



Understanding the Sunday Epistles

CYCLE B

by Father Conley Bertrand

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

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture selections are taken from the *New American Bible*,
© 1986 by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D. C.

Copyright © 2014, *Come, Lord Jesus! Inc.* All rights reserved. No part of this book may be
photocopied, reproduced, or transmitted in any form or by any means without written
permission of the *Come, Lord Jesus!* administrators.

Published by *Come, Lord Jesus! Inc.*

1804 WEST UNIVERSITY AVE

LAFAYETTE, LA 70506-2544

Phone: (337) 233-6277 FAX: (337) 233-6144

www.comelordjesus.com

First Printing: October 7, 2014

Feast of Our Lady of The Rosary

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EPISTLE COMMENTARIES: CYCLE B

First Sunday of Advent	1
Second Sunday of Advent.....	2
Third Sunday of Advent.....	3
Fourth Sunday of Advent	7
The Nativity of the Lord—Christmas	11
The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.....	12
Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God	15
The Epiphany of the Lord	17
The Baptism of the Lord	18
Second Sunday in Ordinary Time	19
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time	21
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time	22
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time	24
Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time	25
First Sunday of Lent	27
Second Sunday of Lent	28
Third Sunday of Lent	30
Fourth Sunday of Lent	31
Fifth Sunday of Lent.....	33
Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion.....	35
Easter Sunday—The Resurrection of the Lord	37
Second Sunday of Easter -Divine Mercy Sunday	38
Third Sunday of Easter	40
Fourth Sunday of Easter	41
Fifth Sunday of Easter	43
Sixth Sunday of Easter	44

TABLE OF CONTENTS—2

EPISTLE COMMENTARIES: CYCLE B

The Ascension of the Lord	46
Pentecost Sunday	47
The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity	48
The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ—Corpus Christi.....	50
Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	51
Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	52
Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	53
Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	55
Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	56
Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	58
Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	59
Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	61
Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	63
Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time	64
Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time	66
Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time	67
Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time	69
Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	71
Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time	72
Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time	74
Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time	75
Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time	77
Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time	78
Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time	80
All Saints.....	81
Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time	83
Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time	84
The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King	86
General Bibliography	90

1st Sunday of Advent

1 Cor 1:3-9

St. Paul opens his letter to the Corinthians, the Christian community in Corinth, Greece, with, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (3). This is the blessing he calls upon God to give his people: the favor of God, along with the peace which is given to them through Jesus, the risen Lord. This peace implies the forgiveness of sins and the experience of God’s presence: This fulfills the prophet’s words concerning the Messiah, “He shall be peace” (Mic 5:4).

St. Paul continues, “I give thanks to my God always on your account for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus” (4).

The apostle is a very grateful person. Rather than being absorbed in himself, he lives in gratitude to God. His is a God-centered life. He is grateful for the gifts that God has lavishly poured upon this young Christian community. These are the many charismatic gifts that have been richly bestowed on them because of their union with Jesus, their glorified Lord.

St. Paul specifies the graces he is referring to, “that in him you were enriched in every way, with all discourse and all knowledge” (5).

Before addressing the problems that are present among the Corinthians, St. Paul compliments them for their charismatic gifts of speech, such as wisdom and knowledge. In chapter 8, he will instruct them in the use of this knowledge regarding meat sacrificed to idols. The love of others must guide them in its use.

All of these blessings received, St. Paul explains, are “as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you” (6). All of this outpouring of charismatic gifts upon the community confirms Paul’s preaching about Christ. These spiritual gifts come from the exalted Christ who has been presented to them. They are signs of the veracity of his teaching. By this multitude of charismatic

gifts outpoured upon them by the Holy Spirit unleashed upon them by their glorious Lord, God is assuring them that everything Paul preached and taught them about Jesus is true.

St. Paul continues his writing, “so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (7).

The Corinthians have every grace needed to prepare themselves for Jesus’ coming. He will reveal himself once more, but then in his full splendor and power. “Behold”, St. John tells us, “he is coming amid the clouds, and every eye will see him” (Rev 1:7). “For just as lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be [in his day]” (Lk 17:24). “...the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him” (Mt 25: 31).

Paul reminds his people to await with expectation Jesus’ second coming or Parousia. That could happen at any moment. They, as all of us, must remain prepared and watchful.

St. Paul assures them and us, “He will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (8). How comforting for those who are worried about falling away. If they do their best to remain faithful, they can be certain that God will strengthen and support them to the very end. His whole reason for giving them his Son is to save them from sin and give them eternal life. He will keep them free from blame. If they remain close to Jesus, he will protect them from the evil one and keep them free from sin. They will then be able to welcome the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Day of Judgment.

The “day of the Lord” is an Old Testament expression signifying God’s fiery judgment when he appears to take vengeance on his enemies and vindicate his faithful followers (Joel 2: 30-32; Amos 5:18). St. Paul changes the Old Testament formula, “day of the Lord” to the “day of our Lord Jesus”, to identify the glorified Christ as the one who will come to judge the living and the dead (CCC 682).

St. Paul gives his people the assurance that “God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (9).

His hope for the blamelessness of the Corinthians on the Day of Judgment is based on God’s fidelity. For example, God says, “understand, then, that the Lord, your God, is God indeed, the faithful God who keeps his merciful covenant down to the thousandth generation toward those who love him and keep his commandments” (Deut 7:9). All of salvation history is a record of God’s faithfulness. It reaches its height in the mission of Jesus who is the Father’s “yes” to the divine promises (2 Cor 1:20).

God calls and invites his people to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ. He desires to live in close friendship and communion with us through our living in union with Jesus. We were joined to him by the Holy Spirit when we were baptized. He wants us to live in an intimate communion of knowledge and love with him. And we who are united to him are likewise united to each other in him. United to God and to each other by grace, prompts us to enter into a communion of fellowship with each other. Jesus had this in mind when he said, “I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one...” (Jn 17: 22-23).

2nd Sunday of Advent

2 Pet 3:8 - 14

“Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day” (8).

The early Christians expected Jesus’ return in glory during their life time. The last of the apostles died, however, and Jesus still had not returned. False teachers appeared on the scene to taunt and ridicule these Christians about the

unfulfilled promise of Jesus’ coming. The first part of this epistle is devoted to answering this problem.

First of all, God’s time is not the same as ours. He lives in eternity; we live in time. We live from moment to moment as time flies by. God lives in an eternal now. A thousand years for us is as one day for him (Ps 90: 2, 4). Only he knows when it will be the right time to appear and judge the living and the dead. Our experience of time disqualifies us from understanding how to count God’s eternity.

Our epistle continues to explain Jesus’ delay in returning, saying “The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard “delay”, but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (9).

For those who think Jesus’ delay in coming to earth again signifies his non-fulfillment of his promise they ought to realize that Jesus’ compassionate wisdom is concerned with sinners. He desires their conversion and readiness for his return. He wants no one to perish. So he patiently awaits their repentance before his return as judge of the living and the dead. Our Savior allows us time to experience for ourselves the bitter fruit of sin, prompting us to repentance and a change of heart for the better. The book of wisdom says of God, “you overlook the sins of men that they may repent...you spare all things, because they are yours, O Lord and lover of souls” (11: 23, 26).

Our epistle reassures us that, “...the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar and the elements will be dissolved by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be found out” (10).

The day of the Lord is judgment day at the end of the world. The fact that that day will come like a thief means that it will come suddenly and unexpectedly. The coming of the day of the Lord is asserted with certitude. The only thing unknown is when that day will occur.

Our epistle tells us that when the last day comes upon us, “the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar and the elements will be dissolved by fire”. The prophets envisioned the world’s destruction by fire. Zephaniah speaks of “the day of the Lord’s wrath, when in the fire of his jealousy all the earth shall be consumed. For he shall make an end, yes, a sudden end, of all who live on the earth” (1: 18).

St. Paul tells the Thessalonians that “at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his mighty angels, in blazing fire,” God will inflict “punishment on those who do not acknowledge God and on those who do not obey the gospel” (2 Thes 1: 7 – 8). Jesus, in his parable of the weeds, says that “The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. Just as weeds are collected and burned [up] with fire, so will it be at the end of the age” (Mt 13: 39-40).

At the coming of the Lord the whole created universe: the heavens, the elements, such as the stars and planets, and the earth will pass away in their present form. They will be tested and “found out” or burned. St. Paul explains that “the work of such will come to light, for the Day will disclose it. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire [itself] will test the quality of each one’s work” (1 Cor 3: 13).

Our epistle continues, “Since everything is to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be, conducting yourselves in holiness and devotion, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved in flames and the elements melted by fire” (11-12).

The end is coming at any moment. We will be judged according to the way we lived in obedience to God. We ought to be on our best behavior, holy and pleasing to God as we rely on his help. If we are pleasing to God and doing his will, we look forward to his coming and a favorable judgment. We will be rewarded with the eternal life of heaven. We ourselves will be transformed

into the bliss of God’s own likeness. Our good

lives hasten the Lord’s return. The only reason for his delay is our need for repentance. But if we have reformed our lives and await Jesus’ coming he will no longer have reason to delay.

“But according to his promise we await new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (13).

The fire of judgment will destroy the works of man’s sinful activity as well as what is part of this passing world. The good and tested part that remains will be transformed and adapted to our glorified bodies. “We await new heavens and a new earth” where only those who are perfectly righteous will live, “the spirits of the just made perfect” (Heb 12: 23). St. Paul explains that “creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God...creation itself [will] be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom 8: 19-21).

“Therefore, beloved, since you await these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace” (14).

Since we await Jesus’ appearance in his second coming as judge of the living and the dead, we want to live sinless lives and be holy and pleasing to him. We, therefore, begin to live in his presence even now, day by day, moment by moment, as his dearly beloved children.

3rd Sunday of Advent **1 Thes 5:16–24**

This Sunday is known as “Gaudete” (the Latin word for “Rejoice”) Sunday. The entrance antiphon announces the theme of the Mass as “Rejoice in the Lord always”, and explains why: because “the Lord is near. God is

lovingly present within our very hearts if we are in the state of grace; and we have free access to

him simply by adverting to him in faith. We come into contact with him in loving remembrance. We enter into communion with him through personal love; we receive his outpoured love and return that love with affection. We maintain this mutual, interpersonal communion with him throughout the day as we go about doing his will in loving remembrance.

God himself is our joy. His nearness to us through his indwelling presence fills our whole person with heavenly happiness. Our joyful experience of the indwelling God reminds us of the words of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity: "It seems to me that I have found my heaven here on earth, since heaven is God and God is in my soul." The time for us to celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation, which made all of this possible, is also very near.

The first reading expresses our theme of joy. Isaiah, the prophet who ministered to the people of God from 742-687 B.C., foretells the liberation of the chosen people from the the Babylonian exile which lasted 60 years, from 598-538 B.C. This liberation is meaningful to us because it foreshadows our being set free from the slavery to sin by the coming of the Messiah.

In poetical imagery, the prophet foretells a new exodus and a new creation when God delivers his people in joy. "The desert...will exult...rejoice and bloom...with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful song." As God's people, we will "see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God." We will experience the presence of God for ourselves.

What encouragement we are given! What an amazing love God has for us! That he would become one of us in the Incarnation, save us from sin by his awesome passion and death, give himself to us in the Holy Eucharist, and continue to be so close to us as to live within our very hearts! What love he shows us! How encouraging to us in our land of exile! So, take courage: "Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak, say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your

God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you." The Lord is near you to support you in all your trials, whether they are outside of you or inside, within your very ailing or oppressed person. He redeems you through your very sorrows and trials; through his own sufferings on earth he gives value to yours so that through them, "[you] are being transformed into his very image from glory to glory" (2 Cor 3:18).

Meanwhile, "Be patient [like] the farmer [who] waits for the precious fruit of the earth...Do not complain, brothers and sisters...Take as an example of hardship and patience...the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord."

We are already experiencing a foretaste of the Isaian prophecy: "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened": We already see the experience for ourselves the new world of God and the beauty of his spiritual kingdom.

"The ears of the deaf be cleared:" Now we can hear the word of God. The sin and anger or lust that obstructed our hearing has been forgiven and removed. We can now understand the word of God.

"Then will the lame leap like a stag": Our weakened moral condition has now been strengthened by the superabundant grace given us by Jesus' coming made so near in the Eucharist and his indwelling presence. We leap with joy in being able to overcome our sinful addictions.

"Then the tongue of the mute will sing": Now that we are filled with the joy of God in our hearts, we want to express it with song. We want to praise God in song for having redeemed us and for remaining so near to us in his joy-giving presence.

"Those whom the Lord has ransomed will return and enter Zion singing, crowned with everlasting joy; they will meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning will flee." The joy of being freed from sin by Jesus in his first coming in grace gives

us a foretaste of the perfect joy and glory that will be given us in his second coming: Zion will become heaven.

The Gospel brings us into the very presence of Jesus who is fulfilling the Isaian prophecy. In it, Jesus the Messiah has arrived. His various miracles of healing demonstrate that the Kingdom of God, and its transforming power, has arrived. We ourselves have experienced its healing power, for example, through the forgiveness of sins and the joy of living a virtuous life in the presence of God. But John the Baptist is no longer on the scene. He is in jail. "Herod [Antipas] was the one who had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother, Philip, whom he had murdered. John had said to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' Herodias harbored a grudge against him and wanted to kill him..." (Mk 6:17-19).

"When John...heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciple to Jesus with this question, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another.'" The term, "the one who is to come", refers to the Messiah. This phrase is taken from the last of the prophets, Malachi, who said, "Lo, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me. And suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek, and the messenger of the covenant whom you desire. Yes, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts" (Mal 3:1). So the people understand this passage as referring to the Messiah; he is the "one who is to come" as the prophet announced.

John knew that Jesus was the Messiah. When he baptized Jesus in the Jordan River, "the heavens were opened [for him] and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'" (Mt 3:16-17). So why does John send his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come...?"

John's message had been one of doom (Mt 3:7-12). The ax was at the root of the tree; the winnowing process was already beginning; the divine fire of cleansing judgment had begun to burn. Perhaps John was thinking: "When is Jesus going to go into action? When is he going to blast his enemies? When is the day of God's divine retribution going to begin?" Jesus is not the kind of Messiah John expected him to be.

If Jesus is the Messiah, as John believed him to be, why was he, John, languishing in prison while

tyrants like Herod Antipas were still free? When will the Messianic Kingdom be inaugurated, as it should, in a burst of power and with the terrible might of the wrath of God, crushing all opposition and establishing right order? The Baptist's question, then, came to this: "Since you are the Messiah, why are you not acting like the Messiah?" Perhaps John, in his lonely prison cell, just needed, anew, to hear Jesus' confirmation of his belief in him as Messiah.

Another reason why John would send his disciples to Jesus is so that they could meet him in person and see for themselves what he was like. Then they too would become his disciples, just as Andrew and John had. The answer Jesus gave John's disciples are the signs of the arrival of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God given by Isaiah in chapter 35, which we heard in our first reading. They present another aspect of the Messiah's ministry. They expand upon John's narrow view of on-coming judgment. He focused on the Messiah as judge and punishment of evildoers. In reality, this will not occur until the Second coming. The Isaian passage focuses on the fact that the Messiah comes to enlighten the blind, heal the lame, cleanse the lepers, give hearing to the deaf, raise the dead to life, and bring good news to the poor. Jesus could be seen performing all of these different acts of compassion.

One would expect that raising the dead would be the high point in the list of blessings given

by the Messiah. Instead, it is that “the poor have the good news proclaimed to them”. The poor includes not only those who are financially or culturally deprived, but also all of human kind. All of us are poor in being and deprived in some fashion. We are all in need of the good news contained in the Gospel teaching of Jesus. We are all deprived and oppressed in some way or other. Jesus comes to redeem us from every adverse and debilitating situation in life. He experienced it all in his life; his sufferings reached a high point in his crucifixion and death; but he turned it all into the glory of the resurrection and life everlasting. Jesus is the model of what will happen to us if we accept God’s will in the human condition the way Jesus did. Through it all, we are being transformed into his very image from glory to glory.

Jesus concludes his message to John and his disciples with, “And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.” John had not grasped the whole truth about Jesus. John preached repentance to avoid the severe judgment of the coming Messiah. He had missed the Isaian prophecies of the Servant of the Lord who comes to suffer for his people and take their sins upon himself (see Isaiah 52:13-53:12). So Jesus says to John, “Maybe I am not doing the things you expected me to do. But the forces of evil are being defeated—not by irresistible power, but by merciful love. Sometimes a man can be offended at Jesus because Jesus contradicts his ideas of what religion should be. Jesus is saying, “Do not disbelieve because your expectations have not been met.”

Once John’s disciples left, Jesus began to speak in praise of John the Baptist. In taking the trouble to go and see John, it was not to see “a reed swayed by the wind”, that is, a weak and fickle, vacillating person, spineless as a reed swaying with every breeze; rather, they had come to see a highly disciplined, penitential ascetic dressed in camel’s hair, sustained by a very meager diet.

John was a prophet, a man with a message from God, with courage to deliver that message; he was filled with God’s wisdom and the unflinching

courage to confront the evils of the day. That is why people flocked to him. But John was even more than that. He is the precursor of the one who would bring in the new and final age. Jesus declared that John was nothing less than the divine herald whose duty and privilege it was to announce the coming of the Messiah. John was nothing less than the herald of God; and no man could have a greater task than that. John is the one, Jesus tells us, who fulfills the prophecy, “Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you.”

It is significant that Jesus changed the quote from “me” (God is speaking of himself) to “you” to identify his (Jesus’) own coming with that of “the Lord” in Malachi. That is why Jesus can say of John, “Among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist.” John’s mission is unique and incomparable; he brings the Old Testament to a close and introduces the new as he ushers in Jesus, the Messiah and the Son of God. His preaching prepared the people for Jesus.

And “yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” John’s preeminent greatness lies in his function of announcing the imminence of the kingdom. But to be in the kingdom is so great a privilege that the least who is in it is greater than the Baptist.

It is a testimony to the greatness and all importance of the kingdom that, since, however great his personal merits and his function, John the Baptist stands only on its threshold; the least in the kingdom is greater than he.

Jesus is contrasting the era of the Old Testament to that of the New: the era of the kingdom of God ushered in by Jesus immeasurably transcends that which preceded and prepared for it. We in the kingdom have been flooded with the grace of the paschal mystery, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the full revelation of the New Testament; we have been privileged to see the mystery of the Resurrection of Jesus

and to know about the resurrection of the body and life everlasting; we have the dignity and the privilege of free access to the seven sacraments, especially that of the Holy Eucharist. The mercy of Jesus is readily available to us in the sacrament of Penance. John the Baptist did not even know about such spiritual riches in the kingdom of God, much less have access to them.

So you can begin to see the dignity and privilege that are ours in belonging to the kingdom of God given us by Jesus. John the Baptist died a martyr before all of these became available. Yet John the Baptist is a great saint, much holier than we are.

4th Sunday of Advent **Rom 16: 25-27**

St. Paul closes his letter to the Romans with one great act of praise of God. This is called a doxology through which he gives special glory to God.

He begins with, “To him who can strengthen you” (25). St. Paul gives glory to God who is his source of strength. He constantly drew power from God through prayer. That is the only way he was able to persevere through the many hardships he endured while ministering to hostile groups. His enlightened faith kept him connected to God. Paul knew from experience what the prophet Isaiah expressed, “My strength and my courage is the Lord” (Is 12: 2).

Our passage continues, “according to my Gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ”. “My Gospel” is the good news of Jesus as St. Paul understood and preached it. He was especially called by Jesus after he had risen from the dead to be an apostle. Paul’s experience of Jesus was quite different from that of the other apostles. His meeting the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus left him with the experience of being “in Christ”. His knowledge of Jesus as Risen was a lived experience. His “proclamation of Jesus” would bear his own

personal touch. Paul understood the Gospel as “the power of God for the salvation of every man who believes” (Rom 1: 16). Similarly, his lasting experience of the Risen Christ influenced Paul to proclaim Jesus as “the power of God” (1 Cor 1: 24). Jesus was very much present to Paul on a continuous basis. Just as Paul was designated to “see the Righteous One” (Acts 22: 14). He helped us understand that so are we. This is his Gospel, the good news Paul proclaimed: “all of us [are] gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord....God has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God [shining] on the face of [Jesus] Christ” (2 Cor 3: 18; 4: 6). These are examples of “My (Paul’s) Gospel” and “the proclamation of Jesus Christ”.

Our text continues, “According to the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages”.... Jesus fulfills and manifests God’s plan kept secret until now. Many generations passed since the creation of man, yet God’s plan for the salvation was not revealed. But now, God is revealing it to his holy ones (Col 1: 26). “God chose to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; it is Christ in you, the hope for glory” (Col 1: 27). This mystery “has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph 3: 4-6).

Our epistle continues, “but now manifested through the prophetic writings and according to the command of the eternal God, made known to all nations to bring about the obedience of faith” (26).

Many of the writings of the prophets looked forward to the coming of Messianic times and the transformation of society and of the world when the Messiah arrived. His actual arrival throws light on these passages and what they were expecting to happen when his kingdom would get established. These prophets used images from the visible and physical world to convey the spiritual benefits made available through the presence of the Messiah. The prophetic writings presented in the first readings during Advent exemplify

this. One will suffice to show how the “revelation of the mystery...[is] now manifested through the prophetic writings”. Isaiah said, “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vindication by our God... the Lord God [will] make justice and praise spring up before all the nations” (Is 61: 1-2, 11).

It was the eternal God who inspired and commanded such revelations to give the people hope as they awaited better times. St. Paul himself was among those that God commanded to reveal the hidden mystery. He says, “God... at the proper time revealed his word in the proclamation with which I was entrusted by the command of God our savior” (Ti 1: 2-3).

All of these revelations were and are “to bring about the obedience of faith” (26). This faith comes from hearing the word of God (Rom 10: 17). Through the word, God stirs a person’s heart to faith in him. “Whoever believes in the Son of God has this testimony within himself” (1 Jn 5: 10). Such a person then entrusts himself to God and his words. He obeys God and his will expressed through his word. Faith then prompts a person to submit himself to God in obedience to his will. This obedient faith connects a person to God who then begins to live in communion with him. Thus he walks in the light, as Jesus expressed it, “Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn 8: 12).

Ourepistleendswith, “to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever. Amen” (27).

St. Paul is caught up in the wisdom of God through which he saves both Jew and Gentile (See Rom 11: 11-24, 30-32). He breaks out in praise, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Rom 11: 33). Neither St. Paul nor we are capable of giving adequate thanks and praise to God. We must join the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord to give God due glory for the

wonders he has accomplished for us. We unite ourselves to Jesus in his self-gift to the Father on the cross by which he expressed utter thanks and praise to his Father for his eternal Sonship which he receives continuously from the Father. Jesus continues his glorification of the Father eternally in the mystery of the resurrection as risen Lord. The fact that Mary “was found with child through the Holy Spirit” means that Jesus has no human father. God alone is his Father through the action of his Holy Spirit.

“Joseph, her husband, since he was a righteous man, decided to divorce her quietly.” Notice, that although they were simply engaged, Joseph is already said to be Mary’s “husband”. The law (Deut 22:21-23) called for death by stoning for adultery even if the couple had not yet begun to cohabit. And Joseph was a righteous man: he was obedient to the law. Yet no such sin could be proven against Mary. St. Joseph would solve the problem by ending the engagement before two witnesses without stating the reason in public.

“According to some of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, Joseph wanted to put ‘[Mary] away privately,’ not because he was ignorant of the Virginal Conception and suspected her of adultery, but because he already knew she had conceived by the Holy Spirit and felt unworthy to live in her presence. In his Commentary on St. Matthew’s gospel, St. Thomas [Aquinas] summarizes the argument as follows: ‘Joseph had no suspicion of adultery, for he was well aware of Mary’s chastity. He had read Scripture that a virgin would conceive...[H]e also knew that Mary was descended from David. It was easier, therefore, for him to believe that this had been fulfilled in her than that she had committed fornication. And so, regarding himself as unworthy to live under the same roof with someone of such sanctity, he wanted to put her away privately, as Peter said, “Leave me, Lord, for I am a sinful man” (Lk 5:8)” (Cradle of Redeeming Love, by John Saward, p.205).

“[T]he angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be

afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.” When Scripture attributes the conception of Jesus to the Holy Spirit, it does so because that conception is an operation of God’s love; and the Holy Spirit is the Love of the Father and the Son. The heavenly Father is the only Father of Jesus. He possesses the divine nature from eternity through his generation by God the Father. “And when God in his wisdom and love chooses by his own power to produce in the womb of Mary the effect that is naturally produced by male seed, that effect is called the miracle of the Virginal Conception. In relation to the matter supplied by the Mother, the conception of the Son is natural, for, like every other child, his body is fashioned out of her blood; but in relation to the active principle, the conception is miraculous, for the maternal matter is fertilized, not by male seed, but by the Holy Spirit.” (Cradle of Redeeming Love, p.200).

In the second reading, St. Paul speaks of the “the gospel about [God’s] Son descended from David according to the flesh” -- not only legally. Jesus is connected to King David first of all through his mother, Mary. The Fathers of the Church, such as St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Irenaeus, St. Justin Martyr and Tertullian, have no doubt: our Lord is “of the seed of David by the birth He has from Mary”. St. Justin Martyr, who lived in the second century, says that the Son of God is “born, by the will of the Father, of a virgin of the race of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, and of the stock of David.” St. Leo calls our Lady “the royal Virgin of David’s stock.”

“Jesse is the rood, David the tree, Mary the branch and Jesus the flower the branch brought forth.

“According to the law, a man must marry within his own tribe (see Nm 36:6f). Thus, if Joseph is of the house and lineage of David, then so, too, is Mary, and so, too, through Mary, is Jesus” (Cradle of Redeeming Love, p.287-288).

But the Gospel linked Jesus to David through

his legal father, Joseph, because in Jewish law, ancestry was counted only through the father--in this case, the adopting father.

Whichever way we look at it, we see that Nathan’s Messianic prophecy is being fulfilled: God had told David through Nathan, “I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm... Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever” (2 Sam 7:12, 16). This prophecy is fully realized in Jesus, son of David, whose kingship will be established forever through the mystery of the resurrection.

The Gospel text continues, “She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” Joseph shows that he is adopting the child by naming him. And yet it is really God who is naming this child. Jesus is really his own son. The name tells us who the person is. Jesus means “Yahweh saves”. In Jesus, God himself is saving his people in person, that is, as the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

Joseph is told why he must name the child “Jesus”: “because he will save his people from their sins.” God is stating very explicitly from the very beginning that Jesus’ mission is a spiritual one--not a political one--he is being sent to save his people from their sins--not from Roman domination.

St. Matthew sees all of this as the fulfillment of Scripture. He writes, “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel.’” This prophecy was uttered more than 700 years before Christ. We read it in our first reading. St. Matthew gives the Hebrew text a new dimension of reality and affirms the virgin birth initiating the Messianic age. In the Hebrew version, the word “alma”, meaning a young woman is used to translate the word virgin. But St. Matthew followed the Greek Septuagint translation. The word “parthenos”, which means “virgin” in

the strict sense of the term is used. So Mary, in conceiving Jesus as a virgin, is seen as fulfilling this prophecy. Moreover, the text tells us, “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son...” Even in giving birth, she remains a virgin. That is why we speak of Mary as “Blessed Mary ever virgin.”

The name “Emmanuel” that is given tells us about this child: he is God living and acting among us, bringing salvation to all by saving us from sin. Jesus realizes the presence of God among his people in an entirely new way. Jesus is present to his people, not only when he walked briefly upon the earth, but especially now through his Church, particularly in the Eucharist where he is God with us, nourishing us and transforming us into divinity.

“When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.” Joseph was an obedient man. He lived by faith--not by feeling. He accepted the explanation of the angel, no matter how unusual it was. He believed the message and cooperated with God’s plan, becoming a great saint in the process. As guardian of the Holy Family, he was perfected in virtue and became patron of the universal Church.

I feel a need to review the Church’s teaching regarding Mary’s virginity. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, following Scripture and Sacred Tradition, places considerable focus on Mary’s virginity and explains why. Here follows some excerpts from the statements made by the Catechism.

496: Jesus was conceived solely by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, affirming also the corporeal aspect of this event: Jesus was conceived “by the Holy Spirit without human seed.” The Fathers see in the virginal conception the sign that it truly was the Son of God who came in humanity like our own.

497: The Gospel accounts understand the virginal conception of Jesus as a divine work

that surpasses all human understanding and possibility: [a human father would cast doubt]. That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit,” said the angel to Joseph about Mary his fiancée. The Church sees here the fulfillment of the divine promise given through the prophet Isaiah: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son” (Is 7:14).

499: The deepening of faith in the virginal motherhood led the Church to confess Mary’s real and perpetual virginity even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made man. In fact, Christ’s birth “did not diminish his mother’s virginal integrity but sanctified it.” And so the liturgy of the Church celebrates Mary as *Aeiparthenos*, the “Ever-virgin”.

The Catechism further explains why God wanted his Son to be born of a virgin.

503: Mary’s virginity manifests God’s absolute initiative in the Incarnation. [A human father would cast doubt.] Jesus has only God as Father.

504: Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary’s womb because he is the New Adam, who inaugurates the new creation [Like the first Adam, Jesus comes directly from God.]...From “his fullness” as the head of redeemed humanity “we have all received, grace upon grace”.

505: By his virginal conception, Jesus, the New Adam, ushers in the new birth of children adopted in the Holy Spirit through faith [a purely spiritual conception]...The acceptance of this life is virginal because it is entirely the Spirit’s gift to man. The spousal character of the human vocation in relation to God is fulfilled perfectly in Mary’s virginal motherhood. Here we recall God’s words to his people: “For he who has become our husband in your Maker; his name is the Lord of hosts...(Is 54:5).

506: Mary is a virgin because her virginity is the sign of her faith “unadulterated by any doubt,” and of her undivided gift of herself to God’s will.

507: At once virgin and mother, Mary is the symbol and the most perfect realization of the Church: “the Church indeed...by receiving the word of God in faith becomes herself a mother. By preaching and Baptism she brings forth sons, who are conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of God, to a new and immortal life. She herself is a virgin, who keeps in its entirety and purity the faith she pledged to her spouse.”

The Nativity of the Lord — Christmas Titus 2:11-14

Our epistle begins with these encouraging words, “The grace of God has appeared, saving all” (11).

The Grace or favor of God has appeared in the Person of Jesus when he became human. “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1: 14). The beloved disciple, who had heard, seen and looked upon Jesus with his own eyes and touched him with his own hands (1 Jn 1: 1-2) felt compelled to add, “and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1: 14). John, the evangelist, had the privilege of experiencing the glorious, divine qualities shining in Jesus’ human features. He encountered the grace of God incarnate in his very own person. What a wondrous grace! And we have this unmerited privilege as well! Through the virtue of faith we also are able to be with the risen, glorified Jesus into whom we were baptized (Rom 6: 3). We can live in his presence continuously and be sanctified by its radiance. The only disposition we need is purity of heart to be able to live in intimate fellowship with him—just as John the beloved disciple did. Glory to the Father who has made this indescribable grace available to all of us who desire it!

Our epistle continues, “and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age” (12). In becoming human, Jesus showed us by example how a son of God lives. We meditate on him and his

life as the gospels present him to us. Interiorly his Spirit trains us through our consciences “to reject godless ways and worldly desires”. He sharpens our wits so we can discern more keenly what leads us to holiness and what leads us astray. By the virtue of temperance, Jesus’ Spirit teaches us moderation and self-restraint towards the pleasurable according to God’s will. In this way, God remains at the center of our desires rather than his delightful gifts. Similarly, the virtue of justice moves us to give everyone his or her due, including God. Grace prompts us to relate properly to everyone with whom we associate. The virtue of piety inclines and trains us to behave devoutly and in a childlike manner toward God. It also teaches us to respect articles of devotion such as sacramentals. For example, we have a special reverence for the crucifix.

Our epistle continues, “as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ” (13).

That lowly, poor and helpless child we worship in the manger is really our great God, attractively appearing to us in the helpless form of a child. In this way we are full of loving wonder toward him, free from any and all fear. We are drawn toward him, wanting to approach and caress him.

Our epistle concludes, “...who gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people as his own, eager to do what is good” (14).

Jesus’ self-gift to us through his incarnation, suffering and death was a divine act of love. He wanted to save us from unrestrained dissipation leading to personal disintegration. Through the gift of his Spirit, Jesus endows us with moral fiber for self-possession in God. We can then have a purposeful life, centered on pleasing God by doing his will. Thus we are able to enter into communion with God and enjoy fruition of divinity itself.

Jesus’ redemptive suffering and death cleanses us from all sin when we, in faith, open ourselves to his redeeming love. His great desire is to free us from the sin that stands between us and God to obstruct

union and communion with him. We have but to surrender and entrust ourselves to his saving grace. He will then free us to be receptive to divine love and live a life of joyful communion with the living God. Having become God's own, we then are impelled to do what is good. We become true children of God like Jesus who "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38).

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

Col 3:12-21

St. Paul is writing to the Colossians from his imprisonment in Rome. He tells them to put to death whatever is sinful in their lives. Through baptism they have "taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self" (Col 3: 9-10). Our epistle today describes how the new self conducts itself.

Our reading begins with, "12Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, 13bearing with one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do."

Christians are God's specially chosen ones. He calls us out of love to be his own special people, set apart and close to him. We are particularly dear to God and loved by him. He loved us into being. We share his very life. This divine life that we share with God through his sanctifying grace has supernatural powers, called virtues. We share divine qualities through them. They incline us to act virtuously, the way Jesus lived. We are motivated to live holy lives both because we are God's beloved children called to be holy and because we are equipped and called by God to do so. These various moral virtues are enumerated: "Heartfelt compassion": we have an in-depth feeling for and with others' distress and pain, inclining us to want to alleviate them. "Kindness": we relate to one another in a pleasant manner, with respectful goodness and affection.

"Humility": we have a sense of our own lowliness

and dependence on God, which inclines us to serve others and give God the glory.

"Gentleness": we deal with each other in a mildly manner rather than harshly. We relate moderately and delicately—sweetly.

"Patience": we suffer the painful differences and hardships involved in relating to one another. We are sanctified in this patient endurance as we are being transformed into Jesus' image and likeness.

We bear with one another's faults and sins. We are aware of our own sinfulness and how God continually forgives us. So we are prompted to forgive other's offenses against us.

14"And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection."

Love informs all of the moral virtues that were mentioned above. They also flow from love (compare 1 Cor 13: 4-7). Love holds them together and perfects them. Love is a power that assists these other virtues and brings them to completion. Thus, they are carried out to the end and to a perfect degree. Love unites us to God: "God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him" (1 Jn 4: 16). Selfless-love flows from God enabling us to know God: "Love is of God; and everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God" (1 Jn 4:7).

What a wondrous encouragement to love! Our ability to love is a sign that we are being born of God who is love.

Our epistle continues: 15"and let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body and be thankful".

Our hearts were freed from divisiveness when our sins were forgiven by the shedding of Jesus' blood. Now they are at one within themselves and can again experience God's presence as peace. Peace is a divine quality. God revealed his name to Gideon as "Yahweh-shalom", that is, God is peace. Through God's peaceful presence, Jesus keeps our

hearts in an ordered tranquility. At peace within ourselves, we tend to radiate that peace to others. Established in the peaceful righteousness of God, we relate rightly and peacefully to one another. Such peaceful righteousness unifies us into one harmonious body, each member caring for the other.

When we reflect upon God's endless gifts to us, we cannot but be a grateful people. This attitude of thankfulness to God enables us to live God-centered lives and escape self-centeredness. We then live out of ourselves and in God.

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

It is important that we take God's word into our hearts. The word contains and reveals the righteousness of God for our salvation (Rom 1: 16-17). We must consume and devour God's word like the prophet Jeremiah: God's word became his joy and the happiness of his heart (Jer 15: 16). God's word contains and reveals his great commandment of love. He commands us to “Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you...Bind them at your wrist as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the door post of your houses and on your gates” (Deut 6: 6, 8-9). We must keep God's word constantly before our eyes. We must actually consume that word, to “eat the scroll” as the prophet Ezekiel was told to do (Ez 3:1-4; See Rev 10: 9-10). God commands us also to “take into your heart all my words that I speak to you” (Ez 3: 10). And now St. Paul repeats that command to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly”. Thus, we will be able to “teach and admonish one another in all wisdom”.

St. Paul also challenges us to put these sacred words into song so that we can sing to God and one another with words inspired by the Holy Spirit. Thus we will use every opportunity to speak and sing with God's inspired words so that we can integrate them into our lives. In this way

we will use God's word to praise him in song as the psalmist did: “Rejoice, you just, in the Lord; praise from the upright is fitting. Give thanks to the Lord on the harp; on the ten-stringed lyre offer praise. Sing to God a new song; skillfully play with joyful chant” (Ps 33: 1-3).

Our epistle continues, 17“and whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him”.

We love Jesus, our Redeemer. We owe our all to him. We were created through him, in his image. And he saved us from our sins that separated us from God. We want to do everything good out of love for him. We direct every thought, word and action toward him, motivated by our love for him. We do God's will for him, to please him. All is directed to his praise and glory. Thus, we live in communion with him. And he gives eternal value to all of our thoughts and actions. Of ourselves we cannot give adequate thanks to the Father for the endless gifts that are constantly being showered upon us. So we join ourselves to Jesus “who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God” (Heb 9: 14) to give thanks to God. This is particularly true when we are celebrating Mass and joining the Incarnate Lord Jesus and giving thanks to the Father through Jesus' self-offering in the paschal mystery.

“Doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” also means that we remain in the divine name and presence. Jesus is one with the Father in the Spirit as Jesus explained, “I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you” (Jn 14: 20). We remain constantly united to him and aware that we are in him and he is in us. In this way, we do everything within the divine name, in God, in the risen Jesus, and in the divine presence.

Our epistle continues, 18“Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord. 19Husbands, love your wives, and avoid any bitterness toward them”.

The kind of subordination that St. Paul speaks of here is not the kind lived in pagan society where the husband ruled with absolute tyranny. He balances this headship here with love, which avoids inconsiderate behavior that is hurtful and demeaning. That kind of love is like that of Jesus. St. Paul tells the Ephesians, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her....So [also] husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself” (Eph 5: 25-26, 28). A wife whose husband loves her as Jesus loves the church would not find it difficult to subordinate herself to such a loving husband. St. Paul expresses the relationship between husband and wife more clearly in his letter to the Ephesians. He says to the couple, “Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body. As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything” (Eph 5: 21-24).

St. Paul speaks of a mutual subordination that takes place in marriage, rather than a one sided domination. It is true that normally the husband is equipped with natural leadership qualities so that the ultimate authority rests on him. But in the ordinary course of life there needs to be a mutual interpersonal dependence and subordination, as the couple relies on each other for the different talents and gifts that each possesses. The subordination of the wife to the husband “as to the Lord” brings the relationship to a supernatural level of faith. The wife must see Christ in her husband. Her submissiveness then fosters self-effacement in the presence of Jesus. Thus she overcomes pride and self-centeredness, grows in humility and self-effacement, and opens herself to an outpouring of divine grace into her heart.

The husband is called to the kind of love Jesus had for his bride, the church, in the exercise of his headship. He is wise, considerate and self-

sacrificing. He spends himself indefatigably for the love of his wife. The couple vies with each other in loving and sacrificing themselves for each other in mutual self-gift.

Our epistle concludes, 20“Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing to the Lord. 21Fathers, do not provoke your children, so they may not become discouraged”.

Scripture asserts that it is God who gives parents authority over their children. “God sets a Father in honor over his children; a mother’s authority he confirms over her sons” (Sir 3:2). God richly rewards those who obey their parents (Sir 3: 3-6, 14). Even the adolescent Jesus, the God-man, who was experiencing a sense of independence, went down to Nazareth with his mother and foster father, and was “obedient to them” (Lk 2: 51).

In this way, children learn submissiveness to authority. This virtue of obedience unites them to God from whom they draw divine grace for the practice of virtue. The submissiveness involved helps them overcome pride and self-centeredness. This virtue unites them to their parents. Thus, they are open to receive the human wisdom which their parents learned from their many years of life’s experience. This union of love with their parents fosters union with God so that they continue to grow in the divine virtue of love.

Finally, obedience prepares the children to live peacefully in society where they will have other forms of authority over them. St. Paul teaches, “Let every person be subordinate to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God” (Rom 13: 1). This kind of subordination will come easily to those who have been trained by obedience in family life.

Parents must be reasonable in the demands they make of their children. They must not be abusive and overbearing. Love rather than harshness must prevail. Children need a firm, persistent, loving support in their learning to practice virtue. They need a steady oversight that will help them

see things through and accomplish the tasks assigned them. Thus, they will grow in virtue and strength. A sporadic and overly demanding harshness will not accomplish this important aspect of the children's formation. More than anything else they need a faithful, strong, loving presence to guide, correct and teach them. They are as yet weak and imperfect while young and still developing. This wisdom and strength required at this time of formation demands great virtue on the part of parents. Their own virtuous performance will be put to the test.

Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, The Mother of God

Gal 4:4-7

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

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

Moreover, in the Eucharist, we take in the very mystery of the God made man into our very persons. In faith we draw the divine life from the Son of God given to us. We assimilate the innocence of holy childhood to live innocent lives, lives free from sin. All the graces of the mysteries of Jesus' sinless human life are available for our assimilation.

"Fullness of Time"—2nd Reading

For centuries, God was preparing the chosen

people, gracing holy men and women; prophets spoke God's word to ready the people. Finally, time was brought to completion when Mary became pregnant with eternity, i.e. the eternal Son of God, Jesus, God-made-man.

So now, time has been sanctified by the presence of the Son of God. It has reached a new fullness. Time has become enhanced, enriched, elevated and eternalized. We use time to be sanctified and grow into eternal life. We pray that we use every moment of time well—to draw eternal, spiritual profit from it.

We must enter into communion with God through faith expressed as prayer. That is how we assimilate the divine life so that "we are being transformed into his very image from glory to glory" (2 Cor 3:18). The Eternal life of God becomes our own. God gives us a participation in his own divine life so that we actually begin to live the supreme life of God. We come to know and experience for ourselves the very blissful life of God himself (see Jn 17:3).

Happy New Year!

The Church has the power to give you a holy and therefore a happy new year. Jesus said, "I make all things new" (Rev 21:5).

Through priestly ordination and Holy Orders, we share the priesthood of Jesus, the eternal priest. We have the power therefore in the sacrament of Penance to remove the heavy burden of sin that weighs you down. We can take away this oppressive weight and give you the joy of the children of God.

In the Mass we have power to give you Jesus himself, in the Holy Eucharist, giving you divine energy to live a supernatural life.

We give you the living word of God as interpreted by sacred Tradition and the teaching authority of the Church, giving you power to actually live that word. Thus you will be given the power to live a "happy new year".

Finally, we have the power to bless you, i.e. to call God's favor down upon you.

The first reading tells us that the Lord told his priests of the Old Testament how they should bless his people:

“The Lord bless you and keep you” i.e., give you physical well-being, health and protection.

“The Lord let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you” i.e., smile favorably upon you and give you prosperity, material and spiritual.

“The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace” i.e., peace/shalom: a word that summarizes all the blessings: health, security, prosperity, etc.

“So shall they invoke my name ... and I will bless them”.

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

The sacrament of Holy Orders gives priests a participation in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. We act in the person of Christ the head, “*in persona Christi Capitis*”.

Listen to what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says by quoting Pope Pius XII:

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

So when the priest blesses you, it is Christ himself who is blessing you through the Sacrament of the priesthood. It is up to you to open your heart in faith to receive that blessing. Through faith, you contact Christ himself. Without this receptive faith, the blessing will not reach or affect you.

Like Jesus, we extend our hand(s) to bless you. But, we end with the sign of the cross through

which Jesus won our salvation and all of the blessings we receive.

Because of the New Testament revelation, we can also be more explicit in calling upon God. He is not only “Lord” or “Yahweh”; he has revealed himself as Father, as Son and as Holy Spirit. So we invoke the Blessed Trinity in our blessing.

Not only do we bless you, God’s people; we also bless objects such as homes, cars, etc. so we will use these according to God’s will and so he will protect them or allow them to be a grace for us.

We also bless sacramentals, religious objects such as candles, scapulars, crucifixes, holy water, medals, etc. These little signs are meant to stir faith in us; they remind us of God and his saints whose intercession we seek. All of these stir faith and incite us to prayer; they remind us of God and call us to be receptive to his constant outpoured love.

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

The Epiphany of the Lord

Eph 3: 2-3, 5-6

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

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

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

St. Paul is very much taken up with the mystery that Jesus revealed to him. He is intrigued with God's mysterious plan to save the nations along with the Jews. That mystery was kept hidden in the mind of God from all eternity until these New Testament times.

He says, "It was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (5). Thus St. Paul considered his being called to reveal this mystery a unique grace and privilege. St. Paul goes on to explain what this mystery is, "that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (6).

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

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

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

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

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

St. Paul is now explaining "the mystery of God, Christ" (Col 2: 2-3). That mysterious hidden plan of God that Paul has been commissioned to reveal is to unite Jew and Gentile in Christ. Jesus reconciles

and unites them all in himself. All are redeemed by the shedding of his blood. Through baptism all are united to him and to each other. They become one body in him who is their savior and head. Faith, not the law, is what unites them to him. Through this faith they draw divine life. “Those who have faith are children in Abraham...Consequently, those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham who had faith...You are Abraham’s descendant, heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3: 7, 9, 29). “Gentiles are coheirs [with the Jews], members of the same body [of Christ], and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph 3: 6).

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

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

The Baptism of the Lord

Acts 10: 34-38

“Peter proceeded to speak to those gathered in the house of Cornelius saying, ‘In truth, I see that God shows no partiality’” (34). Peter came to this conclusion that God is not more partial to one nation, the Jews, than to another (the Gentiles). He came to this realization by divine revelation. He received a vision that made him understand that all foods are clean (Acts 10: 9-16). “What God has made clean,” he was told, “you are not to call profane” (Acts 10: 15). Furthermore, the

Holy Spirit commanded Peter to accompany the three men sent by Cornelius, a Gentile centurion. Upon arrival, Peter explained, “...God has shown me that I should not call any person profane or unclean” (Acts 10: 28). As Peter was speaking to Cornelius and his relatives and friends who had gathered, “...the holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the word. The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit should have been poured out on the Gentiles also...Then Peter responded, ‘Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these peoples, who have received the Holy Spirit even as we have?’ He ordered them to be baptized” (Acts 10: 44-48). Peter explained the whole scenario to those who objected to his association with Gentiles. When they heard his explanation, “they stopped objecting and glorified God, saying, ‘God has then granted life-giving repentance to the Gentiles too’” (Acts 11: 18). Only this divine intervention could have solved this difficult question regarding opening the Christian faith to uncircumcised Gentiles.

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

“Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him” (35). Anyone who “fears” the Lord, that is, reverences God and does his will is acceptable to him. “The Lord looks into the heart” (1 Sam 16: 7) and relates graciously to the well-disposed.

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

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

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

The exciting news about Jesus quickly spread throughout Palestine. His electrifying presence, preaching and miracles attracted much attention and discussion. The preaching and baptizing of John was itself a topic of much talk. But all of this was leading to his baptizing Jesus and proclaiming him to be the Lamb of God. “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power” (38). What does this baptism and anointing mean? The Catechism explains, “The baptism of Jesus is on his part the acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God’s suffering-Servant. He allows himself to be numbered among sinners; he is already ‘the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’. Already he is anticipating the ‘baptism’ of his bloody death. Already he is coming to fulfill all righteousness, that is, he is submitting himself entirely to his Father’s will: out of love he consents to this baptism of death for the remission of our sins. The Father’s voice responds to the Son’s acceptance, proclaiming his entire delight in his Son. The Spirit whom

Jesus possessed in fullness from his conception comes to ‘rest on him’. Jesus will be the source of the Spirit for all mankind. At his baptism ‘the heavens were opened’—the heavens that Adam’s sin had closed—and the waters were sanctified by the descent of Jesus and the Spirit, a prelude to the new creation” (CCC 536). “Jesus’ gesture of allowing himself to be baptized is a manifestation of his self-emptying” (CCC 1224).

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

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

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

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Cor 6: 13c – 15a, 17-20

Our epistle begins with, “The body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body” (13).

Baptism joined us to Christ. The sacrament united us intimately to Jesus’ risen body. As a member of the Church we were united to Jesus as a bride to her husband. St. Paul tells the Corinthians, “I

betrothed you to one husband to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor 11: 2).

This holy union is equivalent to a holy marriage with Christ. Our bodies belong to him. We are his bride, set apart for him. Moreover, we were redeemed by his precious blood. We are not free to do as we please with our bodies. Any form of immoral use of our bodies would mean infidelity to Christ and a desecration of our bodies. For our bodies, joined to Christ by baptism, are temples of the Holy Spirit (19). They may be used only for holy purposes.

“The Lord is for the body”: he gave himself up for our salvation. He redeemed us and gave us his own righteousness (Jn 1: 16). He belongs to us. We are joined to him forever. He complements our humanity with his divinity. He will be ours forever in heaven.

“God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power” (14). Our bodies are meant for glory. Any form of immorality is completely out of place. Any sinful use of the body would make us completely indisposed to be taken up in glory. Sin is directly opposed to the holiness and the glory for which we are destined in heaven. That is why we must be vigilant, prudent and prayerful to avoid any occasions of sin.

St. Paul continues to motivate us to avoid sin. He says, “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? (15).

We were joined to Christ at our baptism and became members of his body. His Holy Spirit informs these members of his and makes them holy. Surely, we will not desecrate these members by using them in any sinful manner. Each member of our body is holy because it is a member of Christ’s body. Jesus’ whole being is consecrated and dedicated to the Father for holy purposes. So must our body-persons be.

“But whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one Spirit with him” (17). It is not simply a question of our bodies being physically joined to Christ. The

Holy Spirit of Jesus informs our bodies through and through. His holiness permeates our whole being. Every particle, every atom and molecule of our being is sanctified and bathed in the holiness of God. We cannot possibly, therefore, engage any part of our bodies in sin—so diametrically opposed to the holiness of God with which we are endowed. We cannot possibly want to interrupt this holy union with God.

Again, St. Paul strongly states, “Avoid immorality. Every sin a person commits is outside the body, but the immoral person sins against his own body”(18).

In condemning sexual immorality, St. Paul continues to demonstrate why it is so sinful. It is true that we use our bodies to sin in various ways such as eating or drinking in excess, stealing or striking another. But the fornicator tears his body from his holy union with the Lord and sinfully unites it to another. This sinful bodily union is directly opposed to the person’s graced bodily union with Christ. It is also a desecration of the body as a temple of God and thwarts a person’s glorious destiny.

St. Paul goes on to explain still further the malice of sexual immorality saying, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? (19).

Baptism plunged us into God so that he began to live in us and we in him (Rom 6: 3; Jn 14: 20). The blessed Trinity began to live in us (Jn 14: 15-17, 23). Any sinful misuse of our bodies such as sexual immorality would be a sacrilege—a desecration of the holy temple of God. We are called to reverence God dwelling in us. We are invited to enter into the life of knowledge and love between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. This is the highest life attainable on this earth. We pray for purity of heart so that we may enter that blessed life and have great reverence for our body-persons as temples of God. Sin would then be the furthest thought from our minds. The eternal life of the Trinity taking place within

us draws us to participate in it. Our heart is drawn to immerse itself in our inmost center to take part in it through contemplative union. May this love-union keep us far from any immorality that St. Paul is so strong in condemning.

St. Paul can say that “you are not your own” because we were redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus. We belong to him. Our whole lives must be directed toward loving him and giving thanks, far from any sinfulness. We are called to stand out of ourselves and give continuous thanks and praise to God for delivering us from the clutches of evil. “He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1: 13). We owe God and Jesus endless gratitude and praise for the freedom and joy that are ours as children of God.

Our epistle concludes with, “For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body” (20).

God delivered us from the grips of evil by sending us his beloved Son who redeemed us by his precious blood. God has joined us to himself in a new covenant sealed with the blood of Jesus. We must respond to God’s marvelous generosity and love for what he has done for us through his Son. St. Paul tells us how to respond when he says, “Therefore glorify God in your body”. We accomplish this glorification by living out our baptismal consecration. We dedicate our lives to God. We live chaste lives and avoid all forms of immorality. We do our best to live out the words of St. Paul when he said, “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God... (Rom 12: 1).

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time 1 Cor 7: 29-31

Our epistle begins with, “I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out. From now on, let those having wives act as not having them” (29).

In this particular epistle St. Paul seems to be convinced that Jesus’ Second Coming or Parousia was about to take place. So he advises the Corinthians accordingly. The time of preparation was “running out”. The same is true for us. We do not have that much time to prepare for our deaths when the Lord will come for each of us. We must live every moment in his presence, ready to leave this earth, with no sin to weigh our hearts down. This is what life on earth is meant for us: to grow in grace toward the fullness of holiness, ready for the life of heaven.

The hope would be that we would have no attachments to sin or any earthly creature so that we would be completely ready to live the heavenly life immediately—without the need for any purification in purgatory. For St. Paul to say, “let those having wives act as not having them” indicates that he expected Jesus’ return at any moment. Even if the Parousia does not occur during our life-time, St. Paul’s advice holds true for each of us. A certain amount of detachment is necessary—even from those we love dearly—for us to be able to love God with our whole heart and put him first in our lives. Often enough temporary separation is necessary for various reasons. A certain amount of detachment is needed to retain our peace. This is especially true when married couples face permanent separation at death. To be free for God at all times we need to be habitually detached from everything and everyone. That is the only way we can enjoy deep prayer and continuous communion with the Lord. At the same time, a detached heart is ready to leave this world at a moment’s notice so that we can be with our greatest Lover forever.

St. Paul continues to explain the attitude we ought to have as we await the Lord's return:

“those weeping as not weeping
those rejoicing as not rejoicing,
those buying as not owning” (30).

We weep and are saddened when we lose someone or something. But this loss is only temporary. The Lord will soon come and remove all sadness. He will restore our loved ones to us. Our transformation into God-likeness will give us the ecstatic happiness of heaven. All earthly losses will be forgotten and replaced with supreme happiness. We are about to leave all reasons for sadness behind. We must transcend any momentary weeping with the expectant joy that awaits us at the Lord's appearance.

Rejoicing over earthly blessings is a temporary and superficial matter. We will be overwhelmed and inundated before long with the deep and lasting joys of heaven. We must not allow ourselves to be distracted by any earthly joys God allows us to experience: That kind of passing joy will make us lose our focus in preparing for Jesus' coming. So we need to be detached from earthly joys to keep our proper perspective on our readiness to receive the Lord upon his return. Earthly joys can easily cause us to lose our single-hearted devotion and attentiveness to our coming Lord. So we must rejoice as though not rejoicing in the midst of earthly happiness.

St. Paul goes on to consider another need for detachment saying, “...those buying as not owning.”

When we buy things we tend to be possessive. But our clinging to things tends to make us focus unduly on a created thing. This separates us from God and prevents us from giving thanks to our creator for the good things of earth. We thereby lose our freedom for God. We become too immersed in the creature. Our passionate possessiveness blurs our vision of God. We relegate him to second place in our lives. We become indisposed to receive him. We need to stop clinging to the creatures we

own and start clinging to their Creator. He is the One to whom so much attention is due. We pray to become free from such creature attachment so that we can be filled with expectant desire for our precious Redeemer when he returns.

St. Paul shares one more thought to help us prepare for Jesus' return, saying, “...those using the world as not using it fully. For the world in its present form is passing away.”

We do not allow our hearts to be fully taken up with our earthly activities. Even in the midst of accomplishing our daily duties our hearts remain attentive to the Lord. We are cautious about becoming preoccupied with our daily occupations. We are aware that our hearts belong primarily to God. He is the only one worthy of our whole heart. We use the world, but we remain detached from it. We are aware that “the world in its present form is passing away.” At death or at the Lord's second coming it will all be left behind. We cannot afford to become attached to it. We want to remain free for God. Separation from this world and leaving it all behind will not be a problem for us. We kept our hearts free for God. This world served a good purpose. We used it wisely to work for our salvation. It helped us to grow in holiness. We used it to carry out God's will. And in so doing, we were being transformed into his image from glory to glory (2 Cor 3: 18). When the Lord comes for us we will be free for him, happy to leave this world to be with God and our merciful Savior.

4th sunday in ordinary time 1 Cor 7:32-35

Our epistle begins with, “I should like you to be free of anxieties” (32).

St. Paul and the Christian community at Corinth were expecting Jesus to return at any moment. The apostle wanted his people to be totally focused and ready for Jesus' arrival in the Parousia. Thus, he advises them to remain in the state of life that they were in so they would have no distractions.

He wanted them to be absolutely free and open to receive their Lord.

St. Paul continues to explain, “An unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. But a married man is anxious about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided” (33). An unmarried man who dedicates his life to serve the Lord makes him the center of his life. He purposely avoids any serious commitment that would consume his time or drain his energies which he wants to dedicate to the service of the Lord. He jealously guards his heart for the Lord to whom he has consecrated it. His grace is to serve the Lord directly through prayer, sacred reading, the liturgy of the hours, the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy and fellowship with his faith community and the apostolate. Such a person is concerned about living a virtuous life. He avoids the occasions of sin. He goes to spiritual direction for spiritual guidance. He confesses his sins regularly in the Sacrament of Penance and works assiduously at rooting out any habit of sin in his life. He lives for God and strives to obey Jesus’ words, “So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5: 48). And again, “Be merciful, just as also your Father is merciful” (Lk 6: 36).

A married man, however, is divided in his attention. He is concerned about making a living for his wife and children. He has to deal with worldly matters that distract him from total attention on the Lord. He serves the Lord indirectly through his spouse and family. Through a serious prayer and spiritual life he may strive to live in the presence of God. He tries to do his will in all things. But often the things of this world attract or absorb his attention so that he is not as free for the Lord as the one who had dedicated his whole life to serve the Lord directly.

St. Paul further explains, “An unmarried woman or a virgin is anxious about the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy in both body and spirit.

A married woman, on the other hand, is anxious about the things of the world, how she may please her husband” (34).

What has been said above about unmarried and married men applies here. The catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, “From apostolic times Christian virgins, called by the Lord to cling only to him with greater freedom of heart, body, and spirit, have decided with the Church’s approval to live in a state of virginity ‘for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven’” (922).

“Christ is the center of all Christian life. The bond with him takes precedence over all other bonds, familial or social. From the very beginning of the church there have been men and women who have renounced the great good of marriage to follow the Lamb wherever he goes, to be intent on the things of the Lord, to seek to please him, and to go out to meet the Bridegroom who is coming. Christ himself has invited certain persons to follow him in this way of life, of which he remains the model” (CCC 1618; see Mt 19: 12). The Catechism further teaches, “Virginity for the sake of the kingdom of heaven is an unfolding of baptismal grace, a powerful sign of the supremacy of the bond of Christ and of the ardent expectation of his return, a sign which also recalls that marriage is a reality of this present age which is passing away” (CCC 1619).

St. Paul concludes his teaching in this way, “I am telling you this for your benefit, not to impose a restraint upon you, but for the sake of propriety and adherence to the Lord without distraction” (35).

St. Paul is not restraining anyone from changing his or her state of life from a single to a married state. He is simply advising the Corinthians that, in view of the Lord’s appearance at any moment, it would be better to remain as they are to be ready to receive him. He would like them to remain free from the distractions that a change of life would entail.

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Cor 9:16-19, 22-23

St. Paul begins our epistle with, “If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for our obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it!” (16)

Unlike the other apostles who accepted Jesus’ invitation to follow him from the very beginning, Paul was confronted on the road to Damascus by Jesus and “[appointed] as a servant and witness of what you have seen of me and what you will be shown” (Acts 26:16). Paul had no choice but to obey Jesus’ command. He cannot boast of having volunteered to follow Jesus. An obligation has been imposed upon him without his having requested it. He is under constraint to proclaim the gospel. Paul is a “servant”, a slave, who does his master’s will without any consideration of receiving payment for it. He did not accept financial support from the Corinthians. He ministered to them without any recompense. He supported himself by his tent making. Preaching the good news of Jesus and being the steward of the redemptive riches of salvation would perhaps make up for the way he had persecuted the Christians in his earlier years. It was Paul’s pride and joy to be able to minister the unfathomable riches of Christ (Eph 2:7) free of charge. That was reward enough for him. On the other hand, he fears that not to preach the gospel would bring divine judgment on himself: “...woe to me if I do not preach it!” Furthermore, St. Paul explains, “If I do so willingly, I have a recompense, but if unwillingly, then I have been entrusted with a stewardship” (17).

St. Paul was commissioned by Jesus himself to witness his experience of seeing the risen Christ. Relating this experience and reliving it is in itself richly rewarding. The endless labors and travels to accomplish this mission were spiritually transforming. There was an impulsive grace moving St. Paul to proclaim Jesus as the Christ. That unforgettable grace of meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus had so immersed him in Christ that he could say, “...I live, no longer I, but Christ

lives in me...” (Gal 2:20). The life of Paul had been overtaken by Christ so that Paul could say, “For to me life is Christ...” (Phil 1:21). That glorious life impelled Paul to proclaim it to the world. He wanted to tell everyone what a marvelous life awaited them in Christ. Such a lived experience was its own reward.

But even if Paul were not so involved of his own free will, he would still feel obligated to exercise his assignment as steward of the sacred mysteries. There was too much at stake to neglect this charge. He was concerned about the salvation of the multitudes who did not know God or his Christ.

St. Paul continues to explain, “What then is my recompense? That, when I preach, I offer the gospel free of charge so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel” (18).

The minister of the gospel has a right to the financial support from those whom he serves (1 Cor 9:7-12). Yet Paul abstained from such support from the Corinthians. His efforts at self-support were supplemented by the Macedonian community (2 Cor 11:9). Such selfless work would merit for Paul a rich reward. In this way Paul could express his gratitude to Jesus for having saved him from his fanaticism. St. Paul continues, “Although I am free in regard to all, I have made myself a slave to all so as to win over as many as possible” (19).

St. Paul was no longer obliged to keep the Law of Moses. He lived by faith in the Son of God. The Old Covenant was meant to prepare the chosen people for the coming of the Messiah. As the Suffering Servant of the Lord, the Messiah obtained the forgiveness of sins by his suffering, death, and resurrection. He then established a New Covenant, a new law, which could be kept by the power of his outpoured Spirit received by those who believe. Thus, St. Paul was free from the old Law of Moses. He could say for others as for himself, “For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2).

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Cor 10:31--11:1

Our epistle begins with, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God” (31).

God is the source of all our good. We owe him thanks and praise for everything he enables us to do or to enjoy. We are called to go beyond our activities and enjoyment and glorify God for them. We glorify him by giving him thanks and praise.

This implies that we are doing everything according to his will. We glorify him by subjecting ourselves to him and obeying him. We glorify him when we do what is pleasing to him in this way. We do not become absorbed in God’s gifts but partake of them in moderation according to God’s Will. Such self-restraint keeps us free to be in communion with God with gratitude and love for him. A self-absorbing, self-indulgence would rule out the possibility of glorifying God. That is why the practice of holy temperance is so important.

St. Paul explains his thought still further saying, “Avoid giving offense whether to the Jews of Greeks or the Church of God” (32).

If we are doing everything for the love of God, then we will surely avoid offending anyone. We will do everything right in order to please God. At the same time we will edify our neighbor. We will build him up by our good example and godly conversation. We are careful to avoid uncharitable criticism. We will bring out the good qualities of people. We enrich ourselves through sacred reading and meditation on the word of God. We learn certain impressive passages by heart so that we can speak that word on appropriate occasions. Bystanders will see how spiritually rich our faith is and will want to join us. They will want what we have. We need to be aware of the particular people to whom we are relating. St. Paul associates with Jews according to their way of understanding and living. Similarly he deals with Gentiles in

a winning way. He relates to church members in a way becoming their disposition and needs. So, too, he advises us to be aware of the kinds of people to whom we relate. We will then speak in a way becoming to them. Our conversation may attract them to our faith and win them over.

St. Paul explains his approach in dealing with others: “just as I try to please everyone in every way, not seeking my own benefit but that of the many, that they may be saved” (33).

St. Paul appreciated the immense benefits he experienced from the salvation he received from his ongoing union with Jesus. He did everything he possibly could to bring others to the marvelous peace and joy that his union with Jesus had brought him. He could not keep this tremendous good he had received to himself. He had to share it with others. He kept this in mind so that he could relate and motivate others in that direction.

For this end, he tried “to please everyone in every way”. He said, “To the Jews I became like a Jew to win over Jews; to those under the law I became like one under the law—though I myself am not under the law—to win over those under the law. To those outside the law I became like one outside the law—though I am not outside God’s law but within the law of Christ—to win over those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, to win over the weak. I have become all things to all, to save at least some. All this I do for the sake of the gospel, so that I too may have a share in it” (1Cor 9: 20-23).

St. Paul is totally preoccupied in his desire to communicate to others what he himself had received. In his love for others, he did not think of himself any more. He dedicated himself exclusively to save others by introducing them to the kingdom of light and love. The enlightenment received through divine revelation enables people to see the meaning of life. For example, they come to understand the redemptive value of the sufferings of life that they must endure. In light of Jesus’ resurrection, death is not an end to human existence but a new beginning.

And the participation in the divine life given in the kingdom enhances and elevates human life to a new and bright level of existence. The supernatural life received in the Kingdom of God revolutionizes mere human life. A person can then enter into communion with the glorious Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. In this way, through obedience to God's word, one already begins to experience the beginning of eternal life here on earth. We can see, then, why St. Paul was so anxious to bring everyone into the Church, the Kingdom of God in its beginning on earth.

Our epistle ends with this exhortation: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (11: 1). Everything about Paul was Christ. As he put it, "Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me life is Christ, and death is gain" (Phil 1: 20-21). His whole person exuded Christ. St. Paul could truly say, "For we are the aroma of Christ for God" (2 Cor 2: 15). He had died to his old self and was living the life of Christ: "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2: 19-20).

St. Paul's whole existence was "in Christ" (2: Cor 5: 17). His close union with Jesus had made him a new creature. His likeness to Jesus began from within him. He was moved by the Spirit of Jesus to do what Jesus would do in all circumstances. "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God" (Rom 8: 14). "God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (Gal 4: 6). St. Paul was moved by the Spirit to know Christ as crucified. He said, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). Through his sufferings he continued the redemptive sufferings of Christ for the salvation of his people. He expressed his union with the suffering Christ in this way, "in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church" (1 Col 1: 24). His apostolic labors made him one with the suffering Christ. He wrote: "To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clad and roughly treated, we wander about

homeless and we toil, working with our hands. When ridiculed, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we respond gently. We have become like the world's rubbish, the scum of all, to this very moment" (1Cor 4: 11-13). St. Paul was very much aware of Jesus' love and our need to return that love. "Live in love", he said, "as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma" (Eph 5: 2). And again, he said "I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me" (Gal 2: 20). This love was the driving force of St. Paul's life. He said, "For the love of Christ impels us...He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor 5: 14-15).

St. Paul prays that we, too, "rooted and grounded in love, may...know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that [we] may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph 3: 17, 19). This love filled St. Paul's heart so that it overflowed for his people. He addresses the Philippians as "my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown" (Phil 4: 1). He expresses to the Thessalonians how lovingly he cared for them: "We were gentle among you", he writes, "as a nursing mother cares for her children with such affection for you, we were determined to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our very selves as well, so dearly beloved had you become to us" (1 Thes 2: 7-8).

Like Jesus, St. Paul was a very prayerful and grateful person, and wanted his people to have the same attitude. He writes to the Thessalonians, "Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thes 5: 17-18). St. Paul's great desire was that his people glorify Christ with their every action. He wrote, "and whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3: 17).

These are some of the ways that we can be like St. Paul in imaging Christ.

1st Sunday of Lent

1 Pet 3:18-22

Our Epistle begins with, “For Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous, that he might lead you to God. Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the spirit” (18).

If the innocent Christ, who is the way (Jn 14: 6) suffered, we must be prepared to expect suffering in our lives also—just as the early Christians to whom St. Peter is writing are enduring persecution. Perhaps it is because we are not strong witnesses to Jesus and his words that we are not persecuted as they were.

Jesus suffered and died once to take away our sins. The Old Testament annual sacrifices were offered over and over again. But they could not take away the ill effects of sin. Jesus died once and for all. And because his sacrificial death had infinite value, he took away the sins of the world by that one sacrifice. We offer Mass daily to make that one sacrifice present and applied to us. That is why Jesus commanded his apostles to “Do this in memory of me” (Lk 22: 19; 1 Cor 11: 25).

Jesus was totally righteous and without the least sin (Jn 8: 46). He suffered for us unrighteous sinners to take away our sins and make us holy (Is 53: 5-6). By taking away our sins he removed the barrier that separated us from God so that we could be united to him.

Jesus was truly a human being who died from the wounds inflicted upon his body during the crucifixion. He had totally assumed our earthly human condition. But he was “brought to life in the Spirit”. The resurrection transformed him and gave him a new existence. He was now freed from all the limitations and weaknesses of his former human life. He became a “life-giving spirit” (1 Cor 15: 45).

Our epistle continues, “In it he also went to preach to the spirits in prison (19), who had once been disobedient while God patiently waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark,

in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water” (20).

Having been “brought to life in the spirit”, Jesus went to preach to the spirits in prison (18-19). What does that mean? The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains, “The frequent New Testament affirmations that Jesus was ‘raised from the dead’ presuppose that the crucified one sojourned in the realm of the dead prior to his resurrection. This was the first meaning given in the apostolic preaching to Christ’s descent into hell: that Jesus, like all men, experienced death and in his soul joined the others in the realm of the dead. But he descended there as Savior, proclaiming the Good News to the spirits imprisoned there” (632). “It is precisely these holy souls, who awaited their Savior in Abraham’s bosom, whom Christ the Lord delivered when he descended into hell” (633).

“The gospel was preached even to the dead. The descent into hell brings the Gospel message of salvation to complete fulfillment. This is the last phase of Jesus’ messianic mission, a phase which is condensed in time but vast in its real significance: the spread of Christ’s redemptive work to all men of all times and all places, for all who are saved have been made sharers in the redemption” (634).

“Christ went down into the depths of death so that ‘the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live’” (635).

Our epistle says that “God patiently waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark”. “The Lord saw how great was man’s wickedness on earth, and how no desire that his heart conceived was ever anything but evil” (Gen 6: 5). “So the Lord said: ‘I will wipe out from the earth the men whom I have created’” (Gen 6: 7). “But Noah found favor with the Lord” (Gen 6: 8). So the Lord directed Noah to make an ark to save him and his family from drowning in the flood (Gen 6: 14). While Noah was building the ark, “God patiently waited” and endured the lawlessness of sinful men (Gen 6: 11-13). Once Noah, his wife, and

their three Sons and their wives entered the ark with the animals that God directed him to bring, “the floodgates of the sky were opened. For forty days and forty nights heavy rain poured down on the earth” (Gen 7: 11-12). Noah and his family were “saved through water”. The water kept the ark afloat until the rains ceased and they reached dry land (Gen 8: 13-14).

Our reading tells us that “This prefigured baptism, which saves us now. It is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (21).

Noah’s safe passage through the flood waters foretells our baptism which saves us from sin—just as Noah and his family escaped their sinful world through these waters. The resurrection of Jesus through which we are raised to a new life draws from God the grace to live a sinless life with a clear conscience.

Our epistle concludes with, “Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him” (22).

“Christ’s body was glorified at the moment of his Resurrection, as proved by the new and supernatural properties it subsequently and permanently enjoys...Jesus’ final apparition ends with the irreversible entry of his humanity into divine glory, symbolized by the cloud and by heaven, where he is seated from that time forward at God’s right hand” (CCC659).

“Henceforth Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father”. By ‘the Father’s right hand’ we understand the glory and honor of divinity, where he who exists as Son of God before all ages, indeed as God, of one being with the Father, is seated bodily after he became incarnate and his flesh was glorified (CCC 663)

“Being seated at the Father’s right hand signifies the inauguration of the Messiah’s kingdom, the fulfillment of the prophet Daniel’s vision concerning the Son of man; ‘To him was given

dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (CCC 664).

All classes of spirits are subject to the glorified Christ: angels, authorities and powers. He triumphed over all that have rebelled against God. St. Paul was very much aware of the devil and the evil spirits that opposed his ministry and work against our salvation. He writes, “Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens” (Eph 6: 11-12). Now St. Peter tells us that all of these evil spirits are going to be subdued and kept under the dominion of our glorious Lord.

2nd Sunday of Lent

Rom 8:31b-34

Our Epistle begins with, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (31)

God is definitely for us. He has loved us with an everlasting love (Jer 31: 3). “He chose us...before the world began” (Eph 1: 4). That is the reason why we were conceived and brought into being. And when we were separated from him by sin he sent his Son into the world to free us. That means he delivered Jesus to be handed over by betrayal, agony, severe mistreatment, crucifixion and death to redeem us from sin. He has gone to astonishing lengths to express his infinite love for us. We are in awe with St. Paul over such incomprehensible, amazing love. There is no existing power that can prevail against the infinite power and love of God. St. Paul goes on to explain why he has such supreme hope and confidence in God’s desire and will to give us eternal life: “He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?”(32).

God has unselfishly given us his most precious Son. Surely he will give us any and every thing else we need to attain eternal life. He has given us the greatest assurance of his love. He is totally for us. He has proven himself to be 100% for us. His omnipotence will not allow any obstacle to separate us from union and communion with him. Jesus voluntarily chose to become human, to undergo extreme suffering and to die for us. He has already done everything in his power to save us from evil. His love for us is unchanging. He will continue to ward off any threat to our salvation. We can be sure of that. He will supply us with any grace we need to avoid our being separated from him. He is anxious to deepen our union with him to secure our salvation ever more definitively. He wants to give us everything, all the riches of grace that he has attained for us.

With reassuring confidence St. Paul continues, “Who will bring a charge against God’s chosen ones? It is God who acquits us” (33).

God’s salvific activity in our regard demonstrates beyond any doubt that we are his chosen and favorite ones. He will be our judge. No one would dare bring a charge against us. He has acquitted us from all sin. We need not be afraid of judgment. He has favored us in Christ. All of our enemies are powerless before him. Nothing can separate us from him. No one stands a chance as our accuser—through Christ’s passion and death we have been forgiven. He has taken away our sins. There remains none of which to be accused. He has freed us of our guilt.

Our epistle concludes with, “Who will condemn? Christ Jesus it is who died—or, rather, was raised—who also is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us” (34).

With Christ Jesus demonstrating such supreme love in our regard and securing our salvation through his passion, death and resurrection and the gift of his Holy Spirit to lead us securely unto salvation, we can have the greatest assurance. God has and is still extending his infinite power to save us from evil and bring us to the eternal life of heaven.

We would have to deliberately choose to tear ourselves apart from him by serious sin to be separated from him. And even there he will graciously receive us again when we see our mistake, regret our wrongdoing and express our desire to return to him. After we are purified through sincere repentance, he restores us to our former status as beloved children and friends. He allows us to go astray so we can experience for ourselves the severe negative effects of sin and so that we can return to him with a still greater love and fervor. We can then realize how blest we are to be so graced as to live in his presence and never want to leave him again. This experience of the infinite mercy of God as the peak of his love enraptures our hearts and makes us want to return that love by a new fidelity more than ever before. Jesus was raised and exalted to the highest heaven. And in that glorified state he is drawing us to himself as he promised: “And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself” (Jn 12: 32). Jesus in heaven in his glorious state continues to be very actively inciting to us to good, to be faithful children of God. If there is evil in and around us there is even more good: We are permeated with God’s sanctifying grace as well as enjoying the indwelling presence of the Blessed Trinity in the center of our soul. God loves and wants us. He urges us through our conscience to be faithful to his lead to follow the powerful grace that he constantly sends and surrounds us with.

Moreover he is in the presence of the Father constantly interceding for us. After becoming human and all the difficulties entailed, after establishing his kingdom of grace for us, after suffering and dying for our salvation, he does not easily let go of us. He wants to be our friend to embrace us for all eternity. We must not let him down. We must start working for our eternal salvation. We have only one chance to work at it before this short life ends. We must give it all we’ve got. We cannot disappoint him anymore!

3rd Sunday of Lent 1 Cor 1:22-25

St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom” (22).

The Scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you” (Mt 12: 38). Jesus had already performed miracles of healing and exorcisms as signs that the kingdom of God was arriving in his person. But the leaders of the Jews did not accept these. They wanted Jesus to display far greater spectacular and miraculous power to prove to them that he was the Messiah. But they were insincere. They attributed his exorcisms to the prince of demons (Mt 12: 24). They refused to admit Jesus’ cure of the man born blind (Jn 9). So Jesus refused to satisfy their curiosity and further evil interpretations of his signs.

“The Greeks look for wisdom”, for philosophies that explained the world. They pursued learning that satisfied their intellectual pride and curiosity. When Paul was in Athens and said that God “demands that all people everywhere repent because he has established a day on which he will ‘judge the world with justice’”, and when he spoke “about the resurrection of the dead, some began to scoff, but others said, ‘we should like to hear you on this some other time’” (Acts 17: 30-32). Paul realized that these Greeks were not really interested in his message of salvation. That would have required personal conversion and serious effort.

Despite what the Jews demand and the Greeks look for, Paul nevertheless says, “but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (23).

One who dies by crucifixion must be a criminal, a disgrace. It seems altogether absurd that he could benefit humankind. Death by crucifixion brings to a halt any hope of salvation. Other so called

messiahs had also ended by death. The Jews were accustomed to such fiascos....So what else is new? Somehow they had overlooked the possibility of a suffering Messiah—in the Servant of the Lord (Is 50: 6; 52: 14-53: 10). But the passage about the Servant’s vicarious suffering and death does not end there. It is one of great hope: “If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life....Because of his affection he shall see the light in fullness of days....I will give him his portion among the great” (Is 53: 10-12).

The Jews overlooked the need for a spiritual Messiah to save the people from their sins. They did not understand how suffering could make up for sin. Isaiah said of the Suffering Servant, “Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured....But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins, upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, each following his own way; But the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all....Because he surrendered himself to death and was counted among the wicked; and he shall take away the sins of many...” (Is 53: 4, 5-6, 12).

But the Jews were so focused on a warrior king like David as Messiah, a suffering Servant as Messiah totally escaped them. Thus the crucified Christ preached by Paul proved to be an insurmountable stumbling block for most of the Jews. They could not bring themselves to believe in him. The word of God confirmed this for them. It is written, “God’s curse rests on him who hangs on a tree” (Deut 21: 23).

But St. Paul explains this mystery and turned it into a plus for us when he says, “Christ ransomed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Gal 3: 13). And again, “For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin so that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5: 21). Jesus, our Redeemer, took upon himself our sins, suffered and died through crucifixion so that all of our sins were buried with

him. Thus freed from sin we could rise with him through his saving grace and live right with God. The Greeks who were caught up in their thoughts in pursuing natural wisdom could not transcend the death of a crucified man either. How could a man put to death by crucifixion come back to life? It is absurd, they thought, that any man could overcome death.

Therefore, both Jew and Greek remained in their unbelief. They underestimated the power and wisdom of God. They failed to take note of God's word, "See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Is 43: 19) Our epistle continues, "but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (24). We can never tell what God will do. We must not put restrictions on him. How amazing it is that the eternal God would become human, out of love for us, so that he would make up for our sins by suffering, and destroy death by the explosion of his glorification.

"Christ [is] the power of God": St. Paul experienced total transformation from his angry, hateful self when he encountered the glorified Christ. He became a new creature, a new creation, through this encounter. Like us, Paul was baptized, filled with the Holy Spirit and made to see, as he was plunged into Christ (Acts 9: 17-19). That is why he could tell the Corinthians, "So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor 5: 17). What the glorious Christ did for Paul within three days as he remained helplessly enshrouded in darkness, the same Jesus does for us through a gradual transformation into his very image. (2 Cor 3: 18)

God's wisdom knows the transforming power of suffering. What we fear and flee, Jesus embraced for the redemption of the world because that is what the Father in his wisdom commanded him to do. (Mt 26: 42)

St. Paul understood the transforming power of suffering from experience when he wrote, "Therefore, we are not discouraged; rather, although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor 4: 16-17).

Our epistle concludes, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength" (25).

Jesus crucified is God's foolishness as it appears to humans. But the wisdom contained in the redemption and purification from sin is remarkable and beyond all human ingenuity. What can a weak and dying Christ, helplessly hanging on a cross, suffering in crucifixion, accomplish? Such weakness appears to be futile and fruitless. Yet, through it, God accomplished the redemption of the world!

4th Sunday of Lent

Eph 2: 4-10

Our epistle begins with, "God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us (4), even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ (by grace you have been saved)".(5)

The richness or superabundance of God's mercy flows from his infinite love for us. We can see it overflowing through sending his Son who condescended to become a limited human being. In this way he could endure atrocious sufferings to make up for our sins so that we could be forgiven. And then that merciful love brought us into the intimacy of the divine family. God made us his children by the gift of his grace. His mercy took pity on us as we lay dead in our sins. He raised us up and endowed us with human dignity. He wants us to be in his company now and to be with him forever in heaven. We cannot begin to fathom the depths of such love expressed as infinite mercy.

God “brought us to life with Christ”. Baptism united us to Jesus in the moment of his resurrection. We began to share the very life of our glorified Lord as the Father was transforming his dead body. We were brought to new life with and in Christ. What a privileged lot we are! We are called to live this highest life with Christ. May we accept this undeserved privilege and live it to the fullest! It is by grace we have been saved.

God’s infinite love took pity and favored us out of sheer mercy. We were absolutely undeserving of it. We have no grounds for boasting. The grace that gives us a participation in the divine life is a total gift on God’s part.

St. Paul continues to explain, “God...raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus” (6).

Because we were baptized into Christ (Rom 6:3), we participate in both his death and resurrection. Baptism united us to Christ in such a way that we share his glorious life in the presence of the Father. To the extent that we die with him to selfish living, we can experience the life of the Spirit that Jesus now lives. In his risen life, Jesus remains dead to the flesh as he lives the glorious life of the Spirit.

Our epistle continues, “...that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (7).

It is because of our close interpersonal union and communion with our glorious Lord Jesus—we are in him and he is in us—that we are surrounded and penetrated with “the immeasurable riches of his grace”. We have but to open ourselves to receive such superabundant grace. Single-hearted devotion to God is required, and detachment from the things of this world.

Our epistle continues, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God”(8). St. Paul wants to be sure that we understand that salvation from sin

and being in a state of friendship with God is a gift of God. It is true that we must receive that salvation through a receptive faith. But even that initial stirring of faith is caused by God. God has to move us to cooperate with that initial grace of faith. The supernatural world is totally out of our reach. We are wholly dependent on God for it. As Jesus said, “Without me, you can do nothing” (Jn 15: 5). How grateful we ought to be for being singled out by God to give us this grace! We are so privileged to be free from sin, to be totally forgiven to live in the communion of saints, especially with God himself and Jesus, our Savior. Through this sanctifying grace we have been made partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1: 4). St. Paul assures us that this grace of salvation “is not from works, so no one may boast” (9). If we have been able to do good works, it is because God moved us to do so. It is his inspiration that motivated us to do a good act. It is his grace that empowered us to cooperate and follow through with the good act to its completion. Thus if we have succeeded in being and doing good, it is because of the generosity and mercy of God’s abundant grace that we did. So there are no grounds for us to be proud. We are totally indebted to God for the good we have done. We must give him the glory.

Our epistle concludes, “For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them” (10).

“We are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus”. The sacrament of baptism transformed us. St. Paul explains, “Whoever is in Christ is a new creation” (2 Cor 5: 17). Sanctifying grace has endowed us with new, supernatural powers. The theological virtues of faith, hope and love enable us to attain God himself. The infused moral virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude empower us to relate gracefully to the world around us. The gifts of the Holy Spirit of wisdom, knowledge, understanding, counsel, piety, fear of the Lord and fortitude perfect our spiritual organism enabling us to act promptly and with ease on a supernatural level. We are,

therefore, perfectly equipped to respond to God's grace-initiative prompting us to do good works. We were created in intimate union with Jesus, our Good Shepherd who leads us, encourages us, helps us, loves us unto doing and accomplishing God's will. It is proper that good and virtuous works should flow from this new, supernatural nature that God has so graciously given us. All is ready; it is for us to put it into action by cooperating with God's grace. Through prayerful communion with the indwelling Trinity we receive the divine impulse to perform works of loving service. We have but to say "yes" to follow through on God's prompting. We must will it for our part and then exert ourselves as we cooperate with God to perform these good works.

5th Sunday of Lent

Heb 5: 7-9

Our epistle begins with, "In the days when Christ Jesus was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence" (7).

The eternal Son of God, the Word, became human: in the words of St. John, "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (Jn 1: 14). This was the time of Jesus' mortal life as he walked the earth and lived among us. "He offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death".

Jesus experienced all of our weaknesses except sin, since he shared our human nature. He is able to sympathize with us because he went through the same type of trials as we do. So even in glory, he can understand what we're going through and have compassion on us. He himself experienced the fear of suffering and death and prayed, as he was agonizing in Gethsemane, to be spared from drinking such a cup (Mt 27: 38-44; see also Jn 12: 27).

Our epistle does not tell us that Jesus prayed to be saved from dying but from death. It was necessary that Jesus suffer death to fulfill the Father's will. In this way, by entering into death itself, Jesus was able to destroy it through the glory of the resurrection. It was in this way that the Father saved Jesus from death. He had to go through it, experience the wrenching jolt of the separation of body and soul for our redemption. But by overcoming death, having gone through it, he shows us that we need not fear it. Experiencing it will be our final purification from sin, our last opportunity to make up for sin in preparation for glory. But as Jesus passed safely through death to enter into the fullness of life in the presence of the Father, so will we. He made it easier for us to face and accept death because he passed through it with a human nature like ours and came out alive—not only with the human life he had before, but one endowed with the glorious fullness of the divinity: incorruptible, glorious, powerful and spiritual (1 Cor 15: 42-44). By suffering and dying for us, Jesus took away the sting of death by taking upon himself the punishment due to sin. Through his self-sacrificing goodness we have been forgiven and set free; we are now able to enter into heavenly glory once we have passed through the door of death (Compare 1 Cor 15: 53-55).

We are told that Jesus "was heard because of his reverence". He had a profound reverence for his Father. He expressed this, for example, at his baptism. John did not feel worthy to baptize Jesus. But Jesus insisted that he do so. He said, "Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Mt 3: 15). In other words Jesus wanted to do the Father's will perfectly. He desired to submit himself to God's plan for the salvation of the human race in every minute detail. In the baptism, as on Calvary, he identified himself with us sinners, to bury our sins in his terrible suffering and death. In the words of St. Paul, "For our sake he made him, to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor 5: 21). This deep love and respect for the Father and his will

was expressed in the profound reverence of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (Mk 14: 36). This filial love and reverence moved the Father to answer Jesus' prayer.

Our epistle continues, "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered" (8). Jesus was Son of God from all eternity. But he emptied himself of that glory that was properly his. When he became human, he took "the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom 8: 3). Thus "when he came into the world, he said, 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight in. Then I said, 'as is written of me in the scroll, Behold, I come to do your will, O God'" (Heb 10: 5-7).

Even though Jesus was truly the eternal, glorious Son of God, in the words of St. Paul, "he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness, and found in human appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2: 7-9). These passages help us to understand the meaning of "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered".

First, they tell us that the exalted Son of God learned from the experience of being human what submissiveness to the will of God actually is. He learned what obedience is by actually experiencing it, little by little, from youth to adulthood. He submitted himself in his human nature to the will of the Father. Second, he knows how difficult submission of his will can be, especially when it goes so far as to demand his mistreatment and crucifixion at the hands of evil men. His desperate prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane tells us this: "He began to feel sorrow and distress. Then he said... 'My soul is sorrowful even to death...My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will'" (Mt 26: 37-38, 39). Third, at the same time he learned how pleasing obedience is to the Father. For example, after he submitted himself to baptism, which identified him with

sinner, the Father was so utterly pleased with Jesus' obedience that he proclaimed audibly for everyone to hear, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt 4: 17). We learn from this how delighted the Father is with Jesus' humble obedience. Fourth, we also see that, as a result of Jesus' humble obedience to his Father's will in accepting the cross and crucifixion, he was richly rewarded with that glorious life that was rightfully his from all eternity. The Son learned the supreme value of obedience when "God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name...Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil 2: 9, 10). The glorious life of the resurrection fully reinstates Jesus as Son of God, and Lord, endlessly caught up in that heavenly life of glory with the Father.

Fifth, the result of Jesus' obedience as Servant of the Lord is proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah. He said, "If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life, and the will of the Lord shall be accomplished through him. Because of his affliction he shall see the light in fullness of days" (Is 53: 10-11). The prophet is saying that the Servant of the Lord, Jesus, will accomplish God's will and live through his ordeal to "see the light in fullness of days" in what we now know to be the glorious life of the resurrection. He will "see his descendants in a long life": his spiritual children will be like the sands of the seashore. Such is the outcome of his obedience that he will experience. Sixth, the prophet goes on to further explain the value of the Servant's obedience. "Through his suffering", he says, "my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear...and he shall take away the sins of many, and win pardon for their offenses" (Is 53: 11, 12). It is through obedience to death that Jesus learned through experience that virtue's indescribable value: through it he saved the whole world from sin and eternal damnation. By his humbling himself and experiencing obedience on a human level, the divine Son learned how precious that obedience was for himself and for the salvation of all the peoples of the world.

Our epistle concludes, “and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (9).

Jesus had been obedient since childhood. Even if the beginning of his adolescent years urged him towards independence, he still controlled his desires by submitting them to his parents. After they found him in the temple “sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions..., he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them” (Lk 2: 46, 51). During his hidden life Jesus acquired and perfected the habit of obedience to his parents. It became second nature to him. That is why he could still do his Father’s will in the midst of such severe testing in the garden of Gethsemane and Calvary. This habitual obedience kept Jesus united to his Father in continuous communion with him. He was completely one with his Father’s will. Without the least hint of deviation to all that God wanted in his life, all the virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit were free to thrive in him. That is why obedience could bring him to perfection and that is a seventh quality that Jesus came to learn about obedience. It was valuable in perfecting him. The ultimate perfection came to him when the Spirit of glory came upon his human nature as it rested in the tomb in total self-gift. That Spirit of glory crowned his humanity with the sublime perfection of divinity through glorification.

Palm Sunday

Phil 2: 6-11

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

St. Paul presents Jesus to the people of Philippi as a model of selflessness and humility. For this purpose it is believed that Paul is quoting an ancient Christian hymn in this passage. Jesus was “in the form of God” means that he possessed the divine glory and status. But he did not cling to

his equality with God. He gave up that eternal dignity and took on the condition of a slave. Adam grasped at becoming equal to God. Jesus emptied himself of his exalted position to become human like us.

Being one with God in union of wills is where true happiness lies. Grasping for anything beyond that is to lose the essence of happiness. Jesus exemplifies the right attitude. Adam lost all by his grasping attitude. Christ regained all for us by his letting go of all for the sake of love, love for his Father and love for us.

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

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

This humble obedience, even to the point of death, marks the second stage of Jesus’ humiliation. Obedience was the life of a slave. But obedience even to death, even death on a cross, was heroic. This was the lowest depth of humiliation that Jesus could descend, the farthest away from his heavenly, glorious status; the phrase “even death on a cross” is believed to have been added by St. Paul to the hymn he is quoting. This was apparently necessary because the earliest statements of belief, such as expressed in the hymn, seemed to have avoided mentioning the cross because of its shame. But St. Paul gloried in the cross. It is the means God chose to bring about our salvation. It

is “the power of God” (1 Cor 1: 18), about which we can boast (Gas 6: 14). Through the cross we are sanctified and transformed (2 Cor 3: 18; 4: 11, 17).

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

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

The Father raised Jesus “far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things” (Eph 4: 10). The humble self-effacing Jesus was raised high above all the angels and saints. His obedience and self-annihilation were contrasted with adulation and glorification. His humiliation was superseded by the heights of glorification.

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

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

Jesus deserves to be given true worship as God—he is divine and one with the Father. “In him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and invisible...” (Col 1: 16). He sustains the whole universe by his power (Heb 1: 3). The entire cosmos is indebted to him for its existence. The adoration due to God: “To me every knee shall bend” (Is 45: 23) must now be given Jesus

because he is equally a divine Person as the God who revealed himself to Abraham and his children.

Bending the knee is a sign of reverence and adoration. By that act we acknowledge Jesus to be our superior and Lord.

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

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

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

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

not place him in opposition to the Father. Jesus receives his glory from the Father and ceaselessly uses it to glorify the Father. He glorifies the Father with the glory he receives from him.

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

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

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

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

ourselves. In these and other ways we continue to “seek what is above”. We are careful to avoid what drags us to earth, things that take us away from God and cause us to stray or diminish our love for him.

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

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

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

lives to steer clear of them so that our hearts will remain true to our great Lover and Savior.

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

Having stilled these earthly desires, we can then be at peace to enter into our hearts, and, unseen by this world, hide ourselves with Christ in God. This is an interior life of intimacy and love with God in union with Christ – withdrawn from this world. Just as we cannot see Christ in the bosom of the Father with bodily eyes, so too, there is nothing exteriorly visible of the union and spiritual activity the baptized person carries on with Christ. All of this takes place secretly in our hearts.

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

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

2nd Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday)

1 Jn 5: 1-6

Our epistle begins with, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God, and everyone who loves the Father loves also the one begotten by him” (1).

Our ability to believe that Jesus is the Christ or Messiah comes from the fact that we are children of God and share his very nature. Just as our ability to love shows that we are born of God and share his divine nature which is love (1 Jn 4:7), so too the fact that we believe shows that we are born of God. Again, that means we share his divine nature and are closely united to him so that we readily receive God’s testimony that Jesus is his Son. “Whoever believes in the Son of God has this testimony within himself” (1 Jn 5: 10). In other words, our faith issues from the fact that because baptism gives us a share in the divine life and makes us children of God, we perceive God revealing in our hearts that Jesus is his divine Son. Faith is the testimony of God revealing himself in our hearts which indicates that we are born of God.

As beloved children born of God we love our Father. We are wholly indebted to him for giving us divine life. We have an innate love for God. He is love (1 Jn 4: 16), and as his children born of him we are inclined to have a strong love for him from whom we are continuously born. By the same token, we also experience a movement of love towards God’s other children. We are drawn with love toward them by the Holy Spirit who unifies us. Jesus expressed it this way while praying at the Last Supper, “And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, and that you loved them even as you loved me” (Jn 17: 22-23).

Our epistle continues, “In this way we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments” (2).

Our love for others is proven to be true when it is kept within the context of the love of God. We know we are loving God when we are doing his will by obeying his commandments. Attempting to express our love for others while disobeying God in the process would prove our love to be wrong or false. That kind of love would be more hurtful than beneficial. That kind of expression would have to be brought back in line with the word of God and his will for it to be true and beneficial. Telling a lie to keep a friend out of trouble would not be true love; nor would stealing an article from a department store to give to a friend. Similarly, failing to participate in the paschal mystery (holy Mass) on the Lord's Day in order to entertain a visitor would not be true love. It would be putting someone else before God and giving bad example. Thinking we would be loving someone by urging them to overindulge in food or drink would also be a wrong kind of love.

Our epistle goes on to say, "For the love of God is this, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome" (3). Keeping the commands of God is true love because that means we conform to God's will and are pleasing to him. We are also pleasing to him because we are living according to the truth. We live in God and God lives in us. That pleases God, who is love, very much. He greatly desires to live in intimate communion with us. His commandments are not burdensome because unlike those issued by the Pharisees, God's commandments fit and are suitable to our human nature. Our spirit yearns for God, and the commandments show us the direction to go in life to keep our body under control so its passions do not lead us astray. The commandments keep us in God and prevent us from going astray. They keep us from sin. Baptism makes us God's children with supernatural powers so that the commandments become second nature to us. Grace and the Holy Spirit incline us to live by them.

Our epistle explains, "...for whoever is begotten by God conquers the world, and the victory that

conquers the world is our faith" (4). Faith opens us up to God and to baptism so that we are born of God and become his children, endowed with supernatural powers enabling us to live on a divine level. Thus we are able to live in God, above the tempting attractions of this world. We follow the lead of the Spirit. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ has freed us from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8: 2).

This supposes that we remain closely united to our indwelling God through prayer from whom we draw spiritual power to live by his guidelines, the commandments. We nourish this divine life by frequenting the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist. We practice the moral virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude. These enable us to relate properly to the world according to God's will.

Our epistle continues, "Who indeed is the victor over the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (5).

The world has been described by the Beloved Disciple as the best of lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (see 1 Jn 2: 15-17). Jesus transcended and lived above this triple concupiscence. He lived according to what was highest in him, spirit, in fidelity to his Father's will by the practice of the virtues. He kept his human nature subdued by self-denial and holy discipline. He practiced temperance towards the pleasurable and modesty of the eyes towards anything that would stir the passions inordinately. He humbled himself continuously by being obedient to his Father's will at all times. Therefore his heart was totally God's and remained directed toward him and his will. Even when Jesus' body rebelled so vehemently against having to suffer and die the horrible death of crucifixion, Jesus maintained the upper hand by submitting himself to his Father's will. As Son of God he was able to dominate human nature and keep it subject to God's will—no matter how difficult that was.

Believing in Jesus unites us to this God-man

who has been glorified and reigns victoriously over the world and its temptations. By living in close communion with this triumphant Christ, we draw spiritual power from his victory over the world. This faith brings about a new creation in us, giving us supernatural powers enabling us to live on the level of spirit. These powers, the theological and moral virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are energized through prayerful communion with Jesus.

Our epistle concludes, “This is the one who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by water alone, but by water and blood. The Spirit is the one that testifies, and the Spirit is truth” (6). The Holy Spirit testified to Jesus when he was manifested at the Jordan River in his baptism of water. He descended like a dove and rested upon Jesus. John was instructed to say, “On whomever you see the spirit come down and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God” (Jn 1: 32-34). The Father himself proclaimed at that moment “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Mt 3: 17).

This initial manifestation needed to be brought to completion when the Lamb of God proclaimed by John (Jn 1: 29, 36) was slaughtered and shed his blood to take away the sins of the world: “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb 9: 22). These two, the water and the blood, go together. The Beloved disciple watched Jesus’ side being pierced by a lance. Both water and blood gushed out of his heart and flowed from his open wound (Jn 19: 34). The blood took away the sins of the world, and the life-giving waters of the Holy Spirit could flow and spiritually vivify the peoples of the world. The water and the blood also symbolize the sacraments of baptism and the Holy Eucharist, the principal sacraments of the church.

3rd Sunday of Easter

1 Jn 2: 1-5a

Our epistle begins with, “My children, I am writing this to you so that you may not commit sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one”. (1)

“My children” is an expression of pastoral love. John is the disciple whom Jesus loved (Jn 13: 23) and who laid his head on Jesus’ chest (Jn 13: 25) at the last supper. He had heard Jesus call him and the disciples by that same term of endearment on several occasions (Jn 13: 33; 21:5). He needed to express the great love he had for his spiritual child unto whom he was writing.

He was concerned about their not committing sin. He who wanted to call fire down upon the Samaritans to consume them (Lk 9: 54) and who was named Boanerges, a son of thunder (Mk 3: 17), knew what sin was. Jesus had loved him into becoming love itself. Now he was also loving his followers into lovingness. He wanted them to avoid sin. But at the same time John, the beloved disciple, wanted his spiritual children to realize that if they did fall into sin they had an advocate to plead for their forgiveness with the Father. Jesus is the friend at our side who pleads for us (Rom 8:34) and defends us. He is our advocate, our attorney.

Jesus is also “the Righteous One”, he is David’s son that God promised to succeed him (2 Sam 7: 12-17). He is the Messiah that had been awaited for so long: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; as king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, Israel shall dwell in security. This is the name they give him: ‘The Lord our justice’” (Jer 23: 5-6).

Our epistle continues, “He is expiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but for those of the whole world” (2).

Jesus' suffering and death made up for our sins and took them away. We are completely forgiven so that we are no longer burdened by them. This is what John the Baptist announced, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1: 29). He is the one that Isaiah referred to when he said, "Through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear" (Is 53: 11).

He expiates, removes and makes up for the sins of the whole world—the effects of his saving suffering and death are limitless. As a result, we are free to live as children of God and live in intimate communion with him.

Our epistle continues, "The way we may be sure that we know him is to keep his commandments" (3).

An intellectual knowledge of the God-man, without living in close communion with him through conformity of wills and life, falls short of true and complete knowledge of him. A mere head knowledge about him without engaging the heart and the gift of self is insufficient. Obedience and submissiveness to his will is necessary for the union of persons and communion of hearts to take place before true personal and intimate knowledge can be attained. This is what keeping his commandments implies and requires.

"Those who say, 'I know him,' but do not keep his commandments are liars, and the truth is not in them" (4).

A mere head knowledge about Christ without union of hearts and lives would mean that the "knower" remains on a natural level of existence. He is incapable of mystical or supernatural knowledge attained through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This heart to heart, spirit to spirit knowledge can only take place through interpersonal communion between us and Jesus on a supernatural level. But this implies conformity of wills by keeping his word, his commandments, and maintaining purity of heart.

Our epistle concludes, "But whoever keeps his word, the love of God is truly perfected in him" (5).

Keeping Jesus' word causes the love of God to be perfected in us. Submissiveness to him overcomes the resistance and self-centeredness of pride in us so that his grace can invade our hearts. Jesus loved us to death. That love moves us to love him in return. It is out of love that we follow him and keep his commandments. This love rules our hearts, increases with time, and grows to perfection. This love pervades our whole being and informs all of the other virtues and makes them perfect (Col 3: 12-14). St. John tells us that "if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us" (1 Jn 4: 12). The divine love in the Trinity reaches completion and is brought to perfection when it reaches us and causes us to love one another. We are united in love like Father and Son are united in the Love of the Holy Spirit.

When we obey Jesus' word to love one another our union with God in love is brought to perfection. "God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him" (1 Jn 4: 16). Ministering to one another in love shows that we are united to God who is love and from whom we receive the power to love. Such a loving disposition indicates that God is living in us. This loving activity causes love to grow in us towards perfection.

4th Sunday of Easter

1 Jn 3: 1-2

Our epistle begins with, "See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him"(1).

The greatness of the Father's love is seen in his taking us who were created from the earth and raising us up to the dignity of being his children.

In order to accomplish this he sent his own Son to become one of us so that he could redeem us from sin. And then he sent the Holy Spirit to sanctify us. Through baptism he infused divine life into us. This created sharing in God's life is called sanctifying grace. It makes us partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1: 4). Our intellects are elevated by faith and perfected by the gifts of the Holy Spirit enabling us to know God and communicate with him. Our wills are elevated by charity and perfected by the gifts enabling us to love God. Thus we are able to have a personal relationship with God. We have an intuitive sense of God and are inclined to call God "Father" (Gal 4: 6). Since we are spiritual beings with intellect and will, made in the image and likeness of God, we are able to enter into an intimate relationship of knowledge and love with the Blessed Trinity. Thus being a child of God required that we be created anew and become new creatures (2 Cor 5: 17). Our human nature has been elevated and endowed with new powers that enable one to operate on a new, supernatural level. Glory to God for this marvelous gift.

These virtues and powers empower us to live virtuous lives like Jesus who receives his Sonship directly from the Father. We express this divine life that we share with him through love. We submit ourselves to God's will like Jesus and obey his commandments. We behave as true children of God as we conform ourselves to his will. But those who live for this passing world do not know and appreciate the children of God—just as they did not know Jesus. This difference between the children of God and worldlings may cause real antipathy. Scripture expresses it in these words, "Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings, reproaches us for transgressions of the law...He professes to have knowledge of God and styles himself a child of the Lord. To us he is the censure of our thoughts; merely to see him is a hardship for us, because his life is not like other men's, and different are his ways...." (Wis 2: 12-15).

Our epistle concludes, "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is"(2). As God's children, our human nature has been transformed and elevated to a new, super-natural level. We can now act on a spiritual level and relate to the divine. This is what we now are during our earthly existence. But a further transformation is yet to come upon Jesus' return in glory: "we will all be changed, in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet...the dead will be raised incorruptible...and that which is mortal must clothe itself with immortality" (1 Cor 15: 51-53). St. Paul explains the transformation that will take place in this way. The body, he says, "is sown corruptible; it is raised incorruptible; It is sown dishonorable; it is raised glorious. It is sown weak; it is raised powerful. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual one" (1 Cor 15: 42-44).

Our epistle tells us that when what we shall become is revealed, "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is". What does it mean to "be like him", like Jesus in his glorified state? When John saw the risen Jesus at Patmos he says that "his face shone like the sun at its brightest"(Rev 1: 16). Saul tells us that when the glorified Jesus appeared to him "a great light from the sky suddenly shone around me...I could see nothing because of the brightness of that light" (Acts 22: 6, 11). "God is light" (1 Jn 1: 5). It is his presence and brightness shining and glorifying Jesus. And our epistle tells us that we will be like him in our glorified state. Jesus himself said that "the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father" (Mt 13: 43).

Our epistle states that the reason that we will be like him is because "we shall see him as he is". In Scripture to "see him as he is" means to know him personally by experiencing him. It is because we will have been transformed into his very image (2 Cor 3: 18) and become like him in our very being that we will be able to "see" or know

him experientially. We know him because we experience his very being through having become like him.

5th Sunday of Easter

1 Jn 3: 18-24

Our epistle begins, “Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth”(18).

St. John is the disciple for whom Jesus had a special love (Jn 13: 23). Having been so loved, he now communicates that love to his spiritual children. He addresses them as his dear children. He wants them to understand that love must go beyond words and talk. That would stop short of the reality of love. Love must be expressed in a practical way, “in deed and truth”. We must express that love, not only in words, but through acts of service. We must be like Jesus who loved us and gave himself up in sacrifice for our sins (Gal 1: 4; 2: 20). We can give ourselves up by renouncing our own wills and doing what pleases others.

Our epistle continues, “Now this is how we shall know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts before him in whatever our hearts condemn, for God is greater than our hearts and knows everything” (19-20).

Loving acts toward others assure us that we are on the right path. Sacrificial acts prompted by love show that we are acting like our Master and Teacher, Jesus Christ. St. Paul urges us to “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Rom 12: 1). Such selfless acts of love demonstrate that we operate in the realms of truth, that we have real love for one another. Our hearts are thus reassured.

However we may fall short of the total gift of self in expressing our love for others, God understands and is very patient with us. He helps

us overcome our weakness. He knows that it is only bit by bit that we progress. His grace assists us, as we gradually overcome the reluctance of human nature to give itself. God, who is love, is full of mercy and compassion for us as we struggle to improve and grow in love. He knows our desires and our hearts; how much we want to succeed and please him.

Our epistle continues, “Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence in God and receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him” (21-22). Our hearts do not condemn us when we do everything we can to please God. We may fail even while attempting to do our best. In this way we learn to be humble and more dependent on God. Yet we can accept ourselves for having done our best.

Again we see the love exuding from the disciple whom Jesus loved as he encourages his people: He addressed them as “Beloved”.

We can be confident that God will give us everything we need “because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him”. Because we want to please him and do his will, we would not ask for anything contrary to his will. The epistle goes on to explain, “If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” (1Jn 5: 14).

But even in this case, God may postpone our request because he wants to give us something better. The suffering involved in waiting disposes us to receive still more. Jesus pleaded with his Father to be spared from drinking the cup of suffering destined for him (Mt 26: 39). The Father wanted something better for Jesus. The momentary trial he had to undergo resulted in the glorification of his body and heavenly glory in the presence of the Father. No matter how difficult the suffering, it was only for a while in time in exchange for his deification and the eternal glory of heaven.

Our epistle continues, “and his commandment is this: we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us” (23).

Two things are asked of us: to believe in Jesus and to love one another.

To believe in Jesus is to accept him and his revelation. It means to open our hearts to receive him in his self gift. To believe in Jesus’ name is to believe that he is divine, that he is the God-man, the Word, who comes to reveal his Father. Faith brings about a mutual indwelling: Jesus in us and we in Jesus. He enriches us with his divine presence and fills us with spiritual blessings. Through this union with Jesus we draw divine love from him with which we are filled to pour out upon others. It is through our prayerful union with him, attained through faith, that we are able to draw the power to love one another. Our epistle concludes, “Those who keep his commandments remain in him and he in them, and the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he gave us” (24).

Faith leads to baptism which immerses us into Christ. We want to remain in this close interpersonal union with the God-man. Jesus’ commandments guide us and show us what kind of moral lives we must live to be able to remain united to him.

Jesus’ commandments are the words he spoke in the Gospels and all of the inspired writings of the New Testament—these specify still further what Jesus taught in the Gospels. Jesus’ “Commandments” go far beyond what the Old Testament required. He refined the Ten Commandments with his higher moral teaching. He brought them to completion. For example, he perfected the external letter of the law forbidding adultery by teaching the need for purity of heart and the avoidance of lust.

In order to succeed in keeping the new law with pure hearts, it was necessary that the Holy

Spirit be given to us to purify our hearts. His gifts enlighten us and enable us to know Jesus in his indwelling presence. Jesus explained at the Last Supper that we would know the Holy Spirit “because it remains in you, and will be in you” (Jn 14: 17). He also explained that “On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you” (Jn 14: 20). It is the Holy Spirit who enlightens us with his gifts regarding our mutual indwelling with Jesus.

6th Sunday of Easter

1 Jn 4: 7-10

Our epistle begins with, “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; and everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God” (7).

Again, John the beloved disciple, the one for whom Jesus had a special love, brings that love to perfection by extending it to others. He continues that love tradition; he keeps it alive—just as we are called to do. We also have been loved, like John, and must pass on that love. It must not die in us. We must keep it alive by allowing it to continue to love through us.

The motive that is given to move us to love one another is that love is of God, that is, it comes from God who is its source. When we love, therefore, we demonstrate that we are united to God. Christian love is a unique kind of love. It is totally selfless. It can have no earthly source. When we express it, therefore, we show that we are closely connected to God who alone is the source of this supernatural love. Our ability to love means that we are born of God; we are truly his children when we love selflessly the way he loves.

Through the gift of wisdom, which perfects our will and the virtue of charity, we are able to experience God as love. Love perfected by wisdom enables us to know God as love.

Our epistle continues, “Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love” (8).

Love is a sign that we are united to God. A non-loving person shows that he is not united to God and does not know God. For, God’s very nature is love as demonstrated by his selfless acts of love in the history of salvation. He first loved us through creation and his saving acts of redemption in Jesus. His loving nature continues to be expressed by sustaining us in existence even when we continue to sin or forget him. He still goes on loving us even if we fail to respond to his love initiative. Our insensitivity to love indicates that we cannot possibly know God whose very nature and whole expression of existence is love. “In this way the love of God was revealed to us; God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him” (9).

We know that God is love from the fact that he sent his Son to suffer and die for us even when we were in our rebellious, sinful state. Even that did not deter him from coming to love us. Even our defiant attitude could not repel his explosive love. It overflowed to us as mercy and compassion. His supercharged love could not be blocked from spilling over unto us in our miserable sinful condition. This divine loving attitude reveals to us who God is and what his agape love is like. That is why we proclaim him as holy, holy, holy. His selfless, utter self-giving love is totally other than ours. Yet we are called to image him in our lives, to be like him in loving. We were created in his image and likeness. His example, expressed in Jesus taking a human form and giving us his all, expresses what we are called to be, what our restored nature as children of God inclines us to be. His abiding presence and actual grace is actively assisting us to grow in the direction of self-gift in love.

Jesus became human as Son of God. He is intimately connected to us through his human nature. Through faith and baptism we become united to him as branches connected to the divine vine. His own divine life received from the Father

can therefore flow into us and enliven us with that divine love-life that is so self-giving. It prompts us to reciprocate love to him both directly and through our fellow humans. That is how we keep that love-life alive and flowing.

“In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins” (10).

We were destitute of love. We had none to give. We were wholly turned in upon ourselves in sinful living. But God had pity on us. He came to our rescue by his loving condescendence of becoming one of us and taking our sins upon himself. He expelled the evil in our human nature by his atrocious sufferings and death. By his suffering and death he destroyed our sins. He freed us from evil and then poured his own divine love-life into us through the Holy Spirit. He charged us with divine love so we could begin to love like him. He brought us to life in Christ to whom we were united through baptism. He made us into new creatures (2 Cor 5: 17) capable of returning love for love. We have new love powers to return God’s love for us. He has given us the means to awaken and express that love, and to make that love grow to stupendous heights as demonstrated by the saints who cooperated fully with that loving grace. They fed that love through prayerful communion with God who is the source of that love. They increased and enlivened their faith by continuously cherishing God’s word in their hearts (see Rom 10: 17). They assimilated that divine love exuding from the glorified, risen Jesus whom they received in the Holy Eucharist, the Bread of Life. As he receives that love-life from the Father, they and we receive it as he pours it into us through his Eucharistic Body. Thus, through prayer, word and sacrament we are filled and prompted by divine love to love the way God loves—continuously, selflessly—to change our world into a place of love the way Jesus did.

Ascension of the Lord (7th)

Eph 1: 17-23

Our epistle begins with, “May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a Spirit of Wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him” (17). The Father is the source from which Jesus proceeds and receives the divinity and the glory that is proper to it. St. Paul prays that this Father would give his people, including us, “a Spirit of wisdom and revelation” to illumine our hearts for a personal, experiential knowledge of him. This living knowledge, springing from having been plunged into God, is what kept driving St. Paul to the ends of the earth to proclaim the glory of God and his Christ. That heart knowledge is also available to us who have been immersed in Christ through baptism. It is through the gift of wisdom that the Holy Spirit gives us this personal, vivifying knowledge of God.

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

The heart or spirit is the very core and center of our being from which thinking and willing proceed. It is to this inner depth that contemplation takes us so that we can have an experience of the divine through the gifts of wisdom and understanding. St. Paul explains, “For God...has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God [shining] on the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). “All of us [are invited] to gaz[e] with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord...” (2 Cor 3: 18). That is how we attain the experiential knowledge being offered us. That is how we can experience the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise, “Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God” (Mt 5: 8). It is in this way that we “may know what is the hope that belongs to his call”. Elsewhere St. Paul speaks of “Christ in you the hope for glory” (Col 1: 27). In other words our close and intimate association with our indwelling, glorious Savior

gives us a foretaste of the glory of heaven. We are given a mystical knowledge of the joy that God is calling us to in heaven. We have a first hand experience of “the riches of glory” when we will have received our “inheritance” among the angels and saints in heaven. God’s “glory” is “the radiance of his majesty” (CCC 2809) of which we are given a glimpse in our hearts.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pentecost Sunday

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

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

To believe that Jesus is God indicates that the Holy Spirit is within a person’s heart revealing

this to him. “Whoever believes in the Son of God has this testimony within himself” (1 Jn 5: 10).

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

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

St. Paul gives examples of these different kinds of spiritual gifts: the expression of wisdom, the expression of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, mighty deeds, prophecy, discernment of spirits, varieties of tongues and interpretation of tongues (1 Cor 12: 8-10). All of these are attributed to the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, although all external works are produced by all three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. These spiritual gifts come from God and have a good purpose which is the up-building of the church. However different these are, they work together for the good of all. Their good source have a good effect on the people of God no matter how different they are. “...there are different forms of service but the same Lord” (5). The fact that these different gifts are used by different individuals to serve the needs of the church should not be divisive. Rather, since they come from God, who is love, they tend to unify and spread goodness and love. To serve is to love and to reign with God.

Serving is a way of moving away from self-centeredness. Serving others makes us like Jesus who said, “The Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20: 28). Serving others takes us out

of ourselves and overcomes selfishness. "...there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone" (6).

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

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

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

The members of the human body are so different from each other, and yet they work together in

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

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

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

Solemnity of The Most Holy Trinity Rom 8: 14-17

"For those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (14).

TTrue children of God are aware of his presence and inspirations and follow his lead. Jesus explained that he would send another advocate, the Holy Spirit, "to be with you always, the Spirit of truth.... You know it, because

it remains with you, and will be in you” (Jn 14: 16-17), “he will guide you to all truth” (Jn 16: 13). As an advocate, he is our spiritual attorney who remains at our side to counsel and guide us safely through this world and its temptations. St. Paul explains how we know that we are sons and daughters of God: “As proof that you are children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” (Gal 4: 6). Jesus is the natural, external Son of God. After he had been glorified he sent his own Spirit into our hearts at baptism to make us adopted children of God by grace. This Holy Spirit, through our new graced nature (2 Cor 5: 17) as children of God, makes us realize and experience the fact that we are children of God and enables us to recognize God as our Father. Instead of living in fear of God as people of old, we live in love with the same kind of intimacy toward God that children have towards their parents.

St. Paul explains, “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you received a Spirit of adoption, through whom we cry ‘Abba, Father!’” (15). The grace of baptism has configured us to Christ, the Son. We are sons and daughters in the Son whose Spirit makes us like himself, inclining us to look upon God with filial love and call upon him with peaceful confidence. We are true members of God’s family. Through grace, we are privileged to operate on a higher, supernatural level. We have been endowed with spiritual powers, theological and moral virtues, and gifts that perfect these virtues so that we can know God and communicate with him. We are able to live in continuous communion with him. The Father exhorts us through Jesus, “Remain in me, as I remain in you....Remain in my love” (Jn 15: 4, 9). He calls us to filial intimacy with him.

The word “Abba” is the special term that Jesus used to speak to his Father as his child from whom he proceeds from all eternity. It is similar to our way of addressing our earthly father when we say, “Daddy”. This term like the Aramaic term “Abba” expressed a very personal and intimate relationship that is so singular and special.

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (16). We ourselves are being born of God from moment to moment. God continues to sustain us in existence from the nothingness from which he drew us. Moreover, through baptism he has given us a spiritual rebirth. As Jesus told Nicodemus, “What is born of spirit is spirit” (Jn 3: 5-6). The Holy Spirit that Jesus gave us and is living within our hearts (Jn 14: 16-17) testifies that we are children of God and enables us to relate to God as children to their Father.

Through the spiritual powers with which we are endowed as children of God, we act on a spiritual, supernatural level. This is the highest kind of life that a human being can live. It is the happiest life attainable on earth. It fulfills our highest desires for intimacy and love. God earnestly calls us to this highest life saying, “All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat; Come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk! Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what fails to satisfy? Heed me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare. Come to me heedfully, listen, that you may have life. I will renew with you the everlasting covenant, the benefits assured to David” (Is 55: 1-3).

Jesus himself renews and implicitly explains this invitation when he says, “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11: 28). It is through such intimacy with God, attained and maintained through obeying his will and living in childlike, prayerful communion with him that we find the highest joy to which we are called as children of God. This intimate union and communion with God is really the foretaste and beginning of eternal life (Jn 17: 3).

St. Paul takes us beyond this life and focuses on what is yet to come, saying, “and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him” (17).

As Jesus, the divine Son of God, was glorified and experienced the fullness of the kingdom after he had suffered so will we. St. Paul speaks of “what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones” (Eph 1: 18). Jesus gave us a preview of his and our inheritance at his transfiguration: “his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light” (Mt 17: 2). He explained that our inheritance would be similar to his: “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Mt 13: 43).

Our epistle explains, however, that we become “joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him”. The reason we must suffer is because accepted suffering has a marvelous transforming power. It brings about our spiritualization. As St. Paul explains, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit incorruption” (1 Cor 15: 50). Unredeemed flesh is indisposed and even opposed to the glory of God (Gal 5: 17). Flesh must be purified and spiritualized through suffering to be receptive to the invasive glory of God.

We pray then, that we can be receptive to the hardships of life so that we can be gradually, spiritually transformed and become receptive to the glory of God, already anticipating the fullness of the glorious inheritance that will be ours. Jesus prayed for this when he said, “Father...I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me” (Jn 17: 24).

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ—Corpus Christi Heb 9: 11-15

“When Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be, passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation” (11).

Christ Jesus is our high priest. He intercedes for us before God. He sacrificed himself to death

for us, out of his great love for us. Through his glorious resurrection and ascension he sent the Holy Spirit to pour out his spiritual riches upon us in this age of the New Testament and “the good things that have come to be”. We have the continuous presence of the glorified Christ always available to us in his church. We can contact him in each of the sacraments for all our spiritual needs. He awaits our visit in each tabernacle in our churches. He comes to us in the Holy Eucharist. He has even made his dwelling place in our hearts. He has raised us to a new level of being through baptism so we can share in his divine life and live continuously in the presence of God.

“Passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle...not belonging to this creation” may refer to the heavenly regions through which Jesus passed into the highest heaven, where God lives, the Holy of Holies. Or, it may refer to Jesus’ human body which was glorified and became the dwelling place for all who are united to him (see Jn 14: 2).

“He entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption” (12).

In the Old Testament the high priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement every year to sprinkle the blood of animals to cleanse the people from ritual uncleanness. But the blood of sacrificed animals could not take away sins. Jesus entered once for all into the real Holy of Holies—not its mere symbol—the actual sanctuary of God’s dwelling place, with his own blood, sacrificed on the cross for love of us. By pouring out his blood for love of us, he delivered us from sin. His one sacrifice brought about “eternal redemption” of our sins. That means that his self-sacrifice is forever effective in taking away any sins that we may commit. His outpoured blood has eternal, endless value because he is the God-man—he is divine. His sacrifice has infinite value. This great mystery of redemption is made

present on our altars at every mass so that, by our participation, we may receive and assimilate through faith, its saving power.

“For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of a heifer’s ashes can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed (13), how much more will the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God” (14). The blood of these animals brought about ritual purification. It cleansed them from some form of legal uncleanness. Ashes from a red heifer that had been burned were mixed with water and used for the cleansing of those who had become ritually defiled by touching a corpse (see Num 19). If the blood of animals could sanctify those who had contracted some form of external defilement according to the Law of Moses, how much more will the blood of Christ cleanse us from sin? The purifying power of Jesus’ sacrifice penetrates to our inmost depths to remove the sins that defiled our consciences. Sinful actions are “dead works”; they have no spiritual value, whereas good works have enduring spiritual value. They follow us into eternity (See Rev 14: 13), because they are spiritually transforming. Spirit assertiveness is required to perform virtuous acts or good works. These put us on the level of spirit through which we participate in the eternity, and incorruptibility of God. After having been cleansed from morally stained consciences, we are then free for God, to worship him with our whole heart and soul. We can then enjoy being in a living communion and an experiential connectedness with him. Our whole lives become “a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” a “spiritual worship” (Rom 12: 1). In this way we can join Jesus who “offered himself unblemished to God”.

This reminds us of the prescription of the Law where the animal that was to be sacrificed had to be physically unblemished (Ex 29: 1). Ours is a moral integrity and spiritual purity, free from any moral stain. It is “through the eternal Spirit” that Jesus offered himself to God. By his self-gift to the

Father in his sacrificial offering, Jesus was taken up into glory. He was then glorified and entered into the eternity of God. It is in this new, heavenly sphere of existence that Jesus “through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God”. This sacrificial self-offering continues, caught up as it is, in the eternity of God.

“For this reason he is mediator of a new covenant: since a death has taken place for deliverance from transgressions under the first covenant, those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” (15).

Jesus established, mediated, a new covenant and sealed it in his blood (Mk 14: 24). In this way he “delivered from transgressions (sins) those who were under the first covenant” He said, “this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26: 28).

For, the old covenant sacrifices were unable to free the people from sin. Only Jesus’ sacrifice could accomplish such a spiritual cleansing. Therefore those who respond to God’s call “may receive the promised eternal inheritance”, that is, the life of glory with God in heaven.

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2 Cor 5:6-10

As we await our departure from this earth for our heavenly home, we are consoled and encouraged by the presence of the Spirit who has been given to us as a foretaste of the heavenly life. Through the gifts of the Holy Spirit we are given experiential knowledge of the life to come (2 Cor 5:5).

During our earthly existence, while we live in our bodies, we are away from being with God in heaven. We cannot see him face to face as we will later in the beatific vision. But we do have some elementary knowledge of God. In the words of St. Paul, “at present we see indistinctly, as in a

mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known” (1 Cor 13:12). We should note that the mirrors during the time St. Paul was living were a polished bronze. The images they reflected were hazy and indistinct. Our present perception of God is similarly imperfect. We live our lives on earth by faith rather than by sight. We depend on the revealed truths of faith to know what to do instead of seeing directly. For example, we rely on the third commandment to keep holy the Lord’s Day for we do not understand clearly of ourselves this need to worship God.

Even if St. Paul had to walk by faith, he still had the courage to want to leave his earthly existence in the body and go home to the Lord in heaven. Although, we must say, he had the advantage of having seen the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3). He also speaks of being “caught up to the third heaven...into Paradise and heard ineffable things which no one may utter” (2 Cor 12:2-4). Perhaps most of us have unfinished spiritual business to take care of before we would be ready to “leave the body and go home to the Lord”. We are not quite ready yet.

Meanwhile we aspire to please the Lord. We consciously go about living in God’s presence doing his will. This is true whether we are at home living among family and friends, or whether we are in some distant area evangelizing others. We always try to be pleasing to God because we will all have to appear before the judgment seat of Christ. There we will receive what we deserve, according to the lives we lived in our bodies while on earth. We will be rewarded or punished depending on whether we did good or evil.

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2 Cor 5: 14-17

“The love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore all have died” (14).

The sacrificial love for us that Jesus demonstrated on the cross and poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5) moves St. Paul and us to respond with love and zeal. This love impels us to return love for love. It compels us to proclaim it to the whole world. This love urges us interiorly to spend ourselves indefatigably to make it known and to communicate it to others. For, that love is God’s own eternal love given to us, lifting us up above our mere human existence to participate in the very love and life of God. The full power of that love in our hearts constrains us to respond with the same kind of forceful love that cries out to the world for attention and response.

As the new Adam representing all of us Jesus died for all of us, he died to his own will to live for the Father. We are called to join him in dying to all in us that resists God’s will; we die to selfishness so we can live for God. By living in union with him in this way we can enjoy the superior life of God. Jesus’ dying communicates that grace of dying to us at baptism. That grace empowers and inclines us to likewise die to, or refuse to indulge, our sinful inclinations. Jesus’ saving death is for all who open themselves to receive its effects. He is the divine savior whose sacrificial death took away the sins of the whole world, all humankind. He assumes our human nature so that he contains us in himself. Thus he could die for all of us, in our place, in our name.

“He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (15).

Jesus’ death graces and enables us to live on a new, higher level of life, the life of the Spirit of the risen Jesus. Living for him means living his life. We live for him who lived and died for us—to reciprocate his love. Living for him means selfless living which opens us up to his divine level of living. This kind of living is the most beneficial activity we can do for ourselves. It brings us into the stream of the life of the Blessed Trinity, the divine life that Jesus lives. We are called to join Jesus’ dying and rising. We must first die to the

old life of sin and selfish living before we can live the life of the risen Jesus. Dying involves the difficulty of letting go of the old life we enjoyed for rising to the still better, blissful life of God.

“Consequently, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh; even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no longer” (16).

At one time St. Paul evaluated Jesus and others with his unredeemed, human way of thinking and judging. He looked upon Jesus as the Pharisee that he, Paul, was, totally opposed to what Jesus was and taught. He expected the Messiah to be different than the kind of spiritual messiah Jesus was. But when he met the divine Jesus in blinding light, he was totally transformed. He was enlightened by the Holy Spirit and began to perceive and judge on a spiritual level. He no longer judged according to worldly standards. He could penetrate deeply into the spiritual world and grasp the truth about Jesus as Messiah and Son of God. He was able to see beyond the humanity of Christ and attain his divinity.

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

After St. Paul met Jesus in a blinding light on the road to Damascus (Acts 9: 3-9), he was totally transformed and continually perceived himself to be “in Christ”. His old self and sinful, limited human way of behaving died then and there. He began to live the life of Christ (Gal 2: 20). He lived in Christ. He perceived himself to be continually in him. He lived in interpersonal communion with his Lord and Savior. He did not operate outside of Jesus. He did everything with and in him. He perceived himself to be a new creation (2 Cor 5: 17). He keenly experienced his transformation into Christ so he could teach us what happened to us in like manner when we were baptized. By becoming partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1: 4) our human nature has taken on new qualities.

Sanctifying grace brings with it a new spiritual organism; our human nature has undergone a transformation. For example, our intellect has been elevated by faith, perfected by the gifts of Wisdom, knowledge, understanding and counsel. Our wills have been elevated by the virtue of charity perfected by the gift of Wisdom. Our pleasure passion has been perfected by the virtue of temperance, and the gift of fear of the Lord; our aggressive passion has been perfected by the virtue of fortitude and the gift of fortitude. We are thus endowed with powers that enable us to act as Children of God, on a new, spiritual level. We are indeed a “new creation”.

It is true to say that the old things have passed away. We no longer judge and act in a merely human and imperfect way. We see things the way God does. The Holy Spirit is able to lead us through his seven gifts which perceive his inspiration. That is what St. Paul meant when he said, “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are Children of God” (Rom 8: 14). God can then enable us to think and act the way he does. By dying to self, we acquire a new way of being and living. We die only in order to rise and live the life of the resurrection; in and with Jesus.

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2 Cor 8: 7, 9, 13-15

“As you excel in every respect, in faith, discourse, knowledge, all earnestness, and in the love we have for you, may you excel in this gracious act also” (7).

St. Paul enumerates some of the spiritual gifts that the Corinthian community excels in to show them how blessed they are. These virtuous qualities and the prosperity they enjoy will prompt them to contribute toward the collection being taken up to help the needy church in Jerusalem. Their faith will make them realize their solidarity with their needy sister church. Their knowledge of how blessed they are will prompt them to be generous in sharing

with the Jerusalem community. Their earnestness expresses how serious and intent they are in living out their faith in this practical way of assisting their fellow Christians.

“For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (9). In order to motivate the Corinthians, St. Paul cites the example of Jesus’ act of becoming human to redeem us. He wants them to imitate the graciousness of our Savior. Jesus was “rich”: he possessed the same divine nature as the Father. “For in him dwells the whole fullness of the deity” (Col 2: 9). The whole world and everything in it belonged to him. He enjoyed the infinite perfection of the divinity. And yet, out of love for us, he “emptied himself” (Phil 2: 7) or all the glory that was rightfully his, in order to become one of us. He assumed the poverty of our human nature with all its weakness, limitations and the suffering that accompanies our humanity. From beginning to end he lived his whole life on earth in this impoverished condition, even to the extremes of suffering and dying by crucifixion for love of us. He impoverished himself in this way in order to enrich us with his divinity. St. Paul speaks of “the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us” (Eph 1: 7-8), the “immeasurable riches of his grace” (Eph 2: 7), “the inscrutable riches of Christ” (Eph 3: 8). These spiritual riches that Jesus transmitted to us are far superior and surpass all earthly treasures.

St. Paul uses this extreme example of Jesus’ generosity to motivate and encourage the Corinthians to participate in the charity being shown to the impoverished Jerusalem Christian community.

He goes on to explain, “...not that others should have relief while you are burdened, but that as a matter of equality...” (13).

St. Paul does not want this collection to be a burden for the Corinthians. He is not suggesting that they impoverish themselves like Jesus did

to help their needy neighbors. Rather, he simply wants them to share some of their abundant material resources with them. In this way a kind of equality will be established.

He explains, “Your abundance at the present time should supply their needs, so that their abundance may also supply your needs, that there may be equality” (14).

There ought to be a balance between blessings and burdens. The spiritual blessings received from the chosen people have been poured upon the Gentiles through Christ. Now the Gentiles are being called upon to distribute their material blessings in gratitude to those who are in want. The prosperity of the Corinthian Gentiles ought to be used to alleviate the dire poverty of the Christian Jews in Jerusalem. Giving in this way will dispose the Corinthians to receive the spiritual riches that come from the Israelites and Christ, the anointed one, whom they gave to the world. It is only by dispossessing ourselves that we are open to receive the spiritual riches that Jesus, the Christ, has come to give us. The spirit assertiveness needed for such selflessness, disposes us for union with him and to receive his outpoured Spirit.

Our epistle concludes, “As it is written: ‘whoever had much did not have more, and whoever had little did not have less’” (15).

St. Paul is quoting Exodus 16: 18 concerning the gathering of the manna as the Lord had commanded. Some gathered a large amount and some a small amount (Ex 16: 17). In this way the manna was equally distributed. Since a sufficient amount of daily rations was given to each person and family, there was no need to store away an extra amount. God provided for their needs each day. To take more than needed would have shown a lack of trust in God’s providence.

St. Paul is again motivating his people to imitate God in distributing their resources so that no one in the Christian Community would be lacking

in the necessities of life. They are being urged to share the blessings of their prosperity.

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2 Cor 12: 7-10

“That I, Paul, might not become too elated, because of the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan, to beat me, to keep me from being too elated” (7).

Human nature in its wounded condition is prone to pride. St. Paul was privileged to receive special encounters with the risen Christ to prepare, guide or sustain him in his apostolic mission (see Acts 9: 1-8; 16: 9; 18: 9; 22: 17-18; Gal 1:12). He tells us that he was “caught up into Paradise and heard ineffable things, which no one may utter” (2 Cor 12:4). He could easily have become proud, consider himself worthy of these privileged revelations and believe himself to be better than others. But God saw to it that this would not happen to his apostle. He allowed Paul to be afflicted with some sort of trial, cross or suffering. We do not know what precisely that was. It may have been some physical disability such as a problem with his eyes (see Gal 4: 13-15; 6:11); it may have been a chronic illness such as a recurring fever, or some sort of handicap hindering his missionary activity. Whatever it was, it afflicted him seriously. St. Paul speaks of it as “an angel of Satan to beat me”. God allowed the devil to “beat” him in this way. He permits the devil to try us and make life difficult for us in order to make us more virtuous and bring about a greater good. St. Paul understands that God is allowing this difficult condition or situation to go on in order to keep him humble and “to keep [him] from being too elated”.

“Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me” (8).

St. Paul felt “this thorn in the flesh” very keenly. It was a source of aggravation to him. He considered it to be a serious obstacle to his apostolic activity.

The harassment of this trial was obviously difficult for him to accept. His prayer to Jesus, therefore, was insistent. He persistently asked for its removal—it seems too much of a hindrance to his precious work. St. Paul’s triple request is likened to that of Jesus begging his Father to spare him from the horrible death by crucifixion (Mk 14: 35-41).

“...but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me” (9). Just as Jesus’ prayer to be spared from crucifixion was denied because the Father wanted to give him something better, so too is Paul’s. Some times answers to our petitions are delayed so that during the waiting period we may be better disposed through hope and deprivation to receive what we asked for. Even if our request is not fulfilled as we asked for it, we did receive the spiritual benefit derived from contact with God attained through our prayer of petition. For in this exercise we used the theological virtues of faith and hope through which we reached God. This connectedness is of great spiritual profit for us. The righteousness of God is poured into us through this faith—communion with our God.

Sometimes, however, the prayer request is not fulfilled because God, who is infinite wisdom and love knows better than we. He knows us through and through and he knows the future. So he does not give us what we ask for in our limited knowledge. Perhaps, as in the case of Jesus, the person must die, or as in the case of Paul, suffer the evil at hand. Jesus had a better, glorious life awaiting him after going through death. Paul was freed from his potential prideful disposition as a result of the divine revelations. Plus, his growth in virtue through patient endurance of the trial, was transforming for him personally and his ministry benefited immeasurably through his participation in the passion of Christ (Col 1: 24) (CCC 1508).

Even if St. Paul did not receive release from his affliction as he had asked, his prayer was effective.

He received in response the grace to patiently endure “this thorn in the flesh”. The grace received through his prayer was sufficient to deal with his trial. The reason given for Jesus’, the Lord’s, response was that “power is made perfect in weakness”. The weakness made Paul cry out to God for his divine assistance. The prayer is more ardent and vehement. The grave need experienced makes for a more efficacious prayer. And God reciprocates with superabundant grace. God’s sustaining power is more apparent. The weakness is totally incompetent and inadequate to deal with the problem being suffered. It becomes obvious that God is present; intervening with his power, enabling the recipient to peacefully endure what he could not accept or endure on his own. The apostle then is thus moved to continually and totally rely on the Lord Jesus for the power he needs to fulfill his ministry.

As a result of his understanding how weakness attracts divine power all the more so he can accomplish his missionary work, St. Paul boasts of his weaknesses rather than his revelations. For it is through the weaknesses he experienced that he was powerfully forced on God for his help. This divine strength now constantly dwells in him to make him a super apostle.

“Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (10).

As a result of God’s fidelity in supplying strength to supplement his weaknesses, St. Paul rests at peace with his “thorn in the flesh”. Might it be that the various difficulties he enumerates in this verse are an actual definition of his “thorn”? That is, “weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and constraints”. At any rate, he accepts these “for the sake of Christ”, that is, for the building of his kingdom on earth, the church. These various afflictions are a participation in the sufferings of Christ so that grace may flow all the more for its up-building.

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time Eph 1:3-14

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens” (3).

St. Paul blesses God in the sense that he praises him for the various blessings he proceeds to enumerate. He recognizes God’s gifts and expresses his gratitude to him for them.

He blesses God for blessing us in Christ “with every spiritual blessing in the heavens”.

These blessings come to us as a result of our being “in Christ”, that is, for having been united to Jesus through baptism. Our attentiveness to this privileged union with Jesus opens us to a continuous outpouring of the Holy Spirit issuing from our exalted glorified Lord. “Every spiritual blessing” is thus being poured out into our open hearts. These ineffable blessings originate from the Father who gave us his Son through whom these blessings come in the Holy Spirit. How blessed we are! And that is why we join St. Paul in blessing God with abundant, unceasing praise. Our epistle continues, “as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him” (4).

Out of his amazing love for us from all eternity God wanted us to be conceived and born—that is why we came to be. He chose us “before the foundation of the world”. That is how long he knew us and desired us to exist. He drew us from the darkness of nothingness into the light of self-consciousness and life. That is why we must, with St. Paul be in continuous praise of our Father who gave us life, and continues to sustain us from moment to moment, every breath, every heartbeat. This is true both regarding natural life as well as supernatural. He chose us for a purpose. We are called to be holy, that is, set apart for God, to be singularly dedicated to him in praise and worship. Our vocation is to offer our bodies to God as a living sacrifice without the least moral

blemish (Rom 12: 1). Unlike Adam and Eve who hid themselves after they had sinned, we stand “before him, that is, in God’s presence, blameless in his sight the way he wanted Abraham to be (Gen 17: 1).

“In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ in accord with the favor of his will” (5).

It is out of love for us that God had us in mind and selected us to be his children. He accomplished this through the sacrificial suffering and death of his Son, Jesus. Thus through the sanctifying grace he gained for us, God has made us partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1: 4), and in that way made us his adopted children. We have the ability to enter into intimate communion with the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. God may draw us through prayer into the life of the Blessed Trinity. We have free access to God’s indwelling presence through the virtue of faith (Rom 5: 1-2). We are privileged children of God indeed! God has favored us in a remarkable way, “for the praise of the glory of his grace that he granted us in the beloved” (6).

Seeing what God has thus done for us, we cannot but break out in praise of his glorious grace, this magnificent favor of God toward us. This accomplished by uniting us to his beloved and glorious Son. This is such a unique grace and favor! This grace is a manifestation of God’s glory, his beauty, his love, his goodness, as seen and experienced in making us his adopted children, and allowing us to address him as our Father. “See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are” (1 Jn 3: 1).

God has accomplished this unique relationship with us, not in some distant manner, but in the intimate and immediate union with his beloved and infinitely precious Son. He spiritually transforms us so that our very being, reflecting his holiness, becomes a praise of his glory.

“In him we have redemption by his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions, in accord with the riches of his grace (7) that he lavished upon us”.

It is in union with Jesus, who shed his blood and died for us, that our sins have been forgiven and taken away. This is how rich God’s favor has been in our regard. He has lavished his grace upon us beyond our dreams. It does not seem possible that God could have loved us to such an extreme. “In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will in accord with his favor that he set forth in him” (9).

God enriched St. Paul with such wisdom and insight by revealing to him the mystery of his will to save all people by uniting them together in love in Christ. God’s secret plan was to form a universal communion of all peoples in his beloved Son. This was the plan “he set forth” in Christ and executed, using the free ill-will of those who arrested and crucified Jesus, to bring it about.

“...as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth” (10).

God’s plan was to await a new era in which he would exercise his power in all its fullness. This plan began to take place when Jesus was born into our human condition. In this way, he could take up in himself the whole universe. He united heaven and earth in himself. Thus he could sanctify and redeem all things in himself, both heaven and earth, the spiritual world and the material world. Through the resurrection Jesus became the universal man and could unite all peoples in himself. He is the new Adam and new head of the human race, endowed with divine power to bring all humankind together in himself. By his saving grace he is able to empower all the children of God to overcome all the barriers that divide us, such as race, color, culture and political differences. Jesus is one of us and our world and unites us all together in himself, in love, sanctifying us with his redemptive grace.

“In him we were also chosen, destined in accord with the purpose of the One who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will (11) so that we might exist for the praise of his glory, we who first hoped in Christ” (12). It was in union with Christ that Paul and his Jewish people were chosen for God’s holy purpose and who effectively carries out what he has willed to take place. The purpose for which God chose the Jewish people is the “praise of his glory”. That is what God intended the chosen people for: they must be aware of his glorious works and praise him for them. Moreover, the transformation of their very being by his grace and merciful love causes their very holy being to become an act of habitual praise and glorification of God.

“In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised holy Spirit (13).

It is in union with Christ that the gentiles also were called. They heard the word revealing the truth about the reality of God and how to live in order to please him and thus be saved from the condemnation on judgment day. That is the good news of the gospel. They were moved to believe in him and were led to the baptismal font where they were sealed with the Holy Spirit promised by the prophets (Is 2: 2; 44: 3; Jl 3: 1-5). The seal is a sign of ownership. They were sealed with the Holy Spirit “which is the first installment of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s possession, to the praise of his glory” (14).

They belong to God and are given a foretaste and down payment of heavenly life by the Holy Spirit. Both the Ephesians and we were redeemed by the blood of Christ so that we belong to God. We must realize how fortunate and blessed we are and respond by ceaseless praise and thanks to God. Our very holiness redounds to his praise and glory.

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Eph 2:13-18

“...in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ” (13).

The bloody sacrifice of Jesus on the cross brought about the forgiveness of sins. The Gentiles were considered far away from God through disbelief and immorality. Now that they have become believers and their sins have been taken away, they have drawn near to God. This occurred when their faith led them to baptism and they were immersed into Christ. There, Gentiles were brought near to God by their being united to Christ who is one with the Father (Jn 10: 30).

“For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh...” (14).

Jesus united both Jew and Gentile. In his flesh he suffered so that the sin that separated them from God and each other was forgiven and removed. They were united to each other by being baptized into Christ. Sin brings about inner turmoil, creating tension and war between peoples. By taking away the sins of the world, Jesus had brought about reconciliation between man and God and between individuals. Thus “he is our peace” just as the prophet Micah said he would be (Mic 5: 4). We are at peace within ourselves leading us to live in harmony with each other in mutual acceptance and understanding in tranquility of order.

The “dividing wall of enmity” refers to the wall in the Jerusalem temple which separated the Gentiles from the Jews. Any Gentile who dare trespass was liable to the death penalty. That wall symbolized the separation called for in the Jewish way of life to keep themselves from being profaned and contaminated by the idol worship and immorality of the Gentiles. Thus no Jew could eat with a Gentile or enter his home. Jesus ignored and abolished these legal precepts such

as dietary laws that made socializing between Jew and Gentile difficult or impossible. This made it possible for all, Jew and Gentile, all nations to be united in Christ in the Messianic age.

“...abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace” (15).

The old law was given to the chosen people, the Jews, through Moses in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. When Jesus came and proved himself to be the Messiah, he established a new law as the prophet Jeremiah had announced (Jer 31: 31-34). The old law, which required circumcision, animal sacrifices, dietary laws and certain festival days, was no longer required. Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection fulfilled and replaced the old Passover. His one sacrifice replaced the many animal sacrifices. Through baptism both Jew and Gentile are joined to Christ to form one body with him. All divisive elements contained in the old law have been removed so that Jew and Gentile can live together in peace.

“...and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it” (16).

Jesus’ one sacrifice made up for and took away the sins of the whole world. Thus, all who received his grace through faith were reconciled and made one with God. They were all united together to Christ. This was made possible through Jesus’ suffering on the cross. Therefore the hatred and antagonism between Jew and Gentile were done away with and replaced with forgiveness and love. “He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near” (17).

Jesus brought his peace to the world and commanded his apostles to bring the good news of God’s love and forgiveness to all nations (Mt 28: 18-20). He fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah, “Peace, peace to the far and the near, says the Lord; and I will heal them” (Is 57: 19).

Whether it was to the Gentiles who were far off, or anyone who was spiritually distant from God; whether it was to the Jews who were near, or anyone who had drawn near to God by grace; Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid” (Jn 14: 27);

“...for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” (18).

Because Jesus is our mediator and made up for our sins, we are now given free access to God, the Father in the Spirit. We see here that the whole Trinity is involved in bringing us salvation. It is through the Son who became one of us so that he could suffer and die for our salvation that we are given free access to the Father who sent him. But it is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Risen Jesus, who actually unites us to the Father. The Spirit completes the salvific work of Jesus and brings us into intimate communion with the Father who is one with Jesus in the divinity.

We are so privileged to have such easy access to God through faith which elevates our intellects. A simple act of the mind thus perfected can take us into the presence of God. The will, perfected by the supernatural virtue of charity, follows the intellect and can thus love God. Our knowledge of God through faith followed and coupled with love attains God himself. We can thus live in his presence and abide with him in love continuously. See what Jesus has done for us and made available for us. We now have free access to God whenever we desire. God is love. Surely we want to avail ourselves of this privilege on a continuous basis! How could we do otherwise?

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time Eph 4: 1-6

“I, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received” (1). Paul was arrested because of his preaching and

the disturbance it caused among the Jews. (See Acts 22-23) He was under house arrest in Rome from 60-62 AD awaiting trial before the tribunal of Caesar. So he would have written the letter to the Ephesians in the early 60's.

Paul's whole life was Jesus. It was his preaching on Jesus as messiah that occasioned his arrest. But, even while under house arrest he continued to proclaim Christ, Messiah, and Son of God.

The call we have received is to live intimately in union with Christ. God has favored us and graced us in creating us into his adopted children. Endowed with supernatural powers and gifts we are able now to relate to God as our Father. This unique privilege urges us to live as Jesus, God's Son from eternity. We must be holy, separated from this world of sin so we can live in Christ and associate with God, our Father, as his true children.

Our close union with Jesus fills us with divine love, inclining us to live in mutual charity with one another. This is what Jesus prayed for at the Last Supper when he said, "I pray...for those who will believe in me..., so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they may be one in us....and I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one..." (Jn 17: 20-23). "...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love" (2).

These virtues of humility, gentleness or meekness, and patience are needed for love to maintain our living in unity and close communion with each other.

Humility gives us a sense of our own lowliness; it enables us to see our littleness and misery before God; we see ourselves as we are in the eyes of God. Thus we do not exaggerate our good qualities nor deny the gifts God has given us. Humility inclines us to serve others and to suffer their deficiencies of character with equilibrium.

Gentleness or meekness is a virtue that enables us to restrain our anger when faced with hardship or difficulty in dealing with others. This virtue enables us to be gentle with others while at the same time keeping our anger under control. We can thus exude the sweetness of Christ when dealing with difficult characters.

The virtue of patience comes from fortitude enabling us to bear physical, emotional, mental or spiritual suffering with composure. When we patiently suffer the defects of one another, we are being cleansed and purified in our own unredeemed passions and desires. Patience produces moral excellence, "we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character..." (Rom 5: 3-4). Patience benefits us not only by helping us to live harmoniously with others, but is also "producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor 4: 17).

It is through love that all of these virtues can be practiced. Humility, gentleness, and patience spring from a loving heart. St. Paul explains that "Love is patient, love is kind....It bears all things...endures all things" (1 Cor 13: 4, 7). We must go to the source of love for all these virtues, that is, God and his Christ, through union of prayer. When we fall short of love and the virtues through which it expresses itself, it is usually because we lack close and continuous communion with God in prayer. God allows us to fail because he wants us to see that we possess no virtue of our own. That power comes from him on whom we must continually lean for strength and support. Without such occasional failure we would erroneously believe that virtue comes from us. But with the fullness of God's love in our heart, this love inclines and empowers us to practice these virtues of humility, gentleness, patience and the rest.

"...striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: (3).

Other translations have Spirit rather than spirit. It is the Holy Spirit, the bond of Love between the Father and the Son, who binds us together

in love. We must be careful to be attentive and respond to his love promptings toward unity with each other. God himself is present to us as peace (Judges 6: 24; Micah 5: 4) who holds us together in tranquil order in peaceful unity.

“...one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call” (4).

St. Paul lists seven elements calling for unity. We have all been baptized into Christ to form one body with him as our head. We, different as we are, are joined together as one to form the body of Christ, one visible community “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor 12: 13).

The Holy Spirit, who is the bond of unity between the Father and the Son, is our one source of unity, binding us together as one. He blends all of our differences into one harmonious body working together peacefully.

“The one hope” of our call is eternal life. Our longing and our hope-filled expectation is for that unending, heavenly life. This one hope binds us together as a community of believers. That is our call: to be with God in heaven for all eternity as one people of God.

“...one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (5).

We have one Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. His teachings call us to unity of belief and life. We submit ourselves as a people to his leadership. We all have that same faith in him and his teaching as proclaimed and maintained by his church and his visible vicar, Peter, and his successors (Mt 16: 13-19); Jn 21: 15-17).

We are united together through that one faith. One baptism united us together when we were plunged into Christ to form one body with him. That one baptism was conferred once and for all. “...one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (6).

The one God, who is our creator, is the Father of us all, for we are his adopted children made such by the sanctifying grace gained for us through the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus, our Lord. We form one family under God, our Father. We are all his children called to live in unity and love for one another.

God is over all of us as our supreme Creator “in whom we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17: 28). Without him we would not be, and he continues to sustain us in existence. We humbly bow and submit ourselves to him and his Fatherly rule. There is no room for pride in us to bring about division and discord.

God is “through all”, he is among us, uniting us together in love—there can be no room in us for contempt of others when God loves everyone, from the least to the greatest, who “makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust” (Mt 5: 45).

And “God...is in all”—If he, the God of love (1 Jn 4: 16) is in all, there is that strong movement in each of our hearts towards love and unity in our relations with our human brothers and sisters. We see him in them, created in his image and likeness. All of this prompts us to unity and peaceful concord in our relationships with each other.

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time Eph 4:17, 20-24

“I declare and testify in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds” (17).

St. Paul is speaking to his Gentile converts from Ephesus as one who is steeped in Christ and who speaks in his name, manifesting God’s will for them. Their actions and lives issuing from minds darkened by the ignorance of paganism are vain and fruitless. They must stop

living the way they used to as pagans who did not know the true God. Their sensual lives were totally opposed to living in communion with God.

“...that is not how you learned Christ” (20). Christ is the one anointed by the Holy Spirit who pours God’s Spirit upon his people. He revealed the true God to them and the eternal life given to those who love and obey him. They now have a purpose for living. They have the example of Jesus who loved his Father and was obedient unto death for their salvation. He showed them the way to attain the highest kind of spiritual life on earth and in so doing attain life everlasting. They “learned Christ” by being intimately united to him in baptism. Now they are living in him and he lives in them. They have gotten to know him personally. They are called to live in his presence so he can lead them to the fullness of life.

“...assuming that you have heard of him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus” (21).

As recent converts, surely they would have known the truth about Jesus, and how to live as adopted children of God. “Truth is in Jesus”, that is, his whole life revolved around the Father. He is the center of the universe. But, they have reverted to putting themselves at the center by catering to their selfish desires. Jesus has revealed the truth about God, how we must love and serve him. They have been taught this in preparation for baptism.

The basic truth that is in Jesus is this “that you should put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires” (22). The old self refers to their former way of life before they were baptized. Human nature springing from Adam, unassisted by grace, was weak and sinful. It led to all kinds of dissipation and immoral behavior. The Ephesians must now desist from this kind of behavior. It is totally opposed to their new life in Christ.

We must be aware of the “deceitful desires” that

come from our, as yet, unredeemed human nature. They can easily lead us astray and prompt us to make wrong choices.

We must test our desires with God’s word to see if they are in accord with God’s will. Those that are not must be promptly rejected. If we allow them to fester, they quickly contaminate and corrupt our human nature. We are then inclined to return to our sinful way of living.

“...and be renewed in the Spirit of your minds” (23).

The new mental outlook goes along with the new nature received through sanctifying grace. Our mind, including intellect and will, has been elevated by faith, hope and love and perfected by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can then enlighten us so that we can think and choose to act on a new, spiritual and supernatural level. Baptism gave us a new nature as children of God. We are new creatures (2 Cor 5: 17). We have new spiritual capabilities as children of God. Creation reminds of God. We see traces of his beauty and greatness there. We also see signs of his wisdom and intelligence in the humans created in his image and likeness. Both sanctifying grace and God’s indwelling presence permeates our minds and souls with the divine life and presence, enabling us to live in a new world and spiritual atmosphere. But we must choose to live that new life and foster it by meditation and recollection.

“...and put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth” (24).

The new self is the new nature received at baptism, enabling us to act virtuously as children of God. We were incorporated as members of Christ. He is the new Adam. We share his divine nature as children of God. We have a new principle and source of spiritual activity. And the Holy Spirit inspires our new nature to act “in God’s way”. He empowers us to act in a way that is right, in accord with God’s will as expressed by God’s word and taught by the teaching authority of the Church.

We can then live in “holiness of truth”. The truth is that which conforms to reality. The reality is that God is our Creator and Sustainer. “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17: 28), living according to the truth, therefore, means making God and his Christ, the center of our lives. Our lives are ruled by his will as enunciated by his word and the Church that he established (Mt 16: 18-19). On the other hand, living a self-centered life means living a lie. We deceive ourselves when we live self-centered lives. We thus live separated from God, deprived of his grace and the true life it gives. Dying in this state means that we would spend all eternity in the hell of being deprived of the One for whom we were created and long for. Living in “holiness and truth” means living lives separated from a sinful world. It means living in the truth, in the divine Reality, which is Christ, as he himself said, “I am the truth” (Jn 14: 6). He is the quintessence of being, the highest Reality, God himself in whose being we participate in the fullest possible measure.

“Put away the old self” would have reminded the Ephesians of the baptismal ceremony during which they removed their old clothing as a sign of putting away their old sinful lifestyle. Then, after they were plunged into the water, a sign of their dying to a sinful life, they “put on” a new white garment, representing the new life of grace which they committed themselves to live.

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Eph 4:30—5:2

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were sealed for the day of redemption” (30).

Isaiah tells how the Lord became the savior of the chosen people. “Because of his love and pity he redeemed them himself, lifting them and carrying them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved his holy spirit” (Is 63: 9-10).

After telling the Ephesians to avoid grieving the Holy Spirit, St. Paul proceeds to exemplify how it

is that they, as God’s chosen people, rebel against the Holy Spirit and grieve him. They refuse to follow his promptings towards self-control. They fall into various vices and fail to relate peacefully and lovingly with one another (31-32). The Holy Spirit was given to us, when we were baptized, to lead and guide us. Jesus explained, “You know it, because it remains with you and will be in you” (Jn 14:17).

He is saddened and grieved when we resist and rebel against him and his holy inspirations. The Holy Spirit is God’s loving seal of ownership upon us. He constantly reminds us that we belong to God. Our behavior must be in accord with our union with God. Moreover, baptism incorporated us into Christ. We are members of his body and of one another. The Holy Spirit calls us to live in harmony for the good of the whole body. We must not resist these holy inspirations.

We were “sealed for the day of redemption”. He prepares us to be ready for the Day of Judgment. The Holy Spirit gives us a foretaste of the heavenly life by his presence in us. He encourages us to remain faithful to God and live in union with him. Then at the parousia when Jesus appears as judge we will be glorified as Jesus promised, “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Mt 13: 43).

“All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice” (31). These are the kinds of sins with which the Ephesians were grieving the Holy Spirit. Bitterness, ill-feeling towards others as a result of enduring resentment must be overcome by letting go of the hurt that had been incurred. This will be brought about by prayer and the grace received from it to forgive the person who injured them. Fury, intense rage and an avenging spirit must be stopped and given over to God. For, the Lord said, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay” (Rom 12: 19). Be reconciled—“do not let the sun set on your anger” (Eph 4: 26). Anger is a strong feeling of displeasure often spilling over into animosity. We must learn to express our angry feelings

appropriately and give glory to God through them. Shouting only intensifies argumentation and fuels anger. We must speak our differences respectfully. Reviling means verbal abuse and is totally unbecoming for Children of God. Malice expresses evil intent and a desire to hurt or harm. All of these vices are contrary to the love with which these new converts are called to relate to each other.

“[And] be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ” (32).

Instead of these various sinful dispositions mentioned above, we are called to be kind to one another, affectionate and loving, sympathetic and gentle. We are to have compassion, feeling for others’ distress, desiring to do whatever possible to alleviate it. If others have offended us, we need to forgive them as the Lord forgives us when we sin against him. That means we let go of the offense and give it to God for him to deal with it. Preoccupation with the hurt tends to separate us from God. Whenever we find it difficult to forgive, we need to pray to God for him to enable us to do so. God forgives us “in Christ”. It is through Jesus’ passion and death that our sins and offenses can be forgiven and removed. In that sense, he labored and suffered for us so that forgiveness might be brought about.

“To be imitators of God, as beloved children” (1). We are God’s beloved children. We come from him. We share his divine nature by adoption made possible by sanctifying grace. So we can be like him in our limited way. We are united to God who is love (1 Jn 4: 16). His grace of sonship prompts us to be like him in the practice of virtue; for, love is patient and love is kind (1 Cor 13: 4). Love prompts us to forgive as God forgives. These are some examples of how we can be imitators of God as his dear children. For further examples we must look to Jesus who is God incarnate. That is why it is so important that we meditate on the Gospels. We must study and pray over his life. “Learn from me”, he says to us (Mt 11:

29). By being with him and looking upon him in prayerful meditation, we draw power to be virtuous and act like Jesus. He is the perfect Son of God who calls us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5: 48).

“...and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma” (2).

To live in love as Christ loved us implies utter selflessness. It calls for the complete gift of self. The kind of agape love St. Paul is talking about is Sacrificial love—only God’s grace received through prayer and intimate communion with God, along with the habitual practice of virtue, make such selfless love possible. Jesus “handed himself over for us”. For love of us sinners, he freely surrendered himself to his enemies, knowing how harshly they would mistreat him, even unto crucifixion. In this way, obedient to his Father’s will, he made a total gift of himself for love of us and for our salvation. This complete self-oblation is like the sacrifices of the Old Testament. The victim was totally consumed by fire and given over to God. It signified supreme adoration of God. The smell of the burning victim ascending to heaven was “a fragrant aroma”. The total destruction of the victim expressed the perfect adoration of the one sacrificing. The “fragrant aroma”, then, of the holocaust, would have been very pleasing to God. The “fragrant aroma” of Jesus’ total self-gift on the cross is compared to the fragrance of the holocaust.

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time Eph 5:15-20

“Watch carefully then how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise” (15).

The Lord may come at any moment, either in the Parousia at the end of time or in our own personal lives at death. We have little time to work out our salvation. We cannot afford

to lose any time. The degree of personal growth in love for God and neighbor will determine the extent of our happiness in heaven. We must do everything in our power to hasten our spiritual growth for when the end comes.

We must then “watch carefully” how we live, that is aware of what is God’s will for us at each moment of our lives so that our conduct will be in accord with that will. We need to steep ourselves in God’s word which expresses God’s will so we can know it and carry it out. It is through his word that God communicates his wisdom to us, enabling us to live wisely and shun and stay free of the secular world’s sinful ways. We live in a world surrounded by the temptation of various kinds of immorality. Greed for money and lust for sensuality, luxury, sinful pleasure and vanity abound in our environment. We must draw strength from God’s word to overcome these tempting attractions.

God’s wisdom teaches us to be prudent and avoid exposing ourselves to occasions of sin. Thus we live in God’s presence and are alert to follow his inspirations to do good and avoid the least evil.

“Making the most of the opportunity, because the days are evil” (16).

In St. Paul’s day, people’s faith in Jesus could be discovered and cause them to be arrested and brought to trial. Their lives were at stake. They would be tempted to deny their faith in order to escape death. Our days are evil in a different way. We are tempted more toward forbidden pleasure and living for what this world has to offer. We are tempted toward living for this passing earthly life in ways that are opposed to living for the heavenly, eternal life. We are called to live our short life-span more intensely on a spiritual level in preparation for eternity. The spiritual life is superior to the physical and emotional. These latter will succumb at death but the spiritual will continue unharmed by death. We must use every opportunity to enhance our spiritual life by

deepening our union with God through prayerful meditating on the word of God, participating in the Eucharistic liturgy and fellowship with those who live for God. In this way we will escape the evils of the present day and grow spiritually stronger. We will be more intensely inclined to live each moment for God and for the eternal life already begun as experienced through our communion with the living God. For he gives us a foretaste of his heavenly joy even as we live this life on earth.

“Therefore, do not continue in ignorance, but try to understand what is the will of the Lord” (17).

Even if God has revealed himself completely through his Son, Jesus, it is still possible to remain in ignorance of that revelation. We can become so preoccupied with living this earthly life, we fail to inform ourselves of God’s self-revelation. We fail to set time aside to spend reading and meditating on the word of God. We will not give priority to God and the eternal life. We devote ourselves instead to work and entertainment—the purely natural life, while we neglect the spiritual and eternal life. We may be partly enlightened about our faith, but neglect to devote ourselves to it with the full intensity to which we are called. We remain, therefore, ignorant of the most beautiful and satisfying truths of our faith—to our great loss. Thus we remain half fervent with little or no zeal for the Kingdom and the marvelous salvation it has brought to us in Christ. Faith-life under this circumstance remains dull, uninteresting and we carry it out only as a matter of duty or a family custom. See how detrimental and deplorable a situation continuing in ignorance can lead us! We do not understand thus how much God loves us and how intimate, supreme and exciting the divine life he wants to share with us could be. It is God’s will that we enter into intimate communion with him so that he can share more fully with us the divine life of the Blessed Trinity.

“And do not get drunk on wine, in which lies debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit” (18).

Over-consumption of alcoholic drinks interferes with our moral awareness and our power to reason. It blurs our consciences and weakens or completely inhabits our power of self-control. As a result we can easily surrender to sinful behavior. Our dulled senses blissfully succumb to immoral acts without a care that we are offending God in serious ways. Drunkenness leads to debauchery, that is, to various forms of sensual or sexual indulgence. Drunkenness opens us to the lowest and worst depraved actions even to the level of irrational animals.

On the other hand, our status as children of God gives us access to the highest spiritual activity. Grace opens us to the life of the Spirit so that we can live on a divine level. We are capable of living in intimate communion with God. We are called to be filled with the Spirit and to allow him to be fully operative in us. In this way we can live the fullness of life, elevated to a divine level, filled with intense love and zeal.

“...addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts” (19).

Being filled with the Holy Spirit fills us with divine joy. We are inclined to sing to God and to one another to express our joy in the salvation God gives us. He has freed us from sin and we want to reveal how happy and grateful we are to him. Putting the inspired psalms into melodies so we can sing them to God satisfies the soul athirst with the desire to praise him. Taking up a musical instrument to accompany our song gives double praise to God. Uniting our joy-filled hearts when we gather on the Lord’s day to sing his praises united to Jesus in the Eucharistic liturgy brings our joy to a heightened climax. Our songs are brought to the height of beauty when combined with musical instruments.

“...giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father” (20).

We are a Eucharistic people. Like Jesus, all true children of God are filled with gratitude to the Father for giving us natural and supernatural life from moment to moment. Everything we have is a gift of God. We respond to show that we are aware of this and express our gratitude to God. It is the Holy Spirit who prompts us to be so grateful (18). It is in our union with Jesus, our mediator, and through him that we offer our gratitude to the Father.

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time Ephesians 5:21-32

“Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ” (21).

Generally speaking, that is the attitude all Christians ought to have for one another: husbands and wives 22-33, children and parents 6:1-4, slaves and masters 6:5-9. We are all called to respect and serve one another because we see Christ there. We submit, inasmuch as it is possible, to each other’s needs. We must be concerned and on the alert to be neighbor to them (compare Lk 10:29-37).

“Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord” (22). The wife is called to see Jesus in her spouse and therefore submit herself to his authority even as the church submits herself to Jesus. The relationship between husband and wife represents a great mystery: that of Christ and the Church. This helps us to understand why marriage between husband and wife is called a sacrament. The spouses’ relationship reflects that of Jesus and his church which is his bride. Deference toward each other according to each others’ roles must be filled with love, as the wife is submissive to her husband because he is head of the family, the husband is submissive to her needs. “For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body” (23).

The husband has been given natural gifts of leadership to fulfill his role as head of the family. These are to be respected. It is for this reason that he is to be honored as head of the family—just as the wife has been given gifts to fulfill her role as “heart” of his family and must be honored for that reason. The husband is called to fulfill his role as “savior” of his family.

“As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything” (24). This is because he is equipped with special gifts to fulfill his role in life. This requires trust on the part of his wife, hoping he has earned that trust by his wise decisions. But, he is called to rule with love and tenderness so that his decisions for the family (arrived in collaboration and consultation with his wife) will be respected and gladly conformed to.

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her (26) to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word.”

Just as Jesus sacrificed himself for his bride the church, the husband sacrifices himself for his wife. This self-gift of his tends to draw her to follow his lead with ease. He quotes the word and refers to scriptural passages in his conversation and in his decision making.

“that he might present himself, the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish”(27).

By sanctifying his wife with the word in this way, she will grow in holiness and be continually sanctified in her relationship with her husband. “so also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself” (28).

The church is the body of Christ. So in the sacrament of matrimony, the wife becomes like the body of her husband---they become two in one flesh. Thus, when he loves his wife, he is actually loving himself(28).

“For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church (29) because we are members of his body” (30). Just as Jesus nourishes and cherishes his bride the church, the husband must love his wife who will then readily submit to his leadership.

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (31).

Quoting Genesis 2:24 , we see confirmed this unity we had been speaking about: husband and wife become one in their growth in love and harmony, learning to relate in love by being sensitive to each others’ needs and roles.

“There is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the Church” (32)

The sacrament of matrimony, husband and wife living in unity, reflects this great mystery of Christ and the church in the lives of the couple.

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

“...all good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change” (17).

God is absolute goodness. Only good can come from him. He is unchanging in his goodness. All of our gifts come from him. The sun, the stars and the moon, for example, are his gifts to us. The sun may get blocked out by clouds; the moon in its different phases shines with more or less light; the stars twinkle brighter or lighter. But God’s supreme goodness is constant and faithfully shines upon us with full intensity. He endows us with every good gift—everything we are and have comes from his generous goodness. The whole created world around us, the cosmos, is his outpoured goodness to us.

“He willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (18).

This good and generous God beams the light of his truth brightly upon us by revealing himself through the Gospel. This bright light contains in itself a kind of spiritual electrical current that sets off faith upon its recipients. This faith is stirred by the testimony of God revealing himself in our hearts (1 Jn 5: 10). That word of truth contained in the Gospel reveals God to us and who he is. Jesus, who revealed the Gospel, is the divine Reality in all its fullness. As Jesus himself said, “I am the Truth” (Jn 14: 6), “For in him dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily...” (Col 2: 9). Through his word, contained in the Gospel, he reveals himself and communicates that divinity to us, making us children of God. Receiving that word in faith leads us to baptism. We then share in the fullness of his divinity by being plunged into him (Col 2: 9; Jn 1: 16; Rom 6: 3). Thus we are reborn and become children of God (1 Jn 3: 1). We become in this way “a kind of firstfruits”.

The firstfruits were the best of earth’s produce that were offered to God in thanksgiving. God was thus acknowledged as the creator and source of all fruitfulness. The offering of the firstfruits was a response to God’s generosity. This consecration to God of the firstfruits sanctified the whole harvest. This symbolic gesture signified the giving of the whole harvest to God.

St. James is comparing these baptized Christians to the first-fruits of the land. It was a way of consecrating the rest of humanity to God. And at the same time, this elite group would have a sanctifying influence on the rest of society by their dedication, prayer and example. All of society will one day come to realize that they belong to God and must live their lives in thanksgiving to him. “...humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls” (21).

The prideful person does his own will and resists the word of God which expresses the divine will.

The humble person submits his will to God’s as expressed by his Word. That word was implanted into our hearts when we received instructions. Now it issues from God’s indwelling presence as truth in our hearts. It is expressed by the silent inspirations and enlightened ideas that come from the Holy Spirit living in us. He reveals and teaches Jesus’ word to us, moving us to do God’s will and live according to the truth. It is in this way that God’s implanted word can save our souls. It is important, then, that we keep re-fleshing our memories by keeping that word before our minds. We need to hear or read that word often so that it keeps surfacing in our hearts as truth, continually influencing our decisions and our lives.

“Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves” (22).

The importance of carrying out God’s word and putting it into practice was emphasized by Jesus as he concluded his sermon on the mount. He compared those who listen to his words and act upon them to a wise man who built his house on rock. The floods and storms representing the trials of life beat upon that house but it did not collapse because it had been solidly built on rock. Whereas the one who listens to his words and does not act upon them is like the foolish person who built his house on sand. It collapsed under the pressure of the storms and trials of life (See Mt 7: 24-27).

Listening to God’s word or taking it in by reading it is a good beginning. It motivates and influences us towards accomplishing the good it proclaims. St. Paul explains that God’s word stirs faith (Rom 10: 17) and that the Gospel is “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...For in it is revealed the righteousness of God” (Rom 1: 16-17). But ultimately we must decide and will to follow the word’s prompting. We must carry out what it teaches us. Otherwise it will not better us. We remain as we were before. We refuse to change in the direction of the truth proclaimed by the word. We will not change our selfish, sinful habits. We are deceiving ourselves if we think that

it is sufficient only to listen to God's word without obeying it.

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (27).

Orphans and widows are classical examples of the defenseless and the oppressed. Other deprived, helpless and destitute persons would be included among those we need to be aware of and who need assistance. These types of persons were those Jesus expressed concern about in his day and the ones he called our attention to when he said, "whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25: 40). The truly religious person is moved by love—both of God and humans. Under-privileged persons would tend to move us to compassion for them and prompt us to do whatever we can to alleviate their plight, either directly or indirectly; by giving financial support to those organizations whose calling it is to minister to such people.

Caring for others in distress is one way to practice "religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father". God is presented as Father here because these afflicted ones are his care and concern.

While ministering to these others, our hearts must also remain "unstained by the world" and completely God's. The tempting attractions of the world can easily sway us away from single-hearted devotion to God. St. John's epistle tells us that "all that is in the world [is] sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life" (1 Jn 2: 16). Only a life of prayer and self-denial can strengthen us to resist these allurements. The virtue of prudence and the gift of counsel direct us to keep away from the occasions of sin presented by these worldly enticements.

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Jas 2:1-5

"My brothers, show no partiality as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (1).

Since God brings us into life, both natural and supernatural (1 Jn 4:7), we are all brothers and sisters, children of our heavenly Father. The epistle calls our attention to this fact when it addresses us as "My brothers". We are related, then, both to the author of the epistle, and to one another. We share that same grace which makes us children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus. It is good for us to be aware of this wonderful truth. We are members of the same family of God. We all have the same heavenly Father and Mother (Jn 19:26-27).

Partiality, such as favoring the rich over the poor, is incongruous with our faith in the Lord Jesus who attained such glory by his embracing poverty as his condition on earth and by his self-emptying. Moreover, he identified himself with the poor and lowly (Mt 25:40). Jesus proclaimed how blessed are the poor—the kingdom of God belongs to them (Lk 6:20-23). He also expressed how precarious and vulnerable a position the rich are in at the same time (Lk 6:24-26). Therefore partiality toward them over the poor cannot possibly be in accord with our faith according to the teaching and life of Jesus. Even Jesus' enemies complimented him for his impartiality saying, "Teacher, we know that...you show no partiality" (Lk 20:21). And St. Peter noted, "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34). St. Paul asserted the same (Rom 2:11). The Old Testament likewise testifies to God's impartiality, "For he is a God of justice, who knows no favorites" (Sir 35:12).

Through faith we adhere to Jesus and everything he stands for. Partiality would make us shift from our adherence to him and all he stands for. It would divert our attention and make us adhere to some earthly and human benefit. Partiality would

rob us from our allegiance and communion with our glorious Lord Jesus as we operate for some selfish motive.

“For if a man with gold rings on his fingers and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and a poor person in shabby clothes also comes in, (2) and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say, ‘Sit here, please.’ “While you say to the poor one, ‘Stand there,’ or ‘Sit at my feet,’ (3) have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil designs?” (4) It is the person that matters. Each one stands in a sense naked before God who judges our hearts and merits and demerits. The clothing we wear, no matter how expensive and beautiful, does not make us any better in the eyes of God. Valuable jewelry, rings, bracelets and watches do not affect our state of soul as we are before God.

To judge a person’s worth by external standards would be contrary to the truth of the gospel and to the scriptures in general. The Lord said “... Do not judge from ... appearance ... Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart” (1 Sam 16:7).

To attempt to judge by external appearance would not be according to truth and it would be daring to take God’s place as judge. How arrogant that would be! God offers his gift of salvation to all equally. He gives the means of salvation such as the sacraments to all without discrimination, to rich and poor alike.

Wealth is a source of danger to spiritual growth. Jesus explained that “worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word and it bears no fruit” (Mt 13:22). The wealthy, then, tend to be less well disposed to receive and live the Gospel. On the other hand, Jesus consoled the underprivileged with, “Blessed are you who are poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours” (Lk 6:20).

We pray that we can be as impartial in our judgments as God and not show favoritism. “Listen, my beloved brothers. Did not God choose

those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him?” (5).

God chose those who were poor in the world, most likely, because their condition in life made them better disposed to accept divine revelation. The obstacles to God’s word presented by “the anxieties and riches and pleasures of life” (Lk 8:14) would seem to pertain less to the poor. They can, therefore, more readily accept the gospel. St. Paul writes, “God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something,” so that no human being might boast before God” (1 Cor 1:27-29).

The helpless and the needy who must lean on God for subsistence are more inclined to look to God for salvation. Jesus, our model, came to show us how to live and be receptive to God’s grace. And he came among us when there were no modern conveniences. The setting of his birth was austere. His life as a carpenter in that hot country required much self-discipline and self-denial. The same austerity was required of him as an itinerant preacher and minister to the needy crowds. He himself was one of “those who are poor in the world”.

He, the Son of God, specifically chose that life-style to show us how we can best dispose ourselves “to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom”. Rather than look down upon the poor, then, we ought to look up to them as a condition to strive for to be better receptive to God’s grace rather than a luxurious life that caters to the senses and the passions that resist God’s grace (see Gal 5:16-17).

The poor in the world tend to be rich in faith because they are not surrounded by the luxuries of life that tend to smother faith. “The flesh lusts against the Spirit” (Gal 5:17). The hardships of life require spirit assertiveness for survival. And spirit dominance makes us receptive to God who

is Spirit (Jn 4:24). And bearing with hardships produces virtue and sanctification. That is why St. Paul can say, “we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance proves character” (Rom 5:3-4).

The poor must also rely on God for their needs day in and day out. In this way their faith is made to grow. They tend to remain continuously connected to God and maintain communion with him. Thus they grow rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom of God. That means they enjoy the presence of the King who dwells in their hearts. They are united to him by love and grace. The poor suffer in life, but suffering accepted in submission to God’s will is spiritually transforming. “For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor 4:17).

We do well, then, to have respect for the poor, avoid partiality, and strive for the spirit of poverty selves.

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jas 2: 14-18

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? (14)

Faith is believing in God, in Jesus as Son of God, and in his teaching. Through faith we accept divine revelation and base our lives on it. Not only do we give mental assent to what God reveals, but this implies that we put that revelation into practice. We observe or live it out in our lives. For example, the word of God commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mt 22:39). This implies assisting those in distress such as feeding the hungry and clothing the naked (Mt 25:-36). Failure to carry out such commands in divine revelation makes us unfit for the kingdom of God and eternal life (Mt 25: 45-46). Refusal to exercise our faith by loving others in dire need proves that we are not united to God

by love which impels us to assist others in distress. We do not have the divine life of love in us which enables us to live the eternal life of heaven. Our failure to live out our faith by obeying God’s word disqualifies us from salvation. Faith without works is dead and cannot save us from divine judgment. The wrath of God will come down on such a person who is too self-centered to love and obey God and too selfish to love and help others.

“If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day (15) and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well’, but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it?” (16)

Kind words and wishful thinking are not enough—they are ineffective in helping a needy person. They may express a loving concern which is a good beginning. But they do not remedy the situation. In as much as possible we must go into action as the word of faith commands us. The word directs us to give practical aid. We may see many needy people as we drive through the streets or view the world scene on television. Perhaps we are able to directly aid particular individuals. If we are not in direct contact with them, we may be able to reach out to them through societies or organizations that specialize in ministering to the needy. We can give personal or financial aid through these. Faith operating through love prompts us to give effective aid. Compassion moves us to want to reach out and do something.

“So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (17).

Belief in God and Jesus as divine Son of God connects us to God so that we begin to participate in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).

We then are united to God through sanctifying grace. This grace includes the supernatural, theological virtue of charity or love. Faith elevates and enlightens the intellect to know God’s will and what must be done to fulfill it. The moral virtue of prudence in the practical intellect

points out the right measure and how we are to go about it. It enables us to judge accurately, what is the morally good thing to do under particular circumstances. The will elevated and informed by supernatural charity gives the command to carry out the decision. But if we fail to carry out God's will in a serious matter and commit a mortal sin, we lose God's grace. The supernatural life in us dies or leaves us. Faith, then, is no longer informed by love. We no longer have the divine life. We only have our unredeemed human nature with its multitude of selfish and sinful tendencies to deal with. We no longer have the divine impulse of grace and love moving us to love, show compassion and give practical aid. This is the kind of faith that our epistle describes as dead. "Indeed someone might say, 'you have faith and I have works.' Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works" (18).

Faith is an interior virtue which perfects the intellect and raises it to a supernatural level. Through this virtue we believe in God and his self-revelation. This revelation calls for obedience to its contents and practice. A faith that does not act upon God's commands is either dead or non-existent. How do we know that it exists if it gives no evidence that it is there and alive? For example, if one never prays or goes to Mass, does faith exist in such a person? We would probably conclude that such a one has no faith or that it is dead. When something is alive, it shows signs of life; it breathes and moves. When one shows no signs of supernatural activity we may conclude that faith is non-existent in such a person.

On the other hand, although faith is an interior virtue perfecting the intellect and cannot be seen, we can tell it exists in a person because he expresses it. We can tell this person has it because he prays and goes to daily Mass and Communion. We see him performing acts of charity in helping the needy. He expresses his faith through an effective love. His is an obedient faith. He carries out in his daily life what divine revelation directs him to do. He remembers Jesus' words at the

Last Supper: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22: 19). He acts upon that belief by being faithful to Sunday Mass. He believes Jesus' words, "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25: 40). Therefore he ministers to the poor, the disabled, the sick and forgotten, those who are addicted to drugs, to alcohol and other forms of enslavement. We can tell such a person has faith because he continually expresses and exercises it.

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time Jas 3:16--4:3

"Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice" (3:16).

St. James contrasts an "earthly, unspiritual demonic" (15) kind of "wisdom" with true wisdom which comes from God. Earthly "wisdom" is shrewd and clever but it is selfish and divisive. It jealously guards what is its own and is unwilling to share with others.

It is grasping and greedy with a view to squander what it attains on its pleasures. A person who operates with this self-centered "wisdom" is a law unto himself. Anything goes. "Every foul practice" drawn from what is base in unredeemed human nature is considered legitimate. In this way chaos reigns. There is no order in such a life. Pleasing the unruly self is the only thing that matters—whatever it takes. This leads to habitual sin, disagreements, strife and contention.

"But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity" (17). The wisdom that comes from God produces holy, spiritual fruits in virtuous living. Eight various qualities of the goodness of heavenly wisdom are mentioned. Holy wisdom is:

Pure—it contains no selfish motives. It is totally good.

Peaceable—produces tranquility of order. It is

reconciling and unifying.

Gentle—it bears all things sweetly and maintains a pleasant disposition in dealing with others. It bears difficulties with meekness.

Compliant—it lives harmoniously with others and easily complies with their wishes and needs. It tends towards unity and concord.

Full of mercy—it understands and forgives the sins and hurts inflicted by others. It has compassion and foregoes punishing the guilty.

Good fruits—it is quick to offer assistance to those in need. It expresses love in practical ways.

Without inconstancy--it is sustained in virtue by its union with God. It is steady and unrelenting in fidelity as it relates to others in a virtuous manner.

Without insincerity—it is thoroughly honest and free from guile. It is true and unpretentious.

These virtuous qualities of holy wisdom are so beautiful and appealing. They are completely different from the ill effects of worldly wisdom.

“...and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace” (18).

God lavishes grace upon those who are peaceful. Their hearts are tranquil and open to receive his outpoured love. They are untroubled by conflict. They are free from anxious defensiveness that distracts them from loving attentiveness to the divine indwelling presence. Their living in harmony and concord with others leaves them totally attentive and receptive to God who continually diffuses his grace upon all who readily receive it. Having attained the blessedness of peace themselves they promote peaceful relationships among others. They overcome hurt and discord by encouraging forgiveness and compassion.

“Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members? (4:1)

The question as to the source of conflicts is asked. The answer is given: from your warring passions. The intense desire to possess objects as a means to pleasure is blinding, and stirs the whole human

organism into aggression. A burning anger flares up to overcome any obstacle that gets in the way. Fighting quickly ensues so that one can possess the object that is so avariciously desired. The solution to the warring problem in the community or world scene, then, is to control disordered desire. The virtue of temperance must be employed to bring the passion of desire under control so peace and harmony can be restored. Prayer and meditating on God’s word that expresses the truth in this matter must be engaged in order to obtain God’s help. Grace is needed from God to enlighten reason and empower the human will to practice self-control.

We are members of the body of Christ. We are called to live in harmony. We must work towards selflessness so that we will look towards others’ needs. Love prompts us to love others as we love ourselves or even as Jesus loved us. Then unity and harmony among members of the community will be restored.

“You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war. You do not possess because you do not ask” (2).

To covet is to desire what belongs to another. This is an inordinate desire forbidden by God. The sin of covetousness is so harmful that God forbids it in two of the Ten Commandments: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife....You shall not covet your neighbor’s house...nor anything else that belongs to him” (Ex 20:17).

To burn with desire for some created object or person is forbidden by God. Such desire replaces the great desire we are commanded to have for God—We are commanded to love God with our whole heart, soul, and strength (Deut 6:5). All of our desires must be subordinated to that one great desire we ought to have for God rather than displace and replace it with the overwhelming desire for some creature.

To envy is to be saddened or resentful of another’s advantage. We would like to possess it instead

of the other. This is clearly another disordered desire that is against God's will. Such a desire is spiritually harmful. Fostering such a desire could result in our acting sinfully to obtain the desired object. Even if it doesn't, it causes interior turmoil and separates us from communion with God.

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jas 5: 1-6

"Come now, you rich, weep and wail over your impending miseries" (1).

St. James foresees the condemnation of the rich for their unjust practices. The fate of those who abuse their riches will be terrible. He anticipates severe punishment for them on the last day. Then it will be too late to repent. Their cries will be that of the remorse of the damned for having oppressed the defenseless poor. The faithful are thus warned against ill-gotten wealth, while those who are oppressed by the rich are consoled. We are reminded of Jesus' words, "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation" (Lk 6: 24). And again, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God!" (Mk 10:23). Wealth and abundance inclines us to self-gratification and self-indulgence. It makes us self-centered and forget those who are less fortunate (Lk 16: 19-26). We are easily led to put aside the Gospel warning to practice self-discipline and restraint. We follow the broad road to destruction (Mt 7: 13-14).

"...your wealth has rotted away, your clothes have become moth-eaten" (2).

Costly garments were one of the signs of wealth. In the days to come these will rot and turn to dust. They are seen to be as worthless in light of eternity. They can easily be eaten and made worthless by moths. Such forms of wealth prove themselves to have no value in the days to come. They all perish. It is foolish to spend one's life dishonestly acquiring such ephemeral things. Moreover, their owners will be severely judged and condemned for having used unjust means to acquire them.

"Your gold and silver have corroded, and that corrosion will be a testimony against you; it will devour your flesh like a fire. You have stored up treasure for the last days" (3). The corrosion of silver and gold is a figure of speech to describe the corrosive condition of wealth. Its value is subject to deteriorate very quickly. In the end times it will be worth nothing. Its utter worthlessness on judgment day will count against their possessors. For they chase temporal wealth that is worth nothing on the last day, rather than spiritual, incorruptible wealth. Their bad choice will witness against them. The evil way in which they acquired wealth and the poor use they made of it will testify to their wickedness. The "treasure" they have stored for the last day, such as their corroded gold and silver, will become like fire devouring their flesh. Fire symbolizes the intense pain they will experience from their being separated from God for all eternity. "Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers who harvested your fields are crying aloud; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts" (4). We begin to see the crime and dishonesty of the wealthy and why they are so harshly condemned. They deprived their workers of a just wage. The book of Deuteronomy states, "you shall not defraud a poor and needy hired servant...you shall pay him each day's wages before sundown on the day itself, since he is poor and looks forward to them, otherwise he will cry to the Lord against you, and you will be held guilty" (24: 14, 15).

The rich are not condemned because of their wealth in itself. Both Abraham and Job were wealthy men and were considered virtuous. The rich are being condemned in this passage for their injustice and their ill-use of wealth. They used their power to lord it over the under privileged. They sinned against the law which clearly stated, "You shall not withhold overnight the wages of your day laborer" (Lev 19: 13b).

This is one of the crimes that cries out to God for vengeance.

Other examples of crimes that cry out to

God for vengeance are Abel's blood (Gen 4:10) and the sin of Sodom (Gen 19:13). These examples bring out the seriousness of depriving the poor of their just wages. The cries of the harvesters are seen as already reaching the ears of the Lord. And now, on the last day, they receive the punishment due for their crime. It is "the Lord of hosts" who brings justice and corrects the wrong done. The Lord of hosts was the title of God who went before his people to assure them victory. (Compare Ps 68: 8-9.) The armies of Israel are called the hosts of the Lord (Ex 7:4; 12: 41). Later the prophets used the term to comprise the sum total of powers and multitudes of stars and angels to stress the universal dominion of God.

"You have lived on earth in luxury and pleasure; you have fattened your hearts for the day of slaughter" (5).

Rather than use their wealth to assist widows and orphans, or other needy people, they used it for selfish purposes. Luxury and a life of ease led to dissipation and disintegration. This catered to corruptible flesh and the loss of virtue and self-discipline. This in turn led to loose morals and sinful behavior. Their lives centered around the sinful self instead of around God and his law. Their self-indulgence fattened their hearts for the day of slaughter. This phrase emphasizes the nearness of the Day of Judgment. Their excessive indulgence prepares the rich for extreme punishment. (Compare Jer 12:3.) They will be like fattened sheep for butchering, for the day of slaughter or judgment day.

"You have condemned; you have murdered the righteous one; he offers you no resistance" (6).

The theme of harsh oppression of the righteous poor continues. In the words of the book of Wisdom, we read, "Let us oppress the needy just man; let us neither spare the widow nor revere the old man for his hair grown white with time. But let our strength be our norm of justice; for weakness proves itself useless" (2: 10-11). This kind of oppression continues even to this day. Consider the mistreatment that sometimes takes place in our nursing homes. The old, helpless and

infirm are taken advantage of, abused or neglected by those who have power over them. Such mistreatment may well cause the victims to die. "You have murdered the righteous one". The passion of Jesus continues to this day in the holy, righteous ones. We also think of the murder of aborted babies. These, too, are defenseless and offer no resistance. The perpetrators are disposing themselves for very harsh judgment. But God is merciful and gives them time and grace to repent of their crimes. Scripture puts it this way, "Therefore you rebuke offenders little by little, warn them, and remind them of the sins they are committing, that they may abandon their wickedness and believe in you, O Lord!" (Wis 12:2).

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time Heb 2: 9-11

"He 'for a little while' was made 'lower than the angels', that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (9).

Jesus was made lower than the angels for a little while, that is, during his earthly life. This was brought about "by the grace of God", by the initiative of the Father. It was the will of the Father that Jesus would become one of us, so that he could experience death for the redemption of the whole world.

"For it was fitting that he, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering" (10).

We were made "for" God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in him. He is our destiny.

That means we were made for beatitude, for heavenly bliss. He fulfills our deepest desires for happiness. We will share in his glory. That is his very purpose for creating us: glory! And that gives glory to God. For he made us out of unselfish love. That redounds to his glory and praise.

He is the one “through whom all things exist”. The Father looks upon the Son, the Eternal Word, who mirrors all the divine perfections, and creates the world through him. Thus the created world reflects his goodness, beauty and truth. We are due to give God praise and acknowledge his renown as we contemplate him in his creation that surrounds us.

God’s plan is to bring “many children to glory”. He desires to communicate and share his glorious qualities with us. He makes us his children, creating us anew from our fallen state as children of Adam and Eve. Through sanctifying grace we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1: 4). We are thus endowed with new, supernatural powers to be able to communicate with God, live in his presence, and enjoy his company. We are his beloved children, destined to share his glory with Jesus, our divine Brother!

God made “the leader to [our] salvation perfect through suffering”. The mysterious transforming power of suffering brought Jesus’ human nature to perfection. Accepted suffering transformed his humanity by deifying it. His human qualities were glorified, immortalized and eternalized by the spiritualizing effect of suffering.

Since Jesus is the way to glory, his experience of being perfected and glorified through suffering enlightens us to accept suffering in our lives so that we can be transformed and glorified through it like him. His grace assists us. As Jesus said, “And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in Truth”(Jn 17: 19).

Jesus consecrates himself to the Father by surrendering himself to the Father’s will that he suffer on the cross for our salvation. Through this consecration he gives himself to us in the Eucharist. The Father took him in his self-gift on Calvary and glorified him. It is in that glorified state that we receive him in the Holy Eucharist. We are thus able to live by him as he lives by the Father (Jn 6: 57). In this way, Jesus sanctifies us

and enables us to follow him in accepting the Father’s will. This will involves our existence in a limited, created world which entails suffering.

“He who consecrates and those who are being consecrated all have one origin. Therefore, he is not ashamed to call them ‘brothers’ (11).

Jesus is the one who consecrates. Having consecrated himself to the Father through his total self-gift on the cross, the Father received his sacrifice and glorified him. Now he is able to consecrate us. He shares his glory with us through the Holy Spirit and his sanctifying grace, as he said, to the Father, “I have given them the glory you gave me” (Jn 17: 22).

When we receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, he nourishes us spiritually with his glorified body and blood. He intensifies and strengthens his indwelling presence in us and gradually transforms us into his image. As St. Paul tells us, “all of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3: 18). In this way, he also consecrates us to God’s service; he fills us with fervor and zeal for the Kingdom.

Jesus also consecrates or sets us apart for God through the power of his word. That is what he prayed for at the Last Supper, “Consecrate them in the truth”, he said, “Your word is truth” (Jn 17: 17). By receiving God’s word in faith, we are empowered to live according to the truth enunciated by that word. That means that God is at the center of our lives. They revolve around him. We are obedient to that word of truth which keeps us in God. Our deepest longings are thus fulfilled. The word keeps us in Reality, in Truth. Those whose lives, on the other hand, are centered on self—rather than God, and who refuse to obey God’s word of truth, are living a lie. They condemn themselves to be separated from God for whom they were made. Such self-centeredness leads to miserable, restless, unfulfilled, unhappy lives.

Jesus comes from the Father; he proceeds from him eternally. He is the divine Son. God is our Father also: we are his adopted children. We received our lives from him where we were conceived in time, and he created our human soul. God is also our Father by grace, (through baptism) when we were baptized. Jesus also became one of us. He began to share our human nature when the Immaculate Virgin Mary conceived him by the power of the Holy Spirit. As humans we share the same divine Father. "Therefore, he is not ashamed to call [us] brothers".

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Heb 4: 12-13

"In deed the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart" (12).

In previous verses, the word of God appeals to us, "Oh, that today you would hear his voice: Harden not your hearts as at the rebellion in the day of testing in the desert" (3: 7-8).

The chosen people became impatient in the desert for lack of water (Ex 17: 1-7). They complained and rebelled against God and Moses. God swore, therefore, that these faithless, disobedient people would not enter into his rest (3: 18-19). Today, we are again being invited to hear God's voice and not resist it by continuous disobedience so that our hearts become hardened against God and his will. The result would be that we would not enter into God's rest. Originally, the entry and possession of the Promised Land was God's rest.

This is a symbol of our entry into God's presence at the end of our spiritual journey. By striving to do God's will and by accepting the sufferings that are part of the desert of life, we are spiritualized and sanctified. Thus we become increasingly united to God. Our union with him continually deepens until we reach the very center of our

souls where God dwells. We can then rest in God in our inmost center, having reached the divine presence for which we were striving. With this background, we can better understand today's epistle. We are being warned to persevere in our journey to our place of rest. We must remain obedient and faithful to God's will. We must be prepared to face hardship. We will be tested, perhaps severely. As motivation to keep us vigilant and persevering we are reminded that God's word is a living, effective, and sharper than any two-edged sword....God's word penetrates the very core of our being. It pricks our consciences and judges us. It gives severe remonstrations when we fail to obey it (Acts 26: 14; Jonah 1: 1-3, 2: 1; 3: 1; 1 Sam 15: 22-23).

God's word is "living" and life-giving. It is creative (Gen 1: 3, 6-7, 9, 11 etc). Jesus said, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (Jn 6: 63). He further explained, "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11: 25). Then he proceeded to demonstrate the life-giving power of his words.

For his words are a projection of himself. To the decaying Lazarus who had been entombed for four days, Jesus shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" and "The dead man came out fully alive" (Jn 11: 43-44).

Thus we see that God's words enliven and empower us to live in obedience to God's will. "The gospel...is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes....For in it is revealed the righteousness of God" (Rom 1: 16-17).

The gospel words are a life-giving force for those who take them in. They set in motion towards salvation those who receive them in faith. Thus we see the importance of cherishing and absorbing the content of these words that lead us to salvation. They save us from living in habitual mortal sin, and enable us to live consistently in God's grace in preparation for the eternal salvation of heaven. St. James confirms this when he says, "Welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls" (Jas 1: 20).

We also see how effective for healing God's word is in the gospel: in response to the leper's faith that he could cure him, Jesus "stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, ...Be made clean. His leprosy was cleansed immediately" (Mt 8: 3). Jesus likewise calmed a storm on the sea simply with the words, "Quiet! Be still! The wind ceased and there was great calm" (Mk 4: 39). The power of Jesus' words can calm the emotional storms of our lives in the same way. We simply have to open our hearts to receive these words in faith and they will effectively bring about the same results.

The word of God is also effective in casting out devils. For example, Jesus rebuked the devil in a man, saying "Quiet! Come out of him! The unclean spirit...came out of him" (Mk 1: 25-26). God continued to empower his word when the apostles uttered them after Jesus' ascension: "... the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs" (Mk 16: 20). Receiving God's word with faith will bring about the same results in us.

God's word is "sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart."

We can't get away with anything. The least disobedience is known and judged. We are urged toward purity of thought and desire, and to seek our rest in God and his will. God's word communicates light for us to see ourselves as we are. The least straying from the truth is known, judged and called to our attention. God's word urges us on towards complete victory over our sinful tendencies. We cannot hide any deviation from God's penetrating word. It is very much alive and remonstrates us. It convicts us and brings us to repentance. The word of God does not allow us to shirk our response to truth. It reaches the deepest areas of our heart and challenges us to absolute fidelity to God and to truth as revealed by God's word. The word makes our consciences aware of that truth. We are compelled to see ourselves as we are before God and our purity of

heart or lack of it. The truth stares us in the face as enunciated by God's word. The word attacks our lethargy and goads us on to serving the Lord. It awakens us to holy activity and the doing of God's will. The word and the grace it communicates urges us on toward the life of the blessed in heaven.... "they stand before God's throne and worship him day and night in his temple" (Rev 7: 15). The word also purifies and cleanses us. It brings us to faithfulness, and love. It's far reaching power sanctifies us in the deepest recesses of our souls. "No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account" (13).

Again, we are being motivated to persevere in obeying God's word. God is aware of our innermost thoughts and desires. That should move us to be responsible and respond to God's will as expressed by his word. "Oh, that today you would hear his voice: 'Harden not your hearts'..." (Heb 3: 8).

To realize that God knows what we are thinking and desiring should make us attentive and reject any thought or desire that is contrary to God's word and will. His knowledge of what's going on inside us should shame us to be virtuous and pleasing in his sight. Only a hardened heart would not cease to entertain sinful thoughts and desires. But passion blinds; habitual resistance hardens; so that we become insensitive to the seriousness of sin and the insult that disobedience flings to a loving God in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17: 28).

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Heb 4: 14-16

"Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession" (14).

We have a great high priest, far more superior than the Jewish high priest. The Jewish high priest was head of all

the priests and Levites who served in the Jerusalem temple. He exercised supreme authority over the temple. He was the mediator between God and the people. On the Day of Atonement he carried out the expiation ceremony. On that day—and on that day of the year only—he entered the holy of holies to sprinkle the Ark with the blood of the sacrifices. No other priest could enter there.

Now our mediator with God is Jesus, the divine Son of God. He has entered the real Holy of Holies, heaven itself; there he remains in the presence of God to constantly intercede for us. In Jesus, we have a unique high priest. His once-for-all sacrifice of himself for the sins of the world accomplished what the elaborate sacrificial ritual of the Jewish priests could never do.

Jesus passed through the heavens by his ascension to reach the very place where God lives. The Jews believed that there was a series of heavens in the highest of which God dwells. Jesus remains there forever in the presence of the Father, continually interceding for us. That is why we can have such firm hope and hold on to our confession, our faith. Even in the midst of persecution and trials we are encouraged to maintain our holy faith.

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin” (15).

The fact that Jesus is our high priest and Son of God may make us believe that he is too far removed from us to sympathize with our weaknesses. But the fact that he became one of us by becoming human means that he experienced our weaknesses. He was tested just as we are. He was tested by the Pharisees throughout his public ministry (Mk 10: 2; 12: 13). Jesus’ patience was tested by his disciples’ failure to understand him (Mk 8: 15-21). He was tested by his family (Jn 7: 2-5). The crowds likewise tested him (Jn 6: 14-15). Jesus was tested by Satan (Mt 4: 1-11). He was tested by his Father in his agony in the Garden (Lk 22: 39-46). So Jesus knows from experience

what testing is all about, as well as what weakness is. He experienced hunger (Mt 4: 2). He became tired (Jn 4: 6). He was severely distressed (Lk 22: 44). Jesus needed to sleep (Mk 4: 38). He even wept in sadness (Jn 11: 35; Lk 19: 41). Although Jesus was tested in various ways he never sinned. He could ask his enemies, “Can any of you charge me with sin?” (Jn 8: 46) St. Paul declared that Jesus “did not know sin” (2Cor 5: 21). He was the Suffering Servant who “had done no wrong nor spoken any falsehood” (Is 53: 9). We do not have his divine strength and fidelity to the Father—we sin. But Jesus, through his experience of our weaknesses, understands our weakness and can readily forgive us. He remembers his own trials and weaknesses, and has compassion for us, as we go through ours and are not as successful in overcoming them as he was. He then intercedes for us to his Father.

“So let us confidently approach the throne of grace and receive mercy and to find grace for timely help” (16).

The “Throne of Grace” is the presence of God and the place where one receives mercy. This reminds us of the “mercy seat” which was situated at the top of the Ark of the Covenant. It was considered as the seat of God where he met Moses and spoke to him (Ex 25: 22).

The astonishing difference between the Old Testament mercy seat and the Throne of Grace lies in the fact that whereas only the high priest could approach the mercy seat, and did so with fear and trembling, all are now told to approach the Throne of Grace, and to do so in confidence. In the words of St. Paul “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith to this grace in which we stand” (Rom 5: 12). It is because Jesus suffered and died for us that we have been forgiven so that we can experience reconciliation with God and enjoy his peace. Faith attaches us to Christ and his overflowing grace. Through faith in Jesus we have free access to God’s “grace in which we stand” (See Eph 2: 18; 3: 12).

We can confidently approach God and be assured of his mercy and grace because Jesus is our great high priest. He paid the price of our redemption. Jesus' wounds are still visible. And the infinite merits he gained for us are continually available to us. He is always interceding for us. He stands before the Father who cannot refuse him. We must not hesitate to ask his help. That is what his mission as mediator is all about. His becoming man and going through his paschal mystery is for this very purpose: to save us from sin and to help us. He said, "I consecrate myself for them" (Jn 17: 19). Jesus set himself apart for us and for our salvation. He is ready to help us in any and all of our struggles. He is ever present to assist us. As he told the apostles, he tells us: "In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world" (Jn 16: 33).

We also have these consoling words from St. Paul: "No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor 10: 13).

30th Sunday of Ordinary Time Heb. 5: 1-6

"Every high priest is taken from among men and made their representatives before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Heb. 5: 1).

The statement of our opening verse is based on the fact that Aaron, the first high priest, was taken from among his fellow Jews to be their representative before God. He was Moses' brother and spokesman.

Aaron's descendants in the direct line, beginning with his eldest son, were to succeed him. This was to continue down through the ages. The high priest was the intermediary between the chosen people and God. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, he offered the sacrifice which made atonement for all the sins of the people. The

high priest, therefore, had a very special place – the most important religious position – in the Jewish Community. (See Fr. Kevin O'Sullivan, *The Sunday Readings*). This pattern of the high priest being taken from the people will continue. When God chooses the eternal high priest, he will necessarily come from among the people. In this way he will be able to represent the people before God, just as Aaron, the original high priest, did.

"He is able to deal patiently with the ignorant and erring, for he himself is beset by weakness (Heb. 5: 2), and so, for this reason, must make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people" (Heb. 5: 3).

Because the Jewish high priest was chosen from the people, he shared their weaknesses. He knew from his own experience of falling into sin what weakness was all about. Therefore, he could readily have compassion for their weaknesses and sins. Moreover, he needed to "make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people." This can be seen on the Day of Atonement from the fact that the high priest offered a bull for his own sins before offering a goat for the sins of the people (see Lev. 16: 6).

Although our high priest, Jesus, was sinless, he experienced weakness and was tested as we are. He knows from experience the difficulties we are confronted with in life. He can compassionate with our failings.

"No one seeks this honor upon himself but only when called by God, just as Aaron was" (Heb. 5: 4). The high priest represents the people before God. Therefore, he must be acceptable to God. God himself must appoint him to that position. Aaron became high priest because God chose him for that position (Sir 45: 6-26, esp. 24; Ex 28: 1 etc.).

"In the same way, it was not Christ who glorified himself in becoming high priest, but rather the one who said to him: 'You are my son: this day I have begotten you'" (Heb. 5: 5).

As proof that God chose Jesus to be glorified as his high priest, the author quotes Ps. 2:7, “You are my son; this day I have begotten you”. This psalm is speaking of the Lord’s anointed one (Ps. 2: 2), that is, the Messiah, God’s anointed king. The psalm goes on to explain, “I myself have installed my king...” (Ps 2: 6). This psalm was fulfilled when Jesus, having completed his self-gift and sacrifice on Calvary as high priest, was glorified in the resurrection and ascension. It is at this moment that the Son entered, even in his human nature, into the Father’s eternity. So the Father exclaims with great joy, “You are my son; this day I have begotten you” (Ps. 2: 7). Thus his full sonship was restored. We know the Father received Jesus’ perfect sacrifice by glorifying him. The glory of which he had emptied himself when he became man was fully restored to him by the Father. Now, exalted at God the Father’s right hand, he has become our perfect high priest who is always present before him to intercede for us.

Jesus was God’s Son from all eternity. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn 1: 1).

At a certain point in time, he became human. “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1: 14).

As human, Jesus could represent us. As divine, his human acts had infinite value. Thus, Jesus, by his very nature as God-man, connects us to God. He is our great high priest, our pontifex: he is the bridge that united us to God.

Now, with a human body, he could suffer and die and become a worthy sacrifice to expiate the sins of the whole world. The infinite value of the divine Son’s self-gift in sacrifice repaired the insult and damage of the sins of the whole human race. Having accomplished his mission, Jesus returned to the Father as our eternal high priest to continually intercede for us.

The epistle goes on to give another reason from

scripture that Jesus is our high priest. The force of the first passage is strengthened by this second when we take both of them together:

“Just as he says in another place: you are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 5: 6). We learn from Gen. 14: 18-20 that Melchizedek was king of Salem (Jerusalem). He is described as “a priest of God Most High and brought out bread and wine. He blessed Abram. Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything” (Gen 14: 19-20).

Like Melchizedek Jesus offered a sacrifice of bread and wine which became his body and blood at the Last Supper, anticipating the sacrifice of himself on Calvary. The scripture speaks of Melchizedek as “without beginning of days or end of life, thus made to resemble the Son of God, he remains a priest forever” (Heb 7: 3). The eternal birth of Jesus as Son of God (Jn 1: 1) and his resurrection make Jesus, as symbolized by Melchizedek, an eternal priest who will never cease interceding for us.

All Saints Day

1 Jn 3:1-3

Our epistle begins with, “See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him”(1).

The greatness of the Father’s love is seen in his taking us who were created from the earth and raising us up to the dignity of being his children. In order to accomplish this he sent his own Son to become one of us so that he could redeem us from sin. And then he sent the Holy Spirit to sanctify us. Through baptism he infused divine life into us. This created sharing in God’s life is called sanctifying grace. It makes us partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1: 4). Our intellects are elevated by faith and perfected by the gifts of the Holy Spirit enabling us to know God and communicate with him. Our wills are elevated

by charity and perfected by the gifts enabling us to love God. Thus we are able to have a personal relationship with God. We have an intuitive sense of God and are inclined to call God “Father” (Gal 4: 6). Since we are spiritual beings with intellect and will, made in the image and likeness of God, we are able to enter into an intimate relationship of knowledge and love with the Blessed Trinity. Thus being a child of God required that we be created anew and become new creatures (2 Cor 5: 17). Our human nature has been elevated and endowed with new powers that enable to operate on a new, supernatural level. Glory to God for this marvelous gift.

These virtues and powers empower us to live virtuous lives like Jesus who receives his Sonship directly from the Father. We express this divine life that we share with him through love. We submit ourselves to God’s will like Jesus and obey his commandments. We behave as true children of God as we conform ourselves to his will. But those who live for this passing world do not know and appreciate the children of God—just as they did not know Jesus. This difference between the children of God and worldlings may cause real antipathy. Scripture expresses it in these words, “Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings, reproaches us for transgressions of the law...He professes to have knowledge of God and styles himself a child of the Lord. To us he is the censure of our thoughts; merely to see him is a hardship for us, because his life is not like other men’s, and different are his ways....” (Wis 2: 12-15).

Our epistle concludes, “Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is”(2). As God’s children, our human nature has been transformed and elevated to a new, super-natural level. We can now act on a spiritual level and relate to the divine. This is what we now are during our earthly existence. But a further transformation is yet to come upon Jesus’ return in glory: “we will all be changed, in an instant, in the blink

of an eye, at the last trumpet...the dead will be raised incorruptible...and that which is mortal must clothe itself with immortality” (1 Cor 15: 51-53). St. Paul explains the transformation that will take place in this way. The body, he says, “is sown corruptible; it is raised incorruptible; It is sown dishonorable; it is raised glorious. It is sown weak; it is raised powerful. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual one” (1 Cor 15: 42-44).

Our epistle tells us that when what we shall be is revealed, “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is”. What does it mean to “be like him”, like Jesus in his glorified state? When John saw the risen Jesus at Patmos he says that “his face shone like the sun at its brightest”(Rev 1: 16). Saul tells us that when the glorified Jesus appeared to him “a great light from the sky suddenly shone around me...I could see nothing because of the brightness of that light” (Acts 22: 6, 11). “God is light” (1 Jn 1: 5). It is his presence and brightness shining and glorifying Jesus. And our epistle tells us that we will be like him in our glorified state. Jesus himself said that “the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father” (Mt 13: 43).

Our epistle states that the reason that we will be like him is because “we shall see him as he is”. In Scripture to “see him as he is” means to know him personally by experiencing him. It is because we will have been transformed into his very image (2 Cor 3: 18) and become like him in our very being that we will be able to “see” or know him experientially. We know him because we experience his very being through having become like him.

When John of the Cross was given a foretaste of future glory when we shall be like God and experience him as he is he writes, “The soul now feels that it is all inflamed in the divine union and that its palate is all bathed in glory and love, that in the most intimate part of its substance it is flooded with no less than rivers of glory, abounding in delights, and that from its bosom

flow rivers of living waters (Jn 7: 38), which the Son of God declared will rise up in such souls, accordingly it seems, because it is so vigorously transformed in God, so sublimely possessed by him, and arrayed with such rich gifts and virtues, that it is singularly close to beatitude—so close that only a thin veil separates it” (The Living Flame of Love, S.1 No. 1, Kavanaugh & Rodriguez OCD).

“Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure” (3).

Jesus said, “Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God” (Mt 5:8).

The clean of heart are those who are single-heartedly devoted to God. They allow nothing to come between them and him. Disordered desires for what is against God’s will come between us and God like dark clouds. This prevents us from being in and experiencing his presence. It prevents us from “seeing” him. We “make ourselves pure” by self-discipline and self-mastery which enable us to control our desires so that they are always in accord with God’s will.

Such self-discipline implies that we constantly live in prayerful communion with God and draw power from him to practice virtue. God empowers us to practice self-denial when selfishness wants to usurp his place. For example, the virtue of temperance inclines us to practice self-restraint toward the pleasurable so that we do not spend too much time in entertaining ourselves with television or in eating or drinking too much. The reward of living in God’s presence and beholding him inspire us to keep “making ourselves pure”

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Heb 9: 24-28

“Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, a copy of the true one, but heaven itself, that he might now appear before God on our behalf” (14).

God had directed Moses to make a sanctuary for him (Ex 25). The most holy area contained the Ark of the Covenant. The high priest entered this “holy of holies” to sprinkle the blood of the sacrificed animals to atone for his own sins and those of the people. This was but a shadow of what was to come. Jesus, the Christ, sacrificed himself for our sins. The Father accepted his sacrifice and glorified him. He was taken up to heaven into the very presence of God, where he continually intercedes for us.

“Not that he might offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters each year into the sanctuary with blood that is not his own” (25);

The Jewish high priest entered the holy of holies every year to sprinkle the propitiatory above the Ark of the Covenant (Lev 16: 14). He had to repeat this ritual every year to atone for the sins of the preceding year. These were symbolical acts to make the people aware of sin in their lives and the need to make reparation for them. But the blood of the bulls and goats could not really expiate sins. These rituals looked toward the coming of the Messiah who would expiate the sins of the world by his own blood. He did not have to offer himself in sacrifice repeatedly like the Jewish high priests did.

“...if that were so, he would have had to suffer repeatedly from the foundation of the world. But now once for all he had appeared at the end of the ages to take away sin by his sacrifice” (26).

Jesus did not have to offer himself repeatedly like the Jewish high priest with the blood of animals. Since Jesus is divine, the sacrifice of himself has eternal value. His one sacrifice expiated the sins of the whole world, from the beginning of the existence of humans until the end of the world.

This one sacrifice is made present to us at every Mass in an un-bloody way. Jesus ritualized his sacrifice at the Last Supper in the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup. He then commanded his disciples to “Do this in memory

of me” (Lk 22: 19). The fruits of his sacrifice can then be assimilated through faith and receptive prayer.

“Just as it is appointed that human beings die once, and after this the judgment...” (27)

We have only one life to live which ends at death. “Death is the end of man’s earthly pilgrimage, of the time of grace and mercy which God offers him so as to work out his earthly life in keeping with the divine plan, and to decide his ultimate destiny. When ‘the single course of our earthly life’ is completed, we shall not return to other earthly lives:... There is no ‘reincarnation after death’” (CCC 1013).

“Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven—through a purification or immediately, -or immediate and everlasting damnation” (CCC 1022).

“...so also Christ, offered once to take away the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to take away sin but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him” (28).

A footnote in Matthew 20: 28 explains the word “many”—it does not mean that some are excluded, but is a Semitism designating the collectivity who benefit from the service of the one, and is equivalent to “all”.

Christ is seen as the Suffering Servant of whom Isaiah says “Through his suffering, my servant shall justify many and their guilt he shall bear... Because he surrendered himself to death and was counted among the wicked; and he shall take away the sins of many, and win pardon for their offenses” (Is 53: 11, 12).

Our passage speaks of Jesus’ second coming. After Jesus’ Ascension two men dressed in white garments told the disciples, “This Jesus who has

been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven” (Acts 1: 11). Jesus will return at his Parousia to “bring salvation to those who eagerly await him”.

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Heb. 10: 11-14, 18

“Every priest stands daily at his ministry, offering frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sins” (Heb. 10:11).

The Levitical priests offered daily sacrifices that were ineffectual in remitting sins. The same sacrifices of animals and fruits of the earth were offered day after day, year after year in the Jerusalem Temple. Every morning and every evening a male lamb of one year old, without spot and blemish, was offered as a burnt offering, each with a cereal offering. A libation of wine had to be poured out also (see Numbers 28:3-8).

The Jewish sacrifices were ordered by God and accepted by him as a token of the chosen people’s submission to him. By sacrificing part of their property, animals and fruits of the land, they were proclaiming their dependence on God for all. In themselves, these sacrifices had no value; they had no power to take away sin. Sacrifices incessantly repeated show their powerlessness by their very repetition.

“But this one offered one sacrifice for sins, and took his seat forever at the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:12). Jesus offered a single sacrifice that won him a permanent place at God’s right hand. This was a true sacrifice, of infinite value, because of the divine Person offering it. It was more than sufficient to make atonement to the Father for all the sins of the world. In his human nature Christ was given the place of honor at the right hand of the Father in heaven. When he finished his work of redemption he was seated in glory.

“Whereas the priest continuously adopts the stance of offering and petition (standing),

Christ has offered once and has since ceased to stand but has taken the position of authority; he is seated. Further, he is seated at the right hand of God. His sacrifice finished, he takes his rightful place where he awaits the final consummation of the age (Hebrews by Juliana Casey I.H.M., Michael Glazier, Inc.).”

“Now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool” (Heb. 10:13).

The period of time referred to here is between the enthronement of Jesus and his second coming. In ancient times victorious kings put their feet on the prostrate bodies of their enemies. This comes from Psalm 110:1 where God tells the Messiah, “Take your throne at my right hand, while I make your enemies your footstool.”

Having offered himself as a perfect sacrifice, Jesus sits forever at the right hand of God, awaiting the full actualization of his sovereignty in the subjection of all his enemies.

“Christ has already won this battle and is exalted to power. Yet the final manifestation of his conquests remains in the future. The decisive battle of the war has been fought and the enemies’ back has been broken. But the fighting continues; the enemy continues to resist desperately. Nevertheless, the Biblical writers are confident that with the death and resurrection of Christ the victory is secure and however fierce the struggle, what remains are the mopping up operations. The final outcome cannot be changed. God’s verdict is in. Those who are set aside for God in Christ have been perfected for all time by the single offering of Christ” (Interpreter’s).

“For by one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated” (Heb. 10:14).

Since Jesus is divine and his self-offering has infinite value, it has the potential to make those who receive his offering perfect. His sacrifice has eternal, effective repercussions. Those who are being consecrated are on their way to being totally dedicated to God and are in the

process of being perfected. But since Jesus has already completed his offering on which those who are being sanctified depend, their perfection can be considered as already achieved. As Jesus said, “I consecrated myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth” (Jn. 17:19).

Jesus’ consecration is so absolute and perfect, those associated with him, as far as he is concerned, are guaranteed to be able to attain perfection. They follow in the footsteps of their master. His grace is so powerful, with sufficient cooperation on their part, victory is ascertained also for them.

“Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer offering for sin” (Heb. 10:18).

Jesus’ sacrifice of himself on the cross for love of us was enough to make up for all our sins and the sins of the whole world, from its beginning to its very end. The infinite value of Jesus’ sacrifice brought about God’s forgiveness for all sin for all time. His one sacrifice was sufficient once and for all. All the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament looked forward to this one adequate sacrifice that Jesus offered. All of these sacrifices have finished their purpose and have been fulfilled in Jesus’ unique self-offering on the cross. All of these others are now outdated and useless. A new order has now come into play.

At the Last Supper, Jesus established the ritual of the Mass in order to make present in our time his unique sacrifice on Calvary and to apply its fruits to all who are receptive to it in faith. The breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup through the words of consecration re-enact the paschal mystery: the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. In an unbloody manner the whole mystery is made present to sanctify us. We have but to receive its power and its impelling force moving us to live out the gospel and the supreme life it offers us.

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Jn 18: 33b-37

“Jesus Christ is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood...” (5).

Jesus revealed the Father to us: “He testifies to what he has seen and heard” (Jn 3:32) in the presence of the Father. “No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father’s side, has revealed him” (Jn 1:18). Jesus told Pilate, “For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice” (Jn 18:37). Jesus gave his life as a martyr (witness) to the truth and rose triumphantly from the dead to give definitive proof that everything he had preached and revealed to us was true. He faithfully witnessed to that truth at the cost of his life—it was that important to him and to us. The truth is that important. It is by living according to that truth contained in the gospels that we may enter eternal life.

Jesus is “the firstborn of the dead”. He is the first one to resurrect from the dead—the first of many. Everyone who is connected to him by faith receives his divine life and is empowered to overcome death and the corruption of the grave.

Jesus conquered death not only for himself but for everyone who believes in him. “...the hour is coming” he says, “in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation” (Jn 5:28-29).

Jesus’ resurrection and glorification established him as king “and ruler of the kings of the earth”. After he had been glorified Jesus said, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Mt 28:18).

The resurrection constituted Jesus as universal king. He enjoys power over all creation, over all

creatures. It is to him that these early Christians were asked to give their witness—just as he had witnessed to the truth and overcame death, so will they. He is truly their king. Caesar is subject to him as well. They do well to resist giving ceremonial worship to such an earthly king who is weak and subject to die as they. But Jesus lives forever and will restore their lives and immortalize them with his glorious life.

It is “to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood” “that we give our allegiance. His great love for us, which has gone so far as to shed his own blood unto death, deserves our total allegiance even to the point of dying for him. His love for us is present even now—it is perpetual, immense and eternal. It carries us through any and all the difficulties we will experience. He has relieved us of the unbearable burden of our sins at the cost of his blood. Our indebtedness to him prompts us to lay our lives down for him.

“Who has made us into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father, to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen” (6).

Jesus shares his reign with us by forming us into his messianic kingdom. We are under his loving, life-giving rule rather than under Satan’s hate-filled reign of death. Christians did not feel part of the Roman Empire. They were like strangers or fugitives, fleeing from the authorities seeking to interfere with their allegiance to Christ or attempting to force them to worship the emperor. Now they have their own kingdom, cared for and protected by their loving king who triumphed over death. There they share his divine life and enjoy his messianic peace in his kingdom. There they enjoy his continuous presence and love. They have also been made “priests for his God and Father”. This fulfills God’s promise, “you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). Inasmuch as the whole Christian people is consecrated to God through baptism, it forms a kingdom of royal priests who participate in the liturgical services. In this way and through their prayers they mediate between God and the rest of humanity. Jesus is our great

high priest who offered himself in sacrifice. We participate in his priesthood by joining the ministerial priests to offer Jesus' unique offering of himself to his Father. This implies and affirms that Jesus is the son of God. Our king is divine and immortal, all-powerful and all-loving. All glory and power belong to him. How privileged and honored we are to be ruled by such a king! "Behold, he is coming amid the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. All the peoples of the earth will lament him. Yes. Amen" (7). After Jesus' ascension, the angels told the disciples who were looking at Jesus as he was being lifted

up, "This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

Jesus himself said that at the end of the world everyone "will see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt 24:30). This is known as the Second Coming or Parousia. This will fulfill the prophecy of Daniel who saw "one like a son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven; ...He received dominion, glory, and kingship; nations and peoples of every language serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion..." (Dan 7:13-14). He will come to judge the peoples of the world.

"Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him"—not only the chosen people and the Roman soldiers who crucified him, but all of us sinners who contributed to his crucifixion. For it was our sins that caused him to suffer and die.

"All the people of the earth will lament him." All non-believers and those who persecuted him in the members of his Church will be overwhelmed with terrified grief for causing him and his people to suffer. They remained unrepentant of their error, and sinful violations of God's people. They died with hardened hearts. And now they will have to face judgment for their cruel persecutions.

"Yes. Amen." The Greek and Hebrew words underline the solemnity of the prophecy. And

the writer foresees the concurrence of the listening community. Yes! We agree! So be it!

"I am the Alpha and Omega," says the Lord God, 'the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty'" (8).

It is God who is speaking; Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. He identifies himself as the beginning of all things and the end towards which all things created are destined. The first and the last together signify totality. God was, is and is to come—that is the eternity of God. He began all history and he will bring it to an end. He, the Almighty, is coming to judge: to reward and punish, and to set things right. The emperor's power is not absolute—he is a mere human being whose rule will end shortly—God is eternal and the ruler of all. His Christ, who is co-eternal with him, his Son, is coming to save the Christian community. His power is absolute; he is almighty. His love for his disciples has been proven. They can depend on him for care and defense. For he is one with his Father and shares his almighty power.

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbott, Walter M., S.J. *The Documents of Vatican II in a New and Definitive Translation*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1966.
- The Anchor Bible, The Epistles of James 1, Peter and Jude Volume 37*, by Bo Reicke, tr., 1964.
- Aquinas, St. Thomas. *The Summa of St. Thomas Aquinas. Three Volumes*. 1947.
- Argyle, A. W. *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible. The Epistles*. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1963.
- Augustine, St. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1951.
- Barclay, William. *The Daily Bible Series. The Epistles, Revised Ed*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977.
- Broderick, Robert C. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1976.
- A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*. New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1953.
- Cerfaux, Lucien. *Christ in the Theology of St. Paul*. New York: Herder & Herder, 1959.
- Decoux, Alain. *Paul, Heart of the Apostle*, Boston: Pauline Books, n.d.
- Dunn, James D. G. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998.
- Durrwell, F.X., C.S.S.R. *In the Redeeming Christ. Toward a Theology of Spirituality*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963.
- Durrwell, F. X., C.S.S.R. *The Resurrection. A Biblical Study*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960.
- Guardini, Romano. *The Lord*. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1954.
- Hahn, Scott and Curtis Mitch. *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible. The Gospel of Matthew. The Epistles*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003.
- Harrington, Wilfrid, O.P. *New Testament Message. Mark*. Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1979.
- Hartman, Louis F., C.S.S.R. *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible. A Translation and Adaptation of of A. van der Born's BIJBELS WOODENBOEK. 2nd Revised Ed*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963.
- Henry, Matthew. *New One Volume Edition Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971.
- Hernandez, Francis. *In Conversation with God. Volumes 1-6*. London: Scepter, 1994.
- Hunter, A. M. *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible. The Epistles*. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1965.
- Laymon, Charles M., ed. *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible. Introduction and Commentary for Each Book of the Bible Including the Apocrypha*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1971.

BIBLIOGRAPHY-2

Leon-Dufour, Xavier. Dictionary of Biblical Theology New Revised Edition. New York: The Seabury Press, 1983.

Maertens, Thierry and Jean Frisque. Guide for the Christian Assembly. Notre Dame: Fides Publishers Inc., 1973.

Mantague, George T. S.M. The Living Thought of St. Paul. Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1966.

Martini, Cardinal Carlo Maria, S.J. The Gospel According to St. Paul. The Word Among Us Press, Ijamsville, Maryland, 2008.

Nevins, Albert J., M.M. The Maryknoll Catholic Dictionary. New York: Dimension Books-Grosset and Dunlap, 1965.

A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture. New Jersey: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1969.

New Testament Reading Guide. Volumes 1-14. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1965.

Quay, Paul M., S.J. The Mystery Hidden for Ages in God. New York: Peter Lang, 1955