-23 If the weakest in society are wronged and they cry out to God, he will surely hear their cry. He will come to them in flaming anger and kill the oppressors so that their wives will be widows and their children orphans.

24 The law allowed interest to be taken from loans to foreigners (Deut 23:20-21), but not from fellow countrymen. Taking interest on a loan from a fellow Israelite, especially if such a person was needy, was sharply forbidden. To take interest from a person in distress would be to profit from another's misfortune.

25-26 The only pledge for payment of a loan that a poor man has is his cloak. He uses this to protect himself from the cold, and it serves as a blanket at night. Israelites are to return the poor man's cloak every night when it is needed. God commands them to have compassion on their fellow Israelites. God is a compassionate God and protects the needy.

THE COMMEMORATION OF ALL THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED (ALL SOULS DAY) Wis 3:1-9

The souls of the just are in the hand of God, that is, enjoying his divine protection. They are free from pain. Although they succumbed to physical death, they are very much alive and at peace: all their desires are being fulfilled in God.

3 The affliction of dying is only temporary. It effects the transition from earthly existence to heavenly life.

4 Death may seem to some to be a punishment, but it is the means to bring an end to mortal existence so we can assume an immortal one.

5 Their trials on earth were a holy discipline imposed by God for a final purification to prepare them for glory. They accepted their sufferings and remained faithful to God. They proved themselves worthy to spend their eternity with God in heaven.

6 As gold is purified from foreign elements mixed in with it, the soul is cleared from its attachments to earthly things and readied for heavenly life. As certain sacrifices are completely consumed by fire as an offering to God, so the soul is completely given over to God.

7 When God comes to visit these righteous (just) persons at the final judgment, they will shine with the light of his glory. The sparks given off by fire remind us of the glorious life that awaits those who remain faithful to God.

8 The just will reign with God forever, all caught up in his glorious life. Thus they will rule the world with him. This may also signify the triumph of the righteous over the wicked.

9 The truth of everything will finally be revealed to those who have been faithful. They will forever remain united to God in love. The grace and mercy of God are with those who have set themselves apart for him. God's loving care is ever with his elect, those he has chosen and who remain faithful to him.

THE DEDICATION OF THE LATERAN BASILICA

Ez 47:1-2, 8-9, 12

The prophet Ezekiel saw water flowing out from beneath the threshold of the temple toward the east ... The farther east the prophet goes, the greater the flow of water becomes. Each time it is measured, its depth increases dramatically until it becomes a torrent.

“Wherever the river flows, every sort of living creature that can multiply shall live”.

There is an abundance of fish. The life-giving waters flowing from the temple are so pure they even transform the Dead Sea into a fresh water lake teeming with fish. Fruit trees of every kind grow along both banks of the river, bearing fresh fruit each month. Their fruit is good for food and their leaves good for medicine. The wonderful and superabundant stream flowing from the temple, restoring to fertility traditionally arid ground, is symbolic of the return of the conditions of the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:10). Water signifies great blessings. This imagery looks towards a revitalized worship in a restored temple. Here we recall Jesus’ words, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn 2:19). Jesus is that new temple! And again he said, “Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. ... As Scripture says, ‘Rivers of living water will flow from within him’ (Jn 7:37-38).

We are those blessed with the abundant waters of the Spirit flowing from the open heart of Jesus which we receive in the Holy Eucharist (see Jn 19:34). How grateful we ought to be living as we are in the fullness of time. Ezekiel prophesied some six centuries before Christ where he was exiled in Babylonia. He was the first prophet to be called to prophesy outside the Holy Land.

33RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Prov 31:10, 19-20, 30-31

We see described here a worthy wife and mother. Her value is beyond any earthly treasure. Her husband is blessed beyond measure. He can freely entrust his heart to such a virtuous woman.

12 She is totally virtuous and can only bring him good all of his life.

13 She is very industrious and obtains wool and flax to make clothes with skillful hands.

19 She keeps herself busy all day from early in the morning till late at night making clothes for the family.

20 She is noted for her charity as she reaches out to the poor and the needy.

30 Whereas charm is deceptive and beauty fleeting, this strong and virtuous woman is very praiseworthy, for her life is spent in doing God’s will while referencing him in her heart.

31 She will be rewarded for her ceaseless labors. She will be greatly praised at the city gates as she displays all of the goods she has created.

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

Ez 34:11-12, 15-17

God is so disappointed in the human shepherds He placed over his people. They did not care for the “sheep” but abused them and treated them harshly. Therefore he promises that he himself will look after and tend his sheep.

12 God sorely regrets how the people were mistreated by the leaders he had appointed over them. He loves his people dearly and greatly desires to care for them himself. He will rescue them in every place they were scattered.

“I myself will pasture my sheep.”

Not only will God see to it that his people be well

fed, but he looks to the New Testament times when he will feed his people with himself in the Holy Eucharist. The Lord himself will give them rest in himself. He says, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). All the deepest yearnings in the human heart will be satisfied and rested when it comes into contact with the divine Jesus. These deepest desires are of a spiritual nature. Only the divine Spirit can fulfill them.

16 The Lord is concerned about meeting the needs of each one. He will seek out every one of those who have strayed and gotten lost. He will bind up the injured and heal the sick and shepherd them rightly. "*The sleek and the strong I will destroy*" refers to those with power who have fattened themselves by oppressing the other sheep.

17 God will judge between one sheep and another, between rams and goats. This refers to people of power and influence who were oppressing poorer Israelites. The Lord is concerned with social justice. God will fulfill his desire to tend his sheep by sending his Son to shepherd them. Jesus announced, "I am the good shepherd" (Jn 10:11).

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