



# Understanding the Sunday Old Testament Readings

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## 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*,  
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## 1st SUNDAY OF ADVENT

**Is 63:16-17, 19, 64:2-7**

**W**e recall that the book of Isaiah is divided into three parts: 1-39, 40-55, and 56-66. In 1-39 most of the oracles come from Isaiah and faithfully reflect the situation in eighth-century Judah. Chapter 40-55, sometimes called the Deutero-Isaiah, are generally attributed to an anonymous poet who prophesied toward the end of the Babylonian exile. Chapters 56-66 contain oracles from a later period and were composed by disciples who inherited the spirit and continued the work of the great prophet.

Very probably chapters 55-66 were composed during the first years of the post-exile community in Palestine between 537 and 520 B.C... These chapters are known as Third Isaiah.

Our passage opens with our prophet pleading before God. He is in a serious conversation with God whom he recognizes as father. From the very beginning, Israel is God's Son, his dear child (Ex 4:22; Hos 11:1).

God is also Israel's redeemer. He is forever freeing his people from its enemies. The prophet teaches us how to approach the Lord very intimately. God is a God of love, our father and savior. He has proven his love for us so we approach him with childlike confidence.

We begin with a question: Why does he allow us to wander from his ways expressed in his commands, or harden our hearts by repeatedly resisting his manifest will? It is true that God created us with free wills so we can choose either to obey or disobey him. But there is a wish that God's grace would be so strong that we would choose to follow his will.

The prophet pleads for God's return, for he has left them to experience for themselves how miserable humans are without the divine presence. May he return to assist them in their misery simply because they are his people, his heritage.

Our prophet implores God's personal intervention, a divine manifestation – something like when he came down on Mount Sinai; the power of the divine presence caused the whole mountain to tremble violently (Ex 19:18). St Mark sees this prayer being answered at Jesus' baptism. He writes, "on coming up out of the water, he [Jesus] saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him" (Mk 1:10). God is faithful and responds to those who wait for him. When God does come there is hope that he will find his people doing right, living according to God's ways. God is angry with them because they have sinned. Their deeds are polluted. The people are like withered leaves; they are blown away by their guilt. No one calls on God's name. They do not cling to God.

God has abandoned them and left them to wallow in the guilt of their sinful lives, yet the prophet reminds God that he is their Father, their Creator. There is that hope that he will not leave them to suffer misery forever.

## 2nd SUNDAY OF ADVENT

**Is 40: 1-5, 9-11**

**T**hese words in Second Isaiah were spoken to the Jewish exiles in Babylonia. They were being consoled in that their exile would soon be ended. The term Jerusalem stands for all those who are in exile. Those years of suffering made up for their past sins and expiated them. In fact, their sufferings more than made up for their sins. Accepted suffering is very purifying and beneficial for us, too. Now that God's people have been purified from their sins, God will soon inspire the Persian king Cyrus to free them. There is going to be a new Exodus.

"A voice cries out" – someone from the celestial assembly speaks: the Lord himself is about to lead a new Exodus, out of 'Babylon through the desert back to Palestine.

Just as God took the initiative to lead his people

with the pillar of fire and the cloud in the first Exodus, so now he is leading his people anew and makes it easy for them. It is by his power they are freed and brought forth from their exile.

This passage sees beyond the present situation and looks to the future toward the Messianic deliverance of the whole world. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all mankind shall see it together.”

The writers of the gospels see the fulfillment of this passage as John the Baptist announces Jesus when he appears on the scene to begin his Messianic mission. The people are to prepare the way of the Lord through repentance of sin and conversion of hearts. They must humble their pride and correct their crooked ways.

They must repent of their sinful ways to welcome God's presence in Jesus the Messiah (see Lk 3:2-6). By preparing ourselves through purity of heart we may have a mystical experience of the glory of God (see Mt 5:8, 2 Cor 4:4).

Zion, the New Jerusalem, is the herald of glad tidings. She must proclaim from the highest mountain the presence of the redeeming God. He has come to deliver us from our captivity to sin. He is Immanuel. The exiles are exhorted to welcome this deliverance. God's power liberates the exiles and gives them their reward or recompense: their settlement once more in their homeland. This deliverance is more perfectly fulfilled through Christ's redemptive death and resurrection. He is the good shepherd who gathers us into his arms and feeds us with the bread of life as he leads us to eternal life.

### **3rd SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

#### **Is 61: 1-2, 10-11**

**T**hese words were addressed to the Chosen people exiled in Babylonia. The prophet is anointed by the Holy Spirit to enlighten and strengthen him for his mission. He is sent to bring the glad tidings to those who have been subdued by their enslavement. They have been humiliated by their captors. But they will soon be delivered. These brokenhearted people will be consoled by the knowledge of their deliverance.

The Babylonians will soon be overcome by the Persians, and Cyrus their leader will allow the Jews to return to the Holy Land. They will be released from imprisonment and captivity. The prophet will have the joy of announcing a year of favor from the Lord. God is the one who inspired Cyrus to overcome their captors the day of vindication by our God, and have men return to their homeland.

The year of favor is the jubilee year spoken of in Leviticus 25:8 and following. This year of jubilee was to be held every 49th year. On its arrival, all slaves were set free, loans and mortgages ceased to be binding. The Chosen people and all their property belonged to the Lord, and were returned to him in the Jubilee Year. The year of liberation from Babylon was such a year.

When Jesus began his public ministry, he came to Nazareth and went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found this particular passage, which he read (Isaiah 61:1-2). Then he sat down and said to all in attendance: “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk 4:16-21).

What took place on a smaller scale in Babylon is going to be fulfilled on a universal scale by Jesus' messianic redemption.

“I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul; For he has clothed me with a robe of salvation, and wrapped me in a mantle of justice...like a bride bedecked with her jewels... Jerusalem, realizing her jubilant liberation that God has accomplished, feels that she is once more the bride of her Lord. She is dressed in nuptial robes. The New Jerusalem will be dressed in the garment of salvation, sanctifying grace, and in the robe of righteousness. This is the fulfillment that she can look forward to when the Messiah accomplishes his final redemption (compare Rev 19:7-9).

God will accomplish all of these things in time as surely as the earth brings forth its plants and a garden makes its growth spring up. All the nations will see this happen. God, through his forthcoming Messianic King will make justice or righteousness and praise spring up before all the nations. And we are witnesses to this grand reality come true as we experience it within our very beings.

#### **4th SUNDAY OF ADVENT** **2 Sm 7:1-5, 8-12, 14a, 16**

**D**avid had overcome all of his enemies. God had blessed him with such military skills. Now he could give his attention to other matters. He began to feel uncomfortable over the fact that he was living in a beautiful house of cedar, while the ark of God dwelled in a tent. At first the prophet Nathan told him to proceed according to what he felt in his heart! But, on that same night, the word of the Lord came to Nathan.

Nathan then related to David God’s message. He explained that God had dwelled in a tent all along, from the day he led the Israelites out of Egypt. Never did he utter one word of complaint. He had called David from caring for the flock to be commander of his people. He was with David wherever he went and destroyed his enemies. HE

is going to make David famous like the great ones of the earth. He is going to establish her people Israel so they will not be disturbed by their enemies in the past. God will give him rest over all his enemies.

At this point the Lord tells David that instead of he making a temple for God, the Lord will establish a house, a dynasty, for David, “Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand form forever.”

St. Luke’s gospel is read on this day. The angel Gabriel declares to Mary that God will give her son, Jesus, the throne of his father, David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.

We are living in those happy times when we see how God in his providence fulfilled his promise to David. Jesus, Son of David, as resurrected Lord will never die again—he reigns as King forever.

#### **The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph** **Sir 3:2-6, 12-14**

**T**he first reading tells us that, “God sets a father in honor over his children; a mother’s authority he confirms over her sons” (Sirach 3:2). In other words, God is the one who has given parents authority over their children and calls them to obey. That is a divine order. The New Testament confirms this: “There is no authority except from God...therefore, whoever resists authority opposes what God has appointed...” (Rom 13:1-2). Obedience is a valuable virtue: Adam and Eve lost all the blessings that came with their friendship with God through disobedience. Jesus and Mary regained the blessings and friendship with God through obedience.

Through obedience, we submit that which is highest in us to God, our wills and all of our other

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

One of the worst sins is pride. Submissiveness in obedience overcomes pride and opens us up to God. Humility is required for this. Respect for parents goes far beyond obedience. We must honor them, and love them, and care for them. Holy Scripture is very strong in its condemnation of those who dishonor their parents. Here are just a couple of them:

“Whoever curses his father or mother shall be put to death” (Ex 21:17).

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

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

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

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

## The Epiphany of the Lord Is 60: 1-6

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

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

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

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

**3** The nations (the Gentiles) will follow this light in the form of divine revelation and enlightening grace. Kings and world leaders who are open

to receive it will be illumined with grace and interiorly transformed to lead the people wisely.

4 Let the people raise their eyes and look to the future when all of this will begin to happen. Children will come to the center of salvation from

the ends of the earth. They will come to see God's Messiah and submit themselves to his gentle rule and guidance.

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

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

## **The Baptism of the Lord** **Is 42: 1-4, 6-7**

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

They speak of this mysterious servant of the Lord who ministers to God's people by his word and who suffers for them to make up for their sins. This first of the Suffering Servant passages is read on the occasion of Jesus' baptism. The Fathers' voice proclaims Jesus as his beloved Son. The word son in Greek may be translated as son or servant. Thus Jesus is pointed out by the Father as that mysterious suffering servant prophesied by Second Isaiah. Jesus is the perfect fulfillment

of these four servant oracles of Isaiah. Jesus begins to take upon himself the sins of the world as he immersed in the waters of the Jordan. He presents himself as if he, the Holy One of God, were a sinner.

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

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

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

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

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

7 He will open the eyes of those who are blind to the spiritual world and the eternal life, blind also to their sin and its contaminating effect.

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

## **2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time** **1 Sm 3:3-10, 19**

**W**e remember that Samuel's conception and birth was the result of his mother Hannah's prayer, "The Lord had made her barren" (1:5). She prayed to the Lord and promised that if she conceived a male child to give him to the Lord (1:11). She did conceive Samuel, and once he was weaned, she presented him at the temple of the Lord in Shiloh (1:24-28). In return the Lord favored her and gave her three more sons and two daughters (2:21). Samuel grew up and served the Lord in the temple.

Samuel was sleeping in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was. "The lamp of God was not yet extinguished" (3), "clear oil of crushed olives was to be used for the light, so that you may keep lamps burning regularly. From evening to morning..." (Ex 27:20-21). One of Samuel's duties was to keep the lamp burning during the night. Thus it was during the night that the Lord began to call Samuel. But he was "not familiar with the Lord, because the Lord had not revealed anything to him as yet." Samuel thought that Eli was calling him. He was quick to obey his call three times in succession. Eli then realized that it was the Lord who was calling him. So he told Samuel to respond the Lord's call with, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening", which he did. The Lord then revealed to Samuel what was about to happen to Eli's family (11-18). Samuel grew up, and the Lord was with him not permitting any word of his to be without effect (19).

## **3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time** **Jon 3:1-5,10**

**T**he book of Jonah was written by an unknown author sometime after Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C. It is not an historical narrative but a didactic short story of a prophet who tried to flee from the Lord's command to preach repentance to the Ninevites, the capital of Judas's fierce enemy, Assyria.

The purpose of the book is to proclaim that God calls all the nations to repentance, not only Israel. The book shows how foreign peoples can be open to the saving love and mercy of God. This is in contrast to the stubbornness and disobedience of Jonah and the Israelites. God's mercy is offered universally to everyone.

Jonah finally obeyed God's command to set out for Nineveh. He began his journey and had gone but a single day's walk announcing, "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed." The people believed Jonah and proclaimed a fast—all of them put on a penitential garb to express their grief over sinning against the Lord.

When God saw how truly repentant these people were, he decided not to carry out the punishment he threatened them with.

Jonah exemplifies Israel's mission: to serve the Lord as a light for the world in proclaiming the saving mercy of God. Our mission also is to bring that message to the world.

## **4th Sunday in Ordinary Time** **Deut 18:15-20**

**T**he book of Deuteronomy is the last of the five books of the Pentateuch. Deuteronomy means second law. In reality, it is not a new law but a partial repetition, completion and explanation of the law proclaimed on Mt. Sinai. The book of Deuteronomy, written after the Israelites had for centuries been resident in the

Land of Promise, takes the form of a testament of Moses, the great leader and legislator, to his people on the eve of his death.

Our passage opens with, “a prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kinsmen; to him you shall listen” (15). From the context it seems that Moses is referring in general to all the true prophets (as opposed to pagan sooth sayers) who were to succeed him. But since Christ is the Great Prophet in whom the prophetic office finds its fulfillment and completion, this passage was understood in a special Messianic sense by the Jews (Jn 6:14; 7:40).

This promise was made by God in response to the people who were afraid to hear God speaking on Mount Sinai, where they witnessed the thunder, lightning, trumpet blast and the mountain smoking.

They feared and trembled. They told Moses, “you speak to us, and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we shall die”. (Ex 20:19).

This prophet promised by God will come from among the people, and he will speak words that God will put into his mouth. All were to obey him, or have to answer to God for it. Anyone who presumes to speak in God’s name on his own will face death.

In Jesus’ day, the people were waiting for this great prophet. After the multiplication of the loaves we are told, “When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, ‘This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world’” (Jn 6:14).

### **5th Sunday in Ordinary Time Job 7:1-4, 6-7**

**T**he author of Job is not known; it was composed sometime between the 7th and 5th centuries B.C. The purpose of the book is didactic, that is, to teach. The teaching is

that even the just may suffer here, and their sufferings are a test of their fidelity. They shall be rewarded in the end. Man’s finite mind cannot probe the depths of the divine omniscience that governs the world. The problems we encounter can be solved by a broader and deeper awareness of God’s power, presence and wisdom (see new American Bible, introduction to the Book of Job).

Job’s experience of life is an extremely sad one. He was a very prosperous man but suddenly lost everything, his children and all his possessions. He himself lost his health and became terribly ill, suffering atrociously.

For him, life was pure drudgery; his lot was like that of a hireling or a slave working in the hot sun during a seemingly endless day, waiting for the time when he would finally get paid a meager salary. His experience of human existence is sheer misery, month after month.

He was unable to rest even at night, nights that seemed never to end. Restlessness prevented him from sleep, as he waited the dawn.

His life will come to an end before he knows it – without hope. It is like the wind that passes by and is gone. He has lost every trace of happiness.

Happy for us, the redemptive value of suffering has now been revealed by the passion of Jesus. In the words of St. Paul, “This passing light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor 4:7).

### **6th Sunday in Ordinary Time Lev 13:1-2, 44-46**

**T**he name Leviticus was given to this third book of the Pentateuch because much of this book consists of sacrificial and other ritual laws prescribed for the priests of the Tribe of Levi. The laws contained in this book serve to teach the Israelites that they should always keep

themselves in a state of legal purity, or external sanctity, as a sign of their intimate union with the Lord (see introduction to the New American Bible).

Leviticus also lays down regulations regarding certain bodily ailments which made a person unclean and a menace to the health of his neighbors. Leprosy was one such disease. It was the duty of the priests to declare a manifested or not, by leprosy. The priest then examined a patient and declared him a leper; the patient had then to live in isolation outside the camp where the people lived to prevent the spread of the dreaded disease. Any infectious skin disease made the patient unfit to take part in the religious rites. And to protect the others, he was isolated until cured.

Various kinds of skin blemishes are treated in this passage which were not contagious but simply disqualified their subjects from association with others, especially in public workshop, until they were declared ritually clean. The Hebrew term used does not refer to Hansen's disease, currently called leprosy.

Aaron was the first Chief Priest and all his sons were associated with him in the Priesthood. All the male member of the other families of the Tribe of Levi were "Levities" whose office and duty was to help the priests in the offering of sacrifices and other acts of divine worship.

Those afflicted with such skin diseases had not only to live in isolation but had to warn anyone approaching them by their dress and by word of mouth that they were unclean and had to keep away. The leper had to let his hair grow long and cover his face with a beard so that no one would mistake him for a healthy person. Moreover, he had to warn passersby by crying out "unclean". The fact that a person with a skin disease could overcome the ailment shows that he did not have leprosy in the strict sense. Yet he had to remain in seclusion until healed. It was believed that such a

person was struck by God and therefore unfit to mingle with others in society or in worship.

## **1st Sunday of Lent**

### **Gen 9:8-15**

**T**he first part of the book of Genesis (Gen 1:1-11) consists of a putting together of "origin stories". The origin and early happenings of the world and the human race--the primeval history from Adam to Abraham, that is, from the ancestor of mankind to the ancestor of Israel. This is the part that Noah fits in (Gen 6:8-9:29).

After the flood over the whole earth, God established a covenant with Noah and his descendants. God promised that "never again shall all bodily creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood; there shall never be another flood to devastate the earth (11).

God then proceeded to give a sign to remind mankind of this covenant promise between God and Noah and every living creature; the rainbow. This is an eternal covenant as seen in the words "never again" (11), "for all ages to come" (12) and "everlasting" (16).

The rainbow is a natural phenomenon that was always there when certain cloud formations occurred. Henceforth, however, it would be a sign and reminder of God's unilateral covenant. It would remind "God and mankind that there would never again be a universal flood to destroy all creatures of the earth as the deluge was supposed to have done.

## **2nd Sunday of Lent**

### **Gen 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18**

**T**his narrative of Abraham's call and willingness to sacrifice his only son is a masterpiece.

God tested Abraham to see how total and complete his faith was and trust in God. How far would he trust God? Would he be an example for all future generations? By this time Isaac would have been an adolescent. He was the reward of Abraham's faith. Now Abraham's faith is being tested still further. He had previously waited 2-4 years before he was finally given a son in fulfillment of God's promise. Now he is being asked to give that son up in sacrifice, his only hope of being the father of a race from which would come the Messiah through whom all the nations would be blessed. See how far God demands our trust! Abraham entrusts himself unconditionally to God who calls him.

Abraham responds immediately in readiness to God's call. He is told to take his only son to a height he will be shown in the land of Mariah some 48 miles away (19). This is actually the mount on which Jerusalem will later be built (2 chron 3:1). Abraham was the first to sacrifice there. This call must have come during the night, for early next morning Abraham arose, saddled the donkey and took Isaac and two servants with him and took the wood needed for the holocaust. When they arrived, Abraham built an altar and put the wood on top. When Isaac asked where was the sheep for the holocaust, his father answered that God himself would provide.

If we look to the future, we see that God fulfilled his promise when Jesus, son of God, became the Lamb of sacrifice.

On this occasion, however, Abraham was going to follow through on God's command to offer Isaac as holocaust in which the whole sacrifice was burnt with nothing left—all was offered to God. God deserves and wants all of us.

The moment Abraham was going to kill his son, God's angel, or God himself, called out, "Abraham, Abraham" which indicates great urgency. "Yes, Lord," he answered. "Do not lay your hand on the boy, he said, "Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son."

Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son parallels God the Father's gift of his son, Jesus, in sacrifice for us. Only in God's case, he went through with his sacrifice of Jesus on the cross—so too the wood laid on Isaac's shoulder (6) was like Jesus who carried the wood of the cross on his shoulder.

God did provide a lamb for Abraham, who offered him in sacrifice instead of Isaac. God was so impressed by Abraham's absolute trust in him, he swore by himself to make Abraham's descendents as countless as the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore. Moreover, all the nations of the earth will find a blessing through Abraham because he obeyed God so completely.

## **3rd Sunday of Lent**

### **Ex 20:1-17**

**T**he Decalogue consists of ten distinct commandments. God spoke to the people through Moses. We read, "The Lord spoke with you face to face on the mountain from the midst of the fire. Since you were afraid of the fire and would not go up the mountain, I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to announce to you these words of the Lord") Deut 5:4-5). (Compare Deut 5:6-22 to Ex 20:1-17).

These Ten Commandments are universal in their outlook; they present briefly and clearly the fundamental principles of all religious and moral obligation. The first three prescribe man's duty to God; the last seven expose his duty to his neighbor.

The first commandment forbids the worship of any other god but the Lord himself. According to Deut 4:15-16, God did not appear in any material form so the people would not be led to make an image of him and misapprehend his spiritual nature.

The second commandment forbids all misuse of the divine name. The understanding of this precept went beyond what was intended into prohibiting even a reverent use of the sacred name.

The third commandment of keeping the Sabbath day holy was meant to put aside a portion of man's time from his own use and consecrate it to God as an acknowledgement that all his time belonged to God. And since God rested on the seventh day after the creation, it is fitting that man's actions must be in harmony with God's. Repose on the Sabbath also commemorates God's deliverance of the Hebrews from the hard labors of the Egyptian enslavement. These first three commandments prescribe man's duty to God.

The fourth commandment begins the second list of obligations to our fellow man. We must honor our parents since they brought us into this world and cared for us. They prepared us to live in society. They deserve our reverence and care.

The fifth commandment safe-guards the sacredness of life and forbids killing and innocent person, which includes the unborn, the old and the ailing.

The sixth commandment safe-guards the purity of marriage in forbidding adultery.

The seventh commandment safeguards the right of private property. We are obliged to respect what belongs to others and avoid stealing.

The eighth commandment forbids us to bear false witness against our neighbor. We are called to be truthful in our lives and preserve our neighbor's

good name and reputation.

The ninth commandment forbids all disordered or lustful desires toward others. These would lead to break the sixth commandment.

The tenth commandment forbids disordered desires for our neighbor's good and possessions.

Consult the Catechism of the Catholic Church for a full explanation of the Ten Commandments (CC 2083-2557).

## **4th Sunday of Lent**

### **2 Chr 36:14-17, 19-23**

1 and 2 Chronicles was composed around 400 B.C. Chronicles is an historical summary of the history of the chosen people.

The last three Kings of Judah were unfaithful to God, Johoiakim, his son Johoiachim and his uncle Zedekiah. Concerning each of these it is written, "He did evil in the sight of the Lord, his God" (5,9,12).

The priests were no better. Pagan idolatrous practices were allowed in Jerusalem and even in the temple. All the abominations of the nations were allowed to pollute the Lord's temple.

The Lord, in his love and concern for his people, early and often, sent his prophets to warn them to amend their ways. The people only mocked and ridiculed them. They ignored God's warnings. Therefore, God sent the Chaldeans, the Babylonians led by King Nebuchadnezzar, to invade the land. He captured Jerusalem and tore down its walls. They burnt the house of God and all its palaces. Those who escaped the sword were carried captive to Babylon. They took the king and most of the citizens off to Babylonia as prisoners of war (597-587). The people and their leaders had brought this upon themselves by their stubborn disobedience and disrespect.

The Jews remained prisoners in Babylon for almost seventy years. The prophet Jeremiah had predicted that just as the people had ignored the command of the Sabbath rest, so now the land would be able to rest for some seventy years since there was no one to work it.

After the people had done penance for their sins, God sent King Cyrus of Persia to conquer Babylonia. He inspired the king to set the chosen people free and allowed them to return to their native Palestine.

He sent them back to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

## **5th Sunday of Lent** **Jer 31:31-34**

**J**eremiah was still young, about 23 years, when God called him to be a prophet. He spoke the Word of God in Jerusalem during the most critical period of Judah's history (627-587).

In this passage, the prophet is foretelling the setting up of a New Covenant to replace the Old Covenant made between God and his chosen people on Mount Sinai, a covenant which the Chosen People had not kept.

Our passage opens with, "the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (31). The prophet is thinking of the future Messianic age when Jesus will initiate a new covenant. He will formally establish this covenant at the last supper when he said, "This cup that is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:20 RSV). Jesus sealed the New Covenant with his own blood, shed for the salvation of the world. As the blood of animals in the Old Covenant united the partners in one relationship, so the divine blood of Jesus is now the bond of union between the covenant partners, God the Father and the Christian. This covenant is with

the whole people, both Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah.

This new covenant will not be like the old one established by Moses. The people readily broke it by destroying God and returning to idol worship.

In the new Covenant, God will place his law within them, and write it upon their hearts. The grace flowing from the Paschal mystery will flood the people's hearts and strongly incline them to be faithful to God.

They will respond with love as never before. This new covenant will bring about a relationship of love between God and his people. The indwelling presence of God will teach them to know and love him. As Jesus put it "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you" (Jn 14:26).

"All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the Lord, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more" (34).

Living in these New Covenant times, we realize how perfectly the words of the prophet are fulfilled. The least in the kingdom can experience a personal relationship with God. As Jesus put it, "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you" (Jn 14:20). This mutual indwelling produces intimate loving knowledge of God.

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, since his is divine, had infinite value and made up for our sins superabundantly. Through him, if we are repentant, we receive forgiveness of sins—they are completely taken away—they are no more. We then have the freedom to grow spiritually in leaps and bounds.

## **Palm Sunday of, A,B,C**

### **Is 50:4-7**

**T**his is the third song of the Suffering Servant in second Isaiah (see IS 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12).

The Servant (fulfilled in Jesus) is called to speak to the weary a word of encouragement. God

is the one who enables him to speak words of inspiration. He must first listen to God, in prayer, as a disciple, before he can speak to others. It is in this way that he can speak the word of God and not his own. He must first receive that word from God in prayer (4).

The Servant accepts his divine vocation. He suffers through it despite the fact that he faces such opposition (5). His enemies beat and insult him (6). We are reminded of Jesus' passion, how he was scourged and ridiculed by the soldiers (see Mt 27:26-31). The Servant willingly submits to insults and beatings. To pluck someone's beard is a grave insult. It is amazing how much in detail these prophecies are fulfilled during Jesus' passion.

The Servant is very much aware that it is God who sustains him. It is God who gives him the fortitude to endure such persecution. The Servant is firmly attached to God who sustains him (7).

The Servant "sets his face like flint", with a firm determination, to endure whatever comes. He is in the right, he will not be put to shame. They are the ones who need to be corrected for all their wrongdoing in flaunting their disobedience to God's commands.

## **Easter Sunday**

### **Acts 10:34a, 37-43**

**T**he Acts of the Apostles was written by St. Luke. It continues where he left off in the third gospel which he also wrote. He probably wrote the Acts around A.D. 63 soon after Paul's house arrest in Rome recorded in the closing chapter (28:16). Luke writes about the first thirty years of Christian history from the Ascension of Jesus in Jerusalem to the imprisonment of Paul in Rome. He continues the story of Jesus through the life and mission of his first disciples. Chapters 1-12 narrate the leadership role of Peter in establishing the Church; chapters 13-28 tell about the missionary efforts of Paul in expanding the church. (See Introduction to the Acts of the Apostles in Ignatius Catholic Study Bible.)

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

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

10:39 Peter and the other apostles are the designated ones to bear witness of all that Jesus did among the Jews. Despite his goodness and innocence they put him to death by crucifixion (hanging him on a tree).

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

10:41 They ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead, concrete evidence of Jesus' bodily resurrection.

10:42 Jesus commissioned these apostles to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead; For he is the God-man who came to teach people the truth, how to live. They will be judged according to the truth.

10:43 The whole Old Testament awaited the Messiah. For example, Moses spoke of a prophet like him that God would raise up (Deut 18:15,18). "All the prophets who spoke, from Samuel and those afterwards, also announced" (Acts 3:24). They announced that "everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name"; for faith unites the believer to Christ in whom redemption is received.

## **2nd Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday)**

### **Acts 4:32-35**

"The community of believers was of one heart and mind" (Acts 4:32).

**T**his unity is what Jesus had prayed for. He prayed "that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. 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 17:21-23). The glory of God communicated by the Holy Spirit which the church received at Pentecost inspired this unity in heart and mind.

"No one claimed that any of his possessions was her own, but they had everything in common." This seems to be a continuation of the life style that Jesus was living with the apostles. Jesus and his apostles formed a close unit. They traveled and lived together. Peter said to Jesus, "We have given up our possessions and followed you" (Lk 18:28). Jesus told the rich young man, "Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor... then come, follow me" (Mk10:21). We see also how Jesus and his apostles were supposed. We read: "accompanying him were the Twelve and some women...and many others who provided for them out of their resources" (Lk 8:1-3). We remember that Judas was the one who held the money bag (Jn 12:6; 13:29) which was used to buy provisions for them or to give to the poor. This way of life was somewhat continued after Jesus went to the Father. The disciples lived close to each other and had a common purse from which to give alms to the needy. Some would sell their property and put the proceeds at the feet of the apostles (35). They distributed them to those in need.

"with great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great favor was accorded them all" (33).

As examples of this power we remember how Peter cured the man crippled from birth (Acts 3:1-10). Consider all the power coming from Peter's speech at Pentecost. Some 3000 were converted from his message (Acts 2:36-41). The power of the word revealing Jesus as Messiah continued to convince people and many became believers. "The number of men grew to about 5000" (Acts 4:4).

Despite their being threatened by the Jewish leaders, the Apostles "continued to speak the Word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31) prompted as they were by the Holy Spirit. The authorities found no way to punish them, on account of the people who were all praising God for what had happened (Acts 4:21).

Remnants of this living close together and being of one heart and mind can be seen in those who take the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as seen in religious orders. Something of this can be seen in Come, Lord Jesus! groups. They are closely united in Christian fellowship and help one another in various ways. They also reach out to those in need such as nursing homes and hospitals among other places.

### **3rd Sunday of Easter** **Acts 3:13-15, 17-19**

**A** man crippled from birth was miraculously cured by Peter. The man went about walking, jumping and praising God. The people saw this and were filled with amazement and astonishment at what had happened to him. A crowd gathered around Peter and John as if they had cured the man by their own power. This gave Peter the opportunity to proclaim Jesus' resurrection. So he proceeds to explain to them, "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors..."

These are the exact words God used when he appeared to Moses in the burning bush (ex 3:6). So the same God as their forefathers has manifested himself in raising Jesus from the dead. There is continuity here. He has "glorified his servant Jesus" through the mystery of the resurrection which filled Jesus with the glory of God. We receive some idea of that glory in the mystery of the transfiguration when Jesus' face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light" (Mt 17:2). The fact that God glorified "his servant Jesus" helps Peter's audience realize that Jesus is the Suffering Servant described by Isaiah (see Is 53).

In a striking way, Jesus fulfilled in astonishing detail what the prophet foretold. God glorified Jesus by reversing the judgment against him during his trial. Peter makes the people realize that they and their leaders had handed Jesus over

to Pilate, even after he declared him innocent and wished to release him. But they denied him as their Messiah. They failed to choose the Holy and Righteous One, the sinless and all-holy Son of God; instead they chose a murderer in his place, Barabbas.

"The author of life you put to death". This title clearly points to Jesus as the source and originator of natural and supernatural life.

"...but God raised him from the dead; of this we are witnesses" (Acts 3:15).

There is an urgent need for the apostles to make known the resurrection. They saw Jesus and mingled with him for forty days (see Acts 10:39-43) after his resurrection. He commissioned them to be the special witnesses to his resurrection. They were willing to die for this truth.

Peter tempers his confrontive statements by stating his belief that these people and their leaders were ignorant that Jesus was truly the Messiah. And yet the scriptures foretold that the Messiah would suffer for the salvation of the world (compare Is 53; Ps 22). This had been overlooked by the. God used their ignorance and sinful actions to fulfill his promises.

The only thing remaining for them to do was to repent of their sins. They must admit that they made a horrible mistake in having their Messiah crucified, the very one who had come to bring them salvation in fulfillment of all the scriptures. They must sorrowfully confess the grave evil they have done and have a change of heart that their sins may be forgiven.

## 4th Sunday of Easter

### Acts 4:8-12

**P**eter had explained to the people that it was by faith in Jesus' name that the man crippled from birth was restored to perfect health. Jesus is the Messiah announced by the prophets. He was put to death but he was raised from the dead.

The leaders of the people were disturbed that the apostles were "teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead". So they questioned them: "By what power or by what name have you done this?" So Peter, "filled with the Holy Spirit, answered them".

He simply explained that they and all the people of Israel should know that it was in the name of Jesus Christ whom they crucified and whom God raised from the dead that this cripple was healed. This was a sign that the risen Jesus was very much alive and that Peter had drawn power from him through faith to cure the cripple.

Peter then proceeds to quote Psalm 118:22 to show how it was fulfilled in Jesus. The "builders", the leaders of the people, had rejected him. But God raised him from the dead and made him the cornerstone, joining the two walls, both Jew and Gentile, making them into one temple of God. This is but one among various prophecies regarding the Messiah that was fulfilled in Jesus. He is the prophet like Moses that they, the leaders, must listen to (see deut 18:15, Acts 3:22-24).

"There is no salvation through anyone else". Jesus is the one promised. "...nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved."

All other religious leaders remain entombed. Jesus is the only one to overcome death and endowed by the glory of God to communicate eternal life to those who believe in him.

## 5th Sunday of Easter

### Acts 9:26-31

**S**aul was also known as Paul (Acts 13:9). Saul was his Semitic name and Paul was his Greco-Roman name. After his conversion (Acts 9:1-9) Paul remained in Damascus for some time, proclaiming Jesus as Messiah. But the Jews conspired to kill him. He escaped (Acts 9:25) and went to Jerusalem. But the disciples in Jerusalem were afraid of him when he tried to join them. They were aware that he had persecuted the Christians earlier (Acts 9:1-2). Barnabus (Acts 4:36) "took charge of him and brought him to the apostles and told them how the risen Jesus had

met him on the road to Damascus. Paul was then totally changed and realized that Jesus was the Son of God (Acts 9:20). The transformed Paul began to speak boldly that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 9:22). Thus Paul became fully accepted and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Paul debated with the Hellenist since he was fluent in Greek. These were Palestinian Jews who spoke only Greek. But they refused to believe him and tried to kill him. When the disciples, "brothers", learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea, a port on the Mediterranean coast, and sent him on his way by ship to his native town, Tarsus, in the region of Cilicia.

At this time the Church began to experience peace throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria.

It was being built up by the preaching of the word and living the new life of grace. The people "walked in fear of the Lord", that is, with great reverence for God and keeping his word. They enjoyed the presence of the Holy Spirit because of their submissiveness to God as they grew in numbers.

## **6th Sunday of Easter**

### **Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48**

**C**ornelius was a Roman centurion, a devout and God-fearing man, as well as her whole household. An angel appeared to him and told him “Your prayers and almsgiving have ascended as a memorial offering before God” (Acts 10:4).

The angel told him to send some men to go to Joppa to get Peter and have him come to Caesarea where Cornelius lived. When the men arrived where Peter was staying, the Spirit told him to accompany them. Some of the brothers went with him. Cornelius called together his relatives and close friends as he awaited Peter’s arrival. He greeted Peter with great reverence, falling at his feet. But Peter would have none of that as a fellow human being. Peter had had a vision (Acts 10:9-16) which made him realize that it was no longer unlawful for him to enter the house of a Gentile. He was made to realize that God shows no partiality. All Gentiles who fear and reverence God, keeping his commands, are acceptable to him.

Peter proceeded to explain how Jesus was anointed by God as Messiah but was put to death by crucifixion yet rose from the dead.

Peter and the apostles were his chosen witnesses “to preach and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name.” (42-43).

As Peter was explaining these things “the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the Word.” (44) This helps us to realize how the Holy Spirit comes upon us also when we listen to his word. The Jews who accompanied Peter were surprised to see the Holy Spirit come down upon these Gentiles. They were glorifying God in ecstatic words.

Consequently Peter ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. The glorified Christ is one with the Father in the Holy Spirit. It was only later that the complete formula explicitly mentioning all three divine persons became established (see Mt 28:19).

## **The Ascension of the Lord**

### **Acts 1:1-11**

**1** St. Luke’s first book is his Gospel. He directs his Gospel as well as Acts to a certain Theophilus, a word which means “one who loves God.” This probably refers to a particular person. But it also may refer to lovers of God in general. The fact, however, that Luke addresses the person as “most excellent Theophilus (Lk 1:3) seems to indicate an individual. He was probably a person of dignity and wealth. He may have been Luke’s patron. Such a person would be responsible for seeing that the writings were copied and distributed. This kind of relationship was common at the time.

**2** Jesus spent his 40 days after his resurrection teaching the apostles through the Holy Spirit until the day he ascended to heaven.

**3** We are familiar with the teaching of the Gospel that Jesus appeared many times after his resurrection, speaking to them about the kingdom of God (see Lk 24:25-27 as an example). 1:4 Jesus instructed his disciples to remain in Jerusalem to await the fulfillment of the Father’s promise. The prophet Joel has promised an outpouring of the Spirit upon everyone (Joel 3:1-3). Jesus reminded them of that promise soon to be fulfilled (Lk 24:49).

**5** This baptism or immersion in the Holy Spirit was what John the Baptist had foretold (Jn 1:33).

**6** In asking Jesus whether he was going to restore the kingdom of Israel at this time, the disciples still believed that Jesus as the Messiah would

restore self-rule to Israel during his historical ministry. Since this had not taken place, they ask if it is going to happen at this time, during the period of the church.

7 Jesus responds that the precise time of the parousia or second coming when the final kingdom will be definitively established is known only by the Father (see Mk 13:32). The disciples continued to have a mistaken notion about an earthly restoration of the kingdom of David. They did not grasp the elevated spiritual notion of the restoration of the kingdom.

8 Jesus tells the apostles, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you...” Jesus’ promised gift of the Holy Spirit is going to make a remarkable difference in the lives of his disciples. Up until now they understood very poorly the words that Jesus spoke to them. They lacked power to penetrate the depth of his sayings. Moreover, they were very much afraid and huddled behind locked doors. They feared the Jewish authorities might arrest and imprison them. What a marvelous change occurred in them on Pentecost Sunday when the Spirit completely transformed them by his mighty power. They perfectly understood what Jesus had been trying to explain to them. And they spoke with power and conviction these words to the people. They no longer feared the Jewish authorities. They spoke to them with boldness and rejoiced to suffer imprisonment and persecution. The love of Jesus filled their hearts and now they were ready to die for him and undergo any trial for the sake of the kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit who was sent to continue and perfect the work of Jesus is the one who made all the difference in the world in the disciples’ lives. He is hidden power, the supernatural vitality that caused such a drastic, astonishing change to enable them to accomplish their mission. It was because they were so utterly receptive to him and abandoned all worldly pursuits that he had the freedom to work in them. That is why the Holy Spirit could bring about such a marvelous transition in their lives. Now they could be Jesus’ witnesses in

Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth. As disciples, we also must carry out Jesus’ commission to be his witnesses.

9 Jesus was then physically lifted up and taken to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father (Mk 16:19). The cloud which enveloped Jesus represents the divinity (Ex 13:21).

1:10 The two men in white were angels, divine messengers.

11 They explain that this Jesus who left them will return in the same way he left them. This refers to his second coming.

## **Pentecost Sunday**

### **Acts 2:1-11**

**W**hile Jesus was appearing to the Apostles after his resurrection, he told them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father. “In a few days”, he told them, “you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). Now that Jesus had been glorified and ascended to the Father, he could fulfill his promise. This took place on the feast of Pentecost.

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

The flames of fire remind us of the signs of God’s presence seen in the Old Testament such as the

burning bush (Ex 3:2), Mount Sinai (Ex 19:18), and the pillar of fire which led the people through

the desert (Ex 13:21-22). This fulfilled John the Baptist's promise that the Messiah would baptize the people with the Holy Spirit and fire (Mt 3:11).

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

The sound of the strong driving wind, similar to that of hurricane force winds, caused a large crowd to gather. They were surprised by the fact that each one heard the Apostles speaking in his own language. There were people from many other regions and countries present for the feast of Pentecost. The Apostles spoke in their own language but these visitors understood it—in theirs! It is also possible that the Apostles were given the ability to speak in these foreign languages. This shows us the unifying gift of the Spirit; He enables us to understand each other and to live in love and peace with each other. The effects of the gift of the Spirit rectified the confusion of languages that took place at the building of the tower of Babel (Gen 11:5-9).

### **Solemnity of The Most Holy Trinity Deut 4:32-34, 39-40**

**T**he book of Deuteronomy is the result of a long process of formation, from earliest times to the post-exilic period. While containing material that goes back to the seventh century before Christ and even earlier, in its present form, it dates to the Babylonian Exile (587-539 B.C.). This book seems to have

come to light during the Exile. It is believed to have been created by the elders as custodians of Israel's ancient traditions. They developed these traditions and drew theological conclusions from them. This provided Israel with a new pattern of life after the Exile. The book is presented as Moses' farewell address to the people, delivered in Moab east of the Jordan, probably on the day of his death. He first recalls the principal events from their departure from Sinai until the present, and then exhorts them to observance of the law.

**32** In reality, the book was not written in the days of Moses but a few centuries after. The book of Deuteronomy had different editions. During the exile it received its definitive redaction. Moses asks the people to think back, even before their

time up to when God created man upon the earth. One can go as far as the earth meets the sky, from one end of the earth to the other – never before did anything so great ever happened before. Such a thing was never heard of.

**33** It was believed that one could not speak to God and remain alive. Yet God's people heard his voice speaking from Mount Sinai in the midst of fire, yet they remained alive!

**34** Never before did any god dare to go and take a nation for himself from another nation as God did the Hebrews from the Egyptians. This is what God did through various testings, that is, the ten plagues of Egypt. (Compare Deut 7:19, Ex 7-11).

**39** The chosen people were allowed to see these great signs of God's presence so they would believe in the one true God. They heard him speak; they heard his voice; they saw the great fire of his presence. He drove nations much greater than they to place them in their rich land. God proved himself to be the only true God of heaven and earth

**40** Therefore, they must fear him, that is, reverence him by keeping his commandments. He wants

them to keep higher standards so they can be blessed by him. This is for their own good, that they may prosper and live in communion with God. By obeying God in this way, they will even live longer lives on the land that God is giving them forever.

## **Solemnity of The Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus (Corpus Christi)**

### **Ex 24: 3-8**

**M**oses related all the words and ordinances of the Lord to the people. He had given them the Ten Commandments.

(Ex 20:1-17) and many other laws (see Chapters 21-23). The people responded that they would do everything that the Lord told them. 4 Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. Then he erected an altar with twelve pillars (representing the twelve tribes) at the foot of the mountain. 5 Moses then sent certain young men to offer holocausts. This was the sacrifice of an entire animal (except for its hide) which was consumed by fire on the altar. The purpose of this was to give glory to God and make atonement for sin (see Lev 1). They also sacrificed peace offerings to the Lord. Certain parts of the animal were burned on the altar as a sacrifice. The rest of the animal was enjoyed as a sacred banquet for the offerer and his guests. (Compare Lev 3:1-17 and 7:11-21). 6 Moses then took half of the blood and splashed it on the altar. 7 Then he read aloud the book of the covenant. The people responded that they would carry out everything the Lord had commanded them. 8 Then Moses took the other half of the blood and sprinkled it on the people. He said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words of his".

The covenant between God and Israel was now a formalized reality. Moses was the mediator of the covenant between God and the people. The blood sprinkled on the people implied that if they

did not observe the terms of the covenant then the fate of the sacrificed animals might be theirs.

This sealing of the Old Covenant with the blood of an animal reminds us that the New Covenant was ratified in the blood of Jesus. This helps us to understand the meaning of Jesus' words at the Last Supper: "Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins' " (Mt 26:27-28).

1 Cor 11:25 puts it this way, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood."

## **11th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

### **Ez 17:22-24**

**E**zekiel was a priest of the temple in Jerusalem. Then he was deported to Babylon in 597 BC along with King Jehoiakim and the first group of people who were deported. The prophet denounced the sins of the people which caused them to be exiled. He also foretold still greater misfortunes for Judah: Jerusalem and its temple would be destroyed by the Babylonians; the remainder of the people would be taken into captivity. God would desert the people for a while just as they had deserted him. But Ezekiel had words of encouragement: better days would come when God would take back his people once more and dwell in their midst. Today's passage is a messianic prophecy in which God says that he will raise up a descendant—a sprig from the lofty cedar David who became the glory of Israel. (Refer to the Sunday readings by Fr. Kevin O'Sullivan OFM).

17:22 In the previous 21 verses of this chapter, Ezekiel has described in allegorical form (a parable with many symbolic details) what has already happened to Judah and the greater punishment that would come upon the nation in the future. The eagle, King Nebuchadnezzar

of Babylon came and plucked the top branch of the cedar and carried it off to Babylon. The cedar is the Davidic dynasty; the top branch was the reigning King Jehoiakim. The eagle planted a mere vine in its place. Jehoiakim's uncle, Zedekiah, was appointed to the throne of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar. Instead of keeping the treaty he had made with Babylon, he began to intrigue with Egypt and thus brought destruction to Jerusalem with its people and its temple in 587 BC. In all of this Zedekiah was disloyal to God and the whole population of Judah suffered for they too had been disloyal. God, however, would not be angry with Judah forever. A day would come when he would plant in their midst on a lofty mountain, a sprig from the top of the cedar—a descendant of David who would bring glory and blessing to the chosen people and to the entire world.

**23** From being a shoot, a cutting from the Davidic cedar, this sprig planted by God will become a noble cedar in its own right. It will attract all living things, birds of the air will safely make their nests in its branches, and the beasts of the field will find shelter and security under its shade. Here the universality of the new Davidic kingdom is described.. All nations and peoples will come to rest in the kingdom of God.

**24** “All the trees of the field”—just as the cedar is a king, so the other trees of the field are kings. All the kings of the earth will learn through the coming Messiah that God is Lord of all. He can bring down the proud and rise up the humble. He will let those who are self-sufficient wither away, while in his mercy, he will give new life to the needy. God has promised this messianic restoration and he will fulfill his promise.

The words of Ezekiel spoken in Babylon about the year 590 B.C. were fulfilled in Christ. He was the sprig from the Davidic cedar. God planted their sprig on a lofty mountain and it became a majestic cedar, a refuge and shelter for all people for all time.

## **12 Sunday in Ordinary Time** **Jb 38:1, 8-11**

**T**he book of Job is an inspired didactic novel. Its purpose is to teach that God has plans and purposes which mortal men cannot grasp. While Job's three friends try to persuade him that he must be guilty of some crime, otherwise he would not be suffering as he is, Job insists on his innocence. God now comes on the stage. By correcting Job's friends, he indirectly proves that Job is innocent, but at the same time, he does not proclaim Job's right to complete happiness on earth. The author of Job, like his contemporaries, had hardly any idea of vicarious suffering on earth. A future eternal life of happiness did not look very large in their calculations. God does not, therefore, give a satisfactory answer to the problem raised in this sacred novel, for the author did not have sufficient revelation at the time; but in the chapters 38-41 from which today's short reading is taken, he makes it clear to Job that he is not in a position to judge the doings of God. (See the Sunday Readings by Fr. Kevin O'Sullivan, OFM).

Chapters 38-41 God speaks of his wisdom and power, which are altogether beyond the capacity of Job. He, therefore, should never dare to demand a reason for the divine action. **1** frequently the background of the appearances of the Lord in the Old Testament is the storm.

For example: **Ps 18:10-15**

**10** “He parted the heavens and came down, a dark cloud under his feet.

**11** Mounted on a cherub he flew, borne along on the wings of the wind.

**12** He made darkness the cover about him; his canopy, heavy thunderheads.

**13** Before him scudded his clouds, hail and lightning too.

**14** The Lord thundered from heaven; the Most High made his voice resound.

**15** He let fly his arrows and scattered them; shot his lightning bolts and dispersed them.”

God asks Job “Where were you when I founded the earth?” (v.4)

**8** “And who shut within doors the sea, when it burst forth from the womb”

Where was Job when God created the earth and held the sea within bounds? All of this as well as suffering of the innocent is too complex for man to understand.

**9** The same is true when God made the clouds. The sea like a newborn babe was wrapped in the swaddling clothes of cloud and darkness.

**10** Where was Job when God enclosed the sea and controlled its restless waves?

**11** The sea’s fury, beyond the power of man’s control is tamed by the mighty power of its creator.

All of this, along with why men suffer, is beyond his capacity to understand. Man can only bow before the mystery of God who is all good and wise.

### **13th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

#### **Wis 1:13-15; 2:23-24**

**13** “God did not make death”, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living.

**H**ere he is speaking of spiritual death through moral sin. This is man’s doing when he separates himself from God through serious sin. God says “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked men, but rather in the wicked man’s conversion, that he may live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! Why should you die, O house of Israel?” (Ez 33:11).

It is God’s great desire that humans live on a divine level through sanctifying grace, which gives us a participation in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).

**14** “For he fashioned all things that they might have being; and the creatures of the world are wholesome”, God wishes to share life with all creatures that is his joy. There are different gradations of being from the lowest to the highest in man. There is such perfection in the tiniest being! Even they, in their own way, reflect the divine perfections. “And there is not a destructive drug among them or any domain of the neither world on earth”

It is amazing how each creature is made and how ordered and perfectly well it operates. God made them perfectly well and in good health. They are made to reject poisons from entering into their bodies so as to maintain good health. The domain of the nether world had no place on earth. Only man in his free will can choose evil.

**15** “For justice is undying”. The person who practices virtue and remains right with God will live forever, he is immortal. Justice is God’s righteousness which man participates in, making him a sharer in his divine, immortal nature, empowering him to live righteously.

**2:23** For God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him.” God endowed man with a spiritual nature, having

intellect and free will like him. This spiritual nature cannot die. It is imperishable like God, which it images.

**24** “But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it.” Spiritual death is referred to here. It is the loss of divine life through committing mortal sin. This is a reference to Genesis 3 where we read that Adam and Eve were deceived by the devil to disobey a serious command by God who had warned them of its serious consequences (Gen 3:3). By their disobedience of a serious command they experienced this death. Any who likewise disobey God’s commands experience spiritual death.

## 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time Ez 2:2-5

**E**zekiel is one of the four major prophets of the Old Testament. He spoke to the Chosen people from 593-571 B.C. He was among the nobles of Judah in 597 who were carried into exile in Babylon. Some four years after his arrival in Babylon, God appointed him to speak to his fellow exiles. He explained to them that it was because of their infidelity to God that they were brought into exile. Jerusalem and its temple would be destroyed. Judah would cease to exist as a nation and all the able bodied people would be taken as slaves to Babylon. All of this happened in 587 B.C. Then in the latter half of his ministry, he began to console the exiles. After their just punishment they would be restored to their homeland. A New Jerusalem and a new Temple would be built. The people, purified by their exile would serve God with a new heart and a new spirit. Today's short passage treats of Ezekiel's call to be God's prophet. (See The Sunday Readings by Fr. Kevin O'Sullivan OFM)

The prophet Ezekiel had a vision (Ez 1:26-28) of "one who had the appearance of a man" and "the likeness of the glory of the Lord".

(Ez 2:1) He fell upon his face and heard a voice which spoke to him. 2 This caused---spirit to enter into him and set him on his feet. 3 The voice addressed the prophet as "Son of man". This is how God addresses the prophet throughout this book: over 90 times. It is used to contrast the prophet as man, who is essentially mortal flesh, to God, who is essentially immortal spirit. Man's transitory nature stands against God's unchangeable nature, man's weakness against God's might.

This helps us to understand what happens to us lowly human beings when we are at prayer in dialogue with God. Spirit enters into us and sets us on our feet to do God's will.

The prophet is being sent to the Israelites who

have rebelled against God by breaking his commands. 4 They have been "hard of face and obstinate of heart". Resisting God's commands continually without repentance causes a hardness of heart which shows itself even on our faces. The light of God can no longer shine through them. 5 The prophet must speak to them the words of God even if the people resist him. They are a rebellious people, but he must speak to them anyhow. Even if they resist, they will know that a prophet had been among and spoken to them. There is always that hope that even if we initially reject God's word, it will continue to work on us and bring us to realize the truth and to change our minds, bringing us to repentance.

## 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time Amos 7:12-15

**A**mos was a shepherd of Tekoa in Judah. He exercised his ministry during the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II (786-746 B.C.). He prophesied in Israel at the great cult center of Bethel, from which he was finally expelled by the priest in charge of this royal sanctuary. The poetry of Amos, who denounces the hollow prosperity of the northern kingdom, is filled with imagery and language taken from his own pastoral background. He protested strongly against the religious abuses and lack of religion then rampant in Israel. He especially stressed the truth that the religious worship without a morally good life had no value in the eyes of God. When he foretold the murder of Jeroboam and the exile of Israel he was denounced by Amaziah, the priest and was expelled from Israel. This expulsion is the theme of today's reading.

12 After prophesying that Jeroboam would die by the sword and Israel exiled from its land, Amaziah tells Amos to leave Israel, the northern kingdom and to go back to Judah where he came from. He is called a "visionary", implying that he is a false prophet. He is told to go and earn his bread in Judah by prophesying. The false prophets there were numerous and earned their

living by preaching their own words – not those of God.

**13** Amos is told never again to prophesy in Bethel; “for it is the king’s sanctuary and a royal temple”. This was the national sanctuary of Israel, in opposition to the temple in Jerusalem. It was a sanctuary dedicated to God ever since the time of Abraham, but since the schism of the northern tribes, pagan cults were practiced frequently there. It was now the King’s sanctuary, and Amos, with his denunciations of injustice and irreligion, had no place in such a temple. He must leave that place.

**14** Amos’ response was that he did not belong to the company of professional prophets. He was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores. (The sycamore tree in Palestine produced a fruit something like figs. It is different from the European and American sycamore.)

**15** It is the Lord who called Amos from his shepherding and told him to go and prophecy to his people Israel in the northern kingdom. This is what Amos was doing---he spoke only what the Lord himself told him to speak.

## **16th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

### **Jer 23:1-6**

**T**he prophet Jeremiah foresees harsh punishment upon the leaders of the Chosen people. He speaks for the Lord who says they are destroying and scattering his sheep; that is, his people.

**2** “Because they have deserted their covenant with the Lord, their God, by worshiping and serving strange gods” (22:9), the city will be destroyed and the people will be exiled in Babylonia. As a result of their negligence the leaders of the people will suffer even more than their people.

For example, King Zedekiah received the full

penalty of rebellion. His sons were executed in his presence; he himself was blinded and taken in chains to Babylon, where apparently he died (39:6-7). Since the shepherds, the leaders, have not cared for the people God took care to punish their evil deeds.

**3** But God promises to gather the remnant of his flock from all the lands to which he had driven them and bring them back home where they will increase in numbers. This return from the other countries was fulfilled in the messianic age when some of the scattered Jews accepted Christ and became the true people of God.

The prophets, speaking for God, foresees that he will appoint leaders for the people who will truly shepherd and care for them so that they will no longer experience fear, and none shall be missing, each will be accounted for and safe.

**5** Jeremiah looks toward the time when God will raise up a righteous shoot to David, in fulfillment of God’s promise – through the prophet Nathan (2 Sam 7:12-16). The prophet foresees the arrival of the messianic King from the family of David. He will be filled with the righteousness and holiness of God. Therefore he will rule and govern wisely. Equipped with the righteousness of God, he will do what is just and right.

**6** When the Messiah comes, both Judah and Israel will live in peace in the Promised Land, that is, the kingdom of God ruled by the Messianic king. Jesus, our Messiah, is given the name “The Lord Our Justice”. Having redeemed us from sin through his passion and death, he arose in glory and sent his Holy Spirit to communicate his own righteousness to us. He is our Lord and God as well as our King.

## **17th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

### **2 Kgs 4:42-44**

**42** Baalshalishak is modern Kefir Tilt, 15 miles north of Lydda. The term “man of God” was first applied to Moses who was God’s representative during the Exodus period. Later it was applied to the prophets who were God’s mouthpieces to the people. The “first fruits” refers to the first part of the barley that had been reaped. According to Leviticus 2:12, the first fruits of the grain were offered to the priests of the sanctuary. In this case it was offered to the prophet Elisha. It had been made into twenty loaves of bread. There was also fresh corn in the ear. The prophet then commanded that these be given to the people to eat.

**43** But his servant objected that these 20 barley loaves were far too little to feed 100 hungry men. Elisha insisted, however, that he feed them with these meager loaves. “For thus says the Lord” indicates that the prophet has received the following inspiration of the Lord: “They shall eat and there shall be some left over”. And this is exactly what happened. God worked a miracle by causing the loaves to increase so that the 100 men had enough to eat.

**44** Moreover, there was so much now that some of the loaves remained uneaten. The men had eaten as much as they could yet some was left over. This reminds of today’s Gospel when Jesus performed an even greater miracle by multiplying five loaves and two fish to feed 5000 men, not counting women and children. He enabled nature to produce beyond itself to the amazement of all.

## **18th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

### **Ex 16:2-4, 12-15**

**2** The whole Israelite community grumbled (murmured) against Moses and Aaron. They had run out of food after their escape from Egypt

and there was none available in the desert of Sin. They had not learned to trust in God who is a loving Father who would provide for them. They had already lost appreciation for their newly found freedom from existence as slave workers in Egypt. They murmured against the leaders whom God sent to guide them. We do the same when we are dissatisfied with life. We fail to accept God’s will and gripe and complain. We allow trials to separate us from God’s will for us, trials meant to purify and sanctify us. For these afflictions spiritualize us when we accept them as God’s will for us.

**3** The people preferred slavery with fleshpots and bread to freedom with little to eat. We too usually prefer luxury and plenty to eat to a strong spiritual life with self-restraint. Yet this is what really disposes us for union and experience of God, where true joy and satisfaction reside. The community is blaming Moses for bringing them into this horrible desert! Only trust in God would make it a joyous adventure. But they really don’t know God yet ---even after he manifested himself to them by the 10 miraculous events that led to their freedom. **4** But God was patient with them and told Moses he would rain down bread from heaven for them. Each day they were to go out and gather their daily portion. In this way he would test them to see if they would follow his instructions or not.

**12** Mindful of their grumbling, God promised them flesh in the evening twilight. Thus they would know that God is truly their God and has concern for them.

**13** In the evening, migrating quail exhausted from their flight came down in the camp in great abundance.

**14** And just as promised also, manna covered the surface of the desert as fine flakes like frost.

**15** This is the miraculous bread which fed the Chosen people throughout their wandering in

the desert. It foreshadows the Eucharist, the true heavenly bread, Jesus came down to earth. He feeds us with his glorified Body to sustain us as we make our way through the desert of life and its various trials. What we receive is not a front-like material, but a divine Person to befriend us as well as nourish us with divine life.

## **19th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

### **1 Kgs 19:4-8**

**E**lijah proved the existence of the true god who consumed his sacrifice on Mount Carmel (1Kgs 18:38). The people then proclaimed the divinity of their God. The prophet had them seize the 450 false prophets and slit their throats (1 Kgs 18:40). Therefore Jezebel, King Ahab's wife, threatened to kill Elijah. 4 He flees for his life in the desert. 5 He was exhausted and prayed for death. Then he fell asleep. But an angel awakened him and ordered him to eat. 6 He saw a hearth cake and a jug of water. He ate and drank, then fell asleep again. 7 But the angel returned and ordered the prophet to get up and eat again. 8 This he did and walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb (Sinai).

This mysterious cake and its empowering Elijah to walk this 300 mile journey on foot reminds of the Holy Eucharist. It encourages and strengthens us to walk the journey of life and to brave its difficulties until we reach heaven itself. This mysterious food consumed by Elijah foreshadows the heavenly bread, Jesus' body, which gives us new life and courage to keep on walking through life's difficulties.

How grateful we ought to feel as we compare the simple cake Elijah ate with the glorified Body of Jesus that we receive in communion. The jug of water reminds us of the Holy Spirit that floods us when we receive the Body of Christ. He communicates the divine life to us and raises us to a new level of being. He enhances human life

and raises it to the level of spirit, enabling us to live the life of the children of God!

## **20th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

### **Prov 9:1-6**

**P**roverbs is a collection of wise sayings and precepts to govern the daily lives of the lovers of wisdom and of God. Though some of the wise sayings in this book may have come down by oral tradition from Solomon, most of the material contained in it comes from later sources.

**1** Wisdom is presented as a gracious lady who has built a spacious house with a courtyard having seven columns. Seven indicates its completeness or perfection. It is a kind of home we would be attracted to visit. We are drawn to its beauty and magnificence.

**2** Wisdom has prepared a banquet of rich food and delicious beverage. The wine is mixed with spices so that it is even tastier when we drink it. This gourmet meal is made very appealing. It is really a spiritual banquet. It represents the kind of feasting we do when we are in communion with God and are relishing his divine gifts. This occurs when we live in God's presence and enjoy union with him as we do his will. At times, the gift of wisdom gives us a taste of the divine when

we are at prayer. That is the kind of spiritual banquet that holy wisdom is inviting us to enjoy. In a certain sense, our whole lives in Christ, at least at certain times, are like that.

**3** Through her maidens, holy wisdom calls us in the form of attractive graces sent by the Holy Spirit from on high, appealing to us to give our consent to enter into this divine communion where the fullness of life resides. That invitation can be heard throughout and above the noise of the city, deep in our hearts. These maiden graces keep calling out to us, quietly in inmost depths.

4 The simple, those whose minds and hearts are not too cluttered to listen to words of wisdom—these are the ones being called, those who are open to truth and the wisdom of God. It is those who are open to a deeper understanding, which are being called to listen to wisdom and truth, leading them to enter into communion with the divine where the fullness of life can be found and celebrated.

5 We are urged to give in to the invitation to feast on that divine food and drink. Imagine! How can we continue to resist? What God is offering us through holy wisdom is far superior to anything available on this earth.

6 Therefore, forsake the foolish decision to remain on the earthly level of existence. Accept the invitation to begin living a celestial life. Open your mind to the understanding of divine things, to God and his divine revelation. Open your heart to savor his holy word assimilated through the birth of faith, perfected by the gift of understanding and wisdom.

This holy reading prepares us to enter into the Eucharistic banquet presented in the Gospel of the Mass.

## **21st Sunday in Ordinary Time** **Jos 24:1-2, 15-17, 18**

Joshua succeeded Moses as leader of the Israelites. He portioned out their territories to the twelve tribes east of the Jordan and in the land of Canaan. He then called a general assembly of the tribes and had them renew their acceptance of the covenant between God and themselves at Mount Sinai. This was a very suitable ceremony with which to begin their new settled life in the land given them by God. It took place in Shechem, a town of Samaria which already had associations with the chosen people. Abraham had built an altar there (Gen12:6). God's tent had been set up in Shechem. This,

with the renewal of the covenant, helped greatly to preserve the religious and political unity of the twelve tribes for the first three centuries of their life in Canaan. (See the Sunday Readings by Fr. Kevin O'Sullivan O.F.M.)

1-2 Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel and their leaders. As they stood in ranks before God that is before the tabernacle he addressed them.

15 Joshua proceeds to challenge them to decide whom they will serve, the gods whom Abraham's ancestors served, for they were polytheists or the Lord".

16 The people responded that they will not forsake the Lord.

17 For it is he who saved them from slavery in the land of Egypt. He miraculously freed them by the ten plagues (see Ex 7-11), and protected them along their desert journey and all the peoples through whom they passed.

18 The people also were aware of how God drove out the inhabitants of the Promised Land so that they could occupy it. They concluded, therefore, "We also will serve the Lord, for he is our God".

This decision of the Chosen people and their obvious choice seems to be the only one they can make. It resembles ours when we made our baptismal promises. We professed our faith in God promised to reject sin and the glamour of evil; we expressed our refusal to be mastered by sin, and rejected Satan. So often, however, we fall short of total allegiance to God and these promises. We slide into the service of idols in the form of various pleasures, amusements and addictions. Our primary god is the SELF rather than God. We do not love God with all our hearts. We serve him part time. He takes second place to the SELF. Let us pray on this occasion to renew our allegiance to God and really give him first place in our lives. We will submit to his will

and word so that our lives will revolve around him instead of ourselves.

## **22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time**

### **Deut 4:1-2, 6-8**

**T**he fifth and last book of the Pentateuch is called Deuteronomy, meaning “second law.” In reality, what it contains is not a new law but a partial repetition, completion and explanation of the law proclaimed on Mount Sinai. The historical portions of the book are also a resume of what is related elsewhere in the Pentateuch. The book of Deuteronomy, written after the Israelites had for centuries been resident in the Land of Promise, takes the form of a testament of Moses, the great leader and legislator, to his people on the eve of his death (see introduction of the Book of Deuteronomy, New American Bible).

**1** The tone and style of the author is exhortatory. The word hear “shema” is used just as in the great commandment to love God in order to get the attention of the assembly. They are to give heed and listen to this address. It is exceedingly important because these statutes and decrees they are being taught, which they must observe, will give them life as they take possession of the land that the God of their fathers is giving them. These commands, when obeyed, make the people live on a higher spiritual level. The virtue of faith, as they live them out in obedience, connects them to God from whom they draw supernatural life. This puts them far above their pagan neighbors.

**2** They must keep the laws exactly as they received them, without adding or subtracting from them. Anything more or less would deprive them of the grace of the God-given law.

**6** The people are to observe these laws carefully. They must give it their whole attention and fulfill it completely. This will show all how wise and intelligent they are. The surrounding nations will

observe and remark what an intelligent people they are.

**7** No other nation had such a privileged relationship with the true God who was so close to his people and who readily made himself available whenever they called upon him.

**8** No other nation had such exalted and just laws to elevate the people to such high standards. How privileged they and we are!

## **23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time**

### **Is 35:4-7a**

**I**saiah’s ministry began in 740 B.C. and lasted until about 680 B.C. He is the greatest of the writing prophets. He prophesied imminent judgment but eventual restoration for the people of Judah and Jerusalem. Isaiah’s career was marked by a series of crises caused by the military encroachment of the great superpower of the East, Assyria.

In our present passage, the prophet foresees the people’s deliverance from exile and even forward to the coming of the Messiah. His message is one of encouragement. He exhorts the people to look towards the future. God did not abandon his people. Rather, he allowed their mistakes and sins to bring them into exile for their purification—just as he does for us when we are exiled in nursing homes and hospitals, or even when we are sick and homebound.

**4** Isaiah’s message to us is not to be frightened, love continues to surround us. His mercy is redeeming us through our very sufferings. We must take courage, then, and not fear. Rather we must be strong in the midst of tribulation. All we are going through is for our spiritual transformation. God is coming through for us in all of this for our spiritual good. He has taken up our cause. He is actually working out our salvation.

5 His coming as Messiah and the opening of our eyes enlightens our blindness to see through the darkness we are experiencing. He enables us to see through the negative of the physical to the positive of the spiritual—just as the passion and death of Jesus opened up the resurrection. Similarly, we begin to hear the work of God. What we were deaf to before now becomes audible. The word now begins to make sense. We can discern the material images and signs and understand their spiritual meaning.

6 With such insight and understanding we begin to leap with joy. What was cause for such depression now becomes cause for joy in our enlightened state. For we have come to see the value of the cross in our lives. What happened to Jesus is now happening to us. Just as it brought about his glorification and heavenly life, so it is for us too. Our life then becomes a song of joy. Before we had nothing to say in praise of God, now our tongues are loosened and we give continuous glory to God!

These messianic times have changed everything for us. Its light enables us to interpret life on a higher level. The Holy Spirit of Jesus inspires us to see the world and our experiences in it in a new light. What was once a desert in life for us is now a land springing up with glistening streams. Our lives are now blossoming with brilliant colored flowers. Varied colored butterflies are flying all over the land and the songs of birds can be heard everywhere.

7 The great grace of Jesus' burns the burning sands of pain into refreshing pools of spiritual consolation. The thirsty ground of our empty lives becomes filled with the waters of the Spirit making us aware of God's presence. We understand that all of our tribulations are being filled with a divine fullness.

## 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time Is 50:5-9a

Our passage today is the third of the four "Servant of the Lord" oracles (see Is42:1-4, 49:1-7, 52:13-53, 12). These were fulfilled by Jesus, the Suffering Servant. 50:4 God himself has trained his disciple to speak for him. He is given a compassionate heart to speak to those who are weary. He knows from experience what weariness is. He knows how to console them. He speaks from a knowing heart. His word rouses them; he lifts them up because he speaks with a love they can feel. His words give them spiritual motivation. He speaks the truth which gives spiritual value to hard labor.

The servant begins his day with prayer. He obeys the Lord's call to go apart and listen to him. He receives God's spirit-filled words enlightening him on what to say, strengthening him with power to endure patiently the sufferings of the day. 5 The Servant knows the hardships and persecutions that await him. But prayer has spiritually motivated him to go forward in doing God's will despite the difficulty of his task. 6 When he was called to suffer, he submitted himself freely. He could only do God's will. He knew good would come from this suffering, for he trusted in God's wisdom that allowed it.

We think of the awful scourging that Jesus endured for our sins. Plucking one's beard was painful as well as a grave insult, Jesus the Servant of the Lord, allowed his sacred face to be struck and spirit upon (compare Mk 15:16-20). 7 The servant was closely united to God and drew strength from him to endure all. It was a privilege for him to suffer for the salvation of the world (compare Is 53: 11-12). He faced his persecutors with an unflinching determination. He was sustained in this posture by God himself. He was unrelenting. He knew why he was suffering. It was for a most noble cause. There was no shame in that!

**8** He was extremely united to God and to his will. He experienced God's presence sustaining him. With this divine strength he could take on anybody. He was ready to challenge anyone who came to persecute him. **9** God himself was his help. Who could find fault with him? Those who oppose him will fade away into nothingness. He and his Lord remained.

## **25th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

### **Wis 2:12, 17-20**

**T**he Book of Wisdom was written about a hundred years before the coming of Christ. Its author, whose name is not known to us, was a member of the Jewish community at Alexandria in Egypt. His profound knowledge of the entire Old Testament writings is reflected in almost every line of the book, and marks him as an outstanding representative of religious devotion and learning among the sages of post exile Judaism. The words of today's passage are often applied to the Passion of our Lord (Compare Mt 27:43).

**12** Even the first verse of our text begins with, "Let us beset the just one". The word "beset" means to harass or assail, surround with mistreatment. The reason given is, "because he is obnoxious to us." This righteous one is so different from them. They are ill at ease in his presence. He thinks and acts differently, virtuously. So they attack and persecute him. They can't stand him. He is very much like the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. We recall how Jesus challenged the Pharisees who had misinterpreted the Law of Moses. So they were out to get him; attempting unsuccessfully to embarrass him before the people. They thought that they were harsh and uncompassionate toward the people. They were overly strict in their interpretation of the law. Whereas, Jesus was full of compassion and more warmly human in his behavior.

**17** These adversaries set out to test the just man's

teaching to see whether they were true. They want to trap him and see whether God will deliver him. **18** For he claimed to be the son of God. Surely, if this is so, God will deliver him. In his passion account St. Matthew writes, "He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he wants him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Mt 27:43). God allowed Jesus, the Just one, to suffer at their hands to the very end. He did not deliver him from death for our salvation, but waited until the third day to raise him up.

**19** It is amazing how true this passage was carried out by Jesus in his passion. Our verse states, "With revilement and torture let us put him to the test that we may have proof of his gentleness and try his patience". The word "revilement" is defined as abusive language or to subject to verbal abuse. St Matthew's passion account gives us abundant evidence of this—see Mt 27:39-44. But through it all, Jesus kept his calm and peace. He gave such abundant proof of his gentleness and patience the centurion exclaimed, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mk 15:39).

**20** So this scripture was fulfilled when Jesus, the Just one, was condemned by his enemies to a shameful death. For crucifixion was the shameful death of the worst criminal. But God did take care of him. He strengthened him to suffer with a marvelous patience through it all, until his

dying breath. His total trust and surrender to his Father's will was rewarded with his glorification. This encourages us to patiently endure the trials of life in submission to our Father's will, so we too can experience final glorification.

## 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time Num 11:25-29

The book of Numbers derives its name from the account of the two censuses of the Hebrew people taken, one near the beginning and the other toward the end, of the journey in the desert (Ch1 and 26). It continues the story of that journey, begun in Exodus, and describes briefly the experiences of the Israelites for a period of thirty-eight years, from the end of their encampment at Sinai to their arrival at the border of the Promised Land. It consists of a book which combines law and history. In this book God punishes the murmuring of the people by prolonging their stay in the desert, at the same time preparing them by this discipline to be his witnesses among the nations (see Introduction to the Book of Numbers in the New American Bible). The multitude of Chosen people had become a difficult burden for Moses to govern. They often complained about how they missed the food they had in Egypt and now they had only manna to eat all the time. They wanted meat for food. Moses got discouraged with this heavy burden imposed on him. He reached the limits of patience and asked God to die rather than continue with that task. As a result God had Moses choose seventy elders, proven leaders among the people. He then had them stand around the tent of his presence.

25 “The Lord then came down in the cloud and spoke to them.” He then bestowed some of the Spirit that was on Moses upon these seventy elders. The spirit came to rest upon them and they prophesied. That means they spoke in enraptured enthusiasm. They praised God in ecstatic language, giving evidence that the spirit of God had entered into them. Thus it was

evident that they had received some of the spirit and authority for governing given to Moses.

26 For some unknown reason, two of the chosen elders were absent from the assembled elders. Yet the Spirit fell upon them also. They too began to prophesy giving evidence that God had definitely chosen them among the elders.

27 These were Eldad and Medad. This news was given to Moses. 28 Joshua, Moses’ assistant and future successor, asked Moses to stop them.

29 But Moses would not. He wished that all the people of the Lord were prophets!

## 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time Gn 2:18-24

Genesis is the first book of the Bible, the first of the five books that form the Pentateuch. The name Genesis in Greek means origin. This book recounts the origin of the world, the beginning of humanity and the people of Israel. Genesis is divided into two unequal parts. Chapter’s 1-11 deal with primordial or primitive history. They go back to the origin of the world and survey the whole human race. They tell about the great ancestors of Israel, beginning with Abraham.

18 “The Lord God said: ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him.’” God is a Trinity of Persons, living in interpersonal communion. “God created man in his image, in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them” (1:27). Together as male and female they image God. They complement each other by their masculine and feminine natures to image God. They complete each other by their combined masculinity and femininity and thus image God. But they also image God by their interpersonal communion. They are social beings who need to relate to each other, in a human way in the manner that the Trinity does in a divine way. That is why it is not good for the man to be alone. He needs someone to relate to as an image of God. The words, “a suitable partner for him” may also be translated, “a helper fit for him” (RSV). Perhaps the word partner conveys better the idea of equality of person.

19 God proceeded, then, to form out of the ground various wild animals. He brought them to the man who named them. Simply being made

from the ground and named by man shows their inferiority to man who has power over them.

**20** The man named all the cattle, the birds and all the wild animals. Even if the man, like the animals, was formed out of the clay of the ground to show he shares the animal nature, he is shown to be superior to them. For God “blew into his nostrils the breath of life” (2:7). This indicates his spiritual nature which he shares with the divinity. Thus he is superior to the animals and has power to rule over them. He understands their individual natures and names them accordingly. Since God did not breathe a rational or spiritual soul into these animals, “none proved to be the suitable partner for the man.” He is not able to communicate on the same level with them. They do not have an intellectual nature like the man. So they cannot relate on the same level with him.

**21** “So the Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.” This deep sleep of man induced by God is a sign that something mysterious is now happening. God is at work doing something special in the man. Taking one of his ribs is an intimate part of man. It comes from his very side and part of his own flesh.

**22** “The Lord God then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man”. Already we now can see that they really belong together; they are so closely united we could say that they are one flesh. They are equal in dignity. “When he brought her to the man, **23** the man said, “This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called ‘woman’, for out of her man this one has been taken”. “This one”, unlike the animals, is just like the man. She is made up of his own flesh and bones. We can see why these two are inseparable. They are bound together. She belongs to him. He belongs to her. They are one. They can no longer be separated.

**24** “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them

become one body”, literally, one flesh. (Classical Hebrew has no specific word for body). Thus, they are an entity unto themselves and separate from their parents. They begin to live life on their own, complementing each other, blending together as a couple, sensitive to each others’ needs. (See CCC 1605, 371, 369, 372, 1644, 2325 for further enrichment and understanding.)

## **28th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

### **Wis 7:7-11**

**W**isdom is found by the righteous and is a gift from God to those who earnestly desire it. Wisdom is described as a divine attribute and as the action of divine intelligence and skill. Wisdom is often personified as a woman. Wisdom personified speaks of being God’s delight, while further on, she calls upon humans to listen to her as children. Wisdom existed with God before creation itself came into being. Wisdom was at his side at the creation of the world, the mirror of the power and goodness of God. (See Catholic Bible Dictionary by Scott Hahn) The author of the book of Wisdom, whose name is unknown to us, at times speaks in the person of Solomon in order to emphasize the value of his teachings.

**7** Wisdom is the result of prayer. It is given to one who pleads for it. For it is a gift of God. The word prudence is exchanged for wisdom. **8** This precious gift of insight from God is valued above that of being king and ruler. Riches compared to wisdom is nothing. **9** Even a priceless gem cannot be valued in comparison to her. Gold is like sand and silver like mire or mud next to holy wisdom. **10** Wisdom is loved even more than health or beauty. However valuable these are, they will pass away at death. But wisdom endures forever. It will never perish for it is part of the incorruptible spiritual nature of a person. It brings good judgment and clarity of thought so that good health and comeliness can be attained and enjoyed.

**11** Wisdom is chosen even over light because

its splendor never yields to sleep. “Compared to light she takes precedence; for that, indeed, night supplants, but wickedness prevails not over wisdom”. (v.30) “For she is an aura of the might of God and a pure effusion of the glory of the almighty... for she is the refulgence of eternal light, the spotless mirror of the power of God, the image of his goodness” (v 25-26; compare 7:22-30).

## 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time Is 53:10-11

**T**his section of Isaiah is sometimes called Deutero or Second Isaiah (40-55). It is generally attributed to an anonymous poet who prophesied toward the end of the Babylonian Exile. (This exile was from 587 until 538 B.C.) From this section of Isaiah comes the great messianic oracles known as the songs of the Servant, whose mysterious destiny of suffering and glorification is fulfilled in the passion and glorification of Christ.

This is the last of the four Servant of the Lord oracles 52:13-53:12 (see also 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11). Please take the time to read this entire last oracle. It is a remarkable prophecy and description of Jesus’ redemptive sufferings.

**10** The innocent Servant was crushed with infirmity. He was also spurned by people. Since he suffered, they regarded him as a sinner and therefore to be avoided with disdain. But it is the Lord who crushed him. Such afflictions are a hidden yet marvelous way of purification and spiritualization, not only for the individual who suffers but for those connected to the sufferer. St. Paul expresses it this way, “For we who live are constantly being given up to death for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you” (2 Cor4:11-12). When we accept suffering as God’s will, we are sanctified by it and this new life of grace is a source of grace for others. Thus we see our accepted sufferings are

spiritually valuable both for us and for others. They are not in vain!

Our passage continues, “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”. The Servant gives his life as an offering for sin even unto death, yet mysteriously he shall see his descendants in a long life. Is this not hinting at the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus? The next verse seems to confirm this thought. This fulfills God’s plan, his will, as Jesus quite explicitly expressed when he prayed, “...not as I will but as you will” (Mt 26:39).

**11** “Because of his affliction he shall see the light in fullness of days”. Does this not indicate that the Servant will overcome death and even enter into glory? “He shall see the light – of glory!” “...in fullness of days”; is this not insinuating the endless days of eternity, filled with the glory of God?

The result of the Servant’s afflictions is revealed: “Through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear”. His sufferings endured for us, to make up for our sins, will justify many: his sufferings will cause the many who accept them to be flooded with divine grace and make them right with God. He assumed our guilt in his love for us and made up for our sins by his sacrificial love offering, showing us how we can do the same for each other. We often see parents and grandparents suffer for their children and grandchildren in this way. This passage helps us to understand how efficacious these suffering are. We must direct them for that intention. We are called to be Suffering Servants of the Lord the way Jesus was in fulfillment of this prophecy. In this way we will bring about redemption for those we love. This is why St. Paul can write, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the Church”(Col 1:24). Jesus as head of the Church suffered enough for the

redemption of the world. But he invites us, his members, to participate in his sufferings by our own, for the good of the Church. We can become co-redeemers with Christ.

## 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Jer 31:7-9

**B**ecause of the sins of the people, Israel, the northern kingdom, had been over-run by Assyria in 721 B.C. and the people were taken into exile. Judah, the southern kingdom, survived until 587 B.C. when it was invaded by Babylonia and the people were taken there to live a life of exile. All of this happened because of the people's disloyalty to God who had given them this Promised Land. In today's excerpt, the prophet has changed from denunciation to consolation. He is speaking to Israel (Jacob) the northern tribes. He tells them that God will lead a remnant of them out of exile and establish them once more in their own homeland. God will do this because, notwithstanding their forgetfulness of him, he is still father to Israel. (See The Sunday Readings by Fr. Kevin O'Sullivan O.F.M.). Jeremiah looks to the future when Israel will be released from their captivity and permitted to return home. On that day there will be great rejoicing.

7 "For thus says the Lord: Shout with joy for Jacob, exalt at the head of the nations; proclaim your praise and say: The Lord has delivered his people, the remnant of Israel".

There will be great rejoicing when Israel is freed from exile in Babylonia and allowed to return to its native promised land. The Lord himself will bring this about when Cyrus, the Persian king, will be moved by God to allow the exiles who kept faith to return home.

Jacob is called "head of the nations" because he is favored by God. He is called "my first-born." (9) This is something to be excited about and there is need to praise God for his merciful deliverance of the remnant. There are the few favored remaining ones who kept faith. God in

turn remained faithful to them. This is like us. We may have gotten ourselves into slavery and exile by our sins, but the few who are repentant and strive to please God will also be freed and again live in the promised land of the kingdom of God. There the fullness of grace and peace are recovered to our great joy.

8 "Behold, I will bring them back from the land of the north; I will gather them from the ends of the world..." The faithfulness will be called to leave the land of their exile and return home. God will make it so easy for them that the weak ones; the blind, the lame, the mothers and those with child will be among the immense throng returning home. What great hope this prophesy must have awakened among the exiles!

9 "They departed in tears, but I will soon console them and guide them..." God will be with them to give them comfort and guidance. He will provide fresh water for them in the "brooks that await them as they travel along the way." God will even make the road level for them so none will stumble. All this God will do because he is truly Israel's father. He looks upon him as his first born. This is what God told Moses to tell Pharaoh: "Israel is my son, my first born" (Ex 4:22). Here he calls Israel Ephraim, which was the leading tribe in the northern kingdom. Ephraim is often used in the prophets as a synonym for Israel.

Ephraim was the second son of Joseph. He is the founding father of that tribe. He was adopted by Jacob who preferred him, in his blessing, to the first-born Manasseh (see Gen 48:12-20).

## ALL SAINTS

### Rev 7:2-4, 9-14

**T**he book of Revelation (also called the Apocalypse), is the last book of the Bible and one of the most difficult to understand because it abounds in unfamiliar and extravagant symbolism. Symbolic language, however, is one of the chief characteristics of apocalyptic literature, of which this book is an outstanding example. This

book contains an account of visions in symbolic (allegorical) language borrowed extensively from the Old Testament such as Ezekiel and Daniel. The symbolic descriptions are not to be taken literally, nor are the symbolism meant to be pictured realistically. (See New American Bible introduction for examples).

The early Church was experiencing ruthless persecution by the Roman authorities. The book is, then, an exhortation and admonition to Christians of the first century to stand firm in the faith and to avoid compromise with paganism, despite the threat of adversity and martyrdom; they are to await patiently the fulfillment of God's mighty promises. Ultimate salvation and victory are said to take place at the end of the present age when Christ will come in glory at the Parousia. St. John the Evangelist is believed to be the author of the book which was written around 68 AD.

2 An angel is seen as coming from the East, literally, "rising of the sun". The east was considered the source of light and the place of paradise (Gen2:8). The angel was holding the seal of the living God. Whatever was marked by the impression of one's signet ring belonged to that person and was under his protection. This may refer to a grace of spiritual perseverance rather than a guarantee of physical survival. 3 The seal had to be placed on the servants of God before the area would be destroyed so they could be spared. 4 One hundred and forty four thousand were marked with the seal. In this first vision, this was the number marked on the twelve tribes of the Israelites: The number of the tribes of Israel squared (12x12) and then multiplied by a thousand, signifying completeness (144x1000).

9 In the second vision, John saw a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people and tongue. These also are the saints in heaven who passed through the great tribulation without compromising their faith. It is encouraging to see that the number to be saved

and enjoy heaven is so huge it cannot be counted. The multitudes that make it to heaven come from every nation, all tribes, and peoples and tongues. Their implies that God's grace reaches people everywhere so that everyone has an opportunity to go to heaven---they only have to cooperate with that saving grace.

These multitudes of saints stood before the throne of God and before the Lamb, that is, Jesus, who is the Paschal Lamb sacrificed for the salvation of the world.

## **32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time**

### **1 Kgs 17:10-16**

**O**ne of the many miracles attributed to the great prophet Elijah is recorded in today's reading. Elijah preached in the northern kingdom of Israel between 900 and 850 B.C.

10 The prophet predicted a severe drought and was told by the Lord to hide in the Wadi Cherith, east of the Jordan River. There was a stream from which he could drink. He was fed by ravens sent by the Lord. When the brook ran dry, God told him to move on to Zarephath of Sidon along the seacoast where God had designated a certain widow to provide for him. When he arrived at the entrance of the city, he met this widow gathering sticks. He asked her for a cup of water to drink.

11 As she was going to get it, he also asked her for a bit of bread.

12 She then explained to Elijah that she had nothing baked. Only a handful of flour remained in the jar and a little oil in her jug. She was going to prepare something for herself and her son to eat. But there was none left after that—so they expected to die of starvation.

13 Elijah hastened to tell her not to be afraid but to go and prepare the meal. She should make a little cake and bring it to him. After that she could prepare something for herself and her

son. Ordinarily that would have been something audacious to say. She is asked to serve him first!

**14** The prophet explained that God assured him that “the jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the Lord sends rain upon the earth.” The holy woman of faith and great love believed the prophet!

**15-16** She left and did as Elijah had asked her and the miracle happened. “She was able to eat for a year, and he and her son as well; the jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, as the Lord had foretold through Elijah.”

The widow’s faith in the word of God earned her a great reward. Our keeping God’s work will earn us eternal life. We too are challenged to share what little we have with those who are needy. Jesus promises that “whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because he is a disciple—amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward.” (Mt. 10:42)

The story of this generous, self-sacrificing widow reminds us of the poor widow who put two small coins in the temple treasury which was all she had to live on. This surely challenges us to attack our selfish tendency to keep all we have and to start giving at least some of it away.

### **33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Dn 12:1-3**

**T**he book of Daniel takes its name not from the author, who is actually unknown, but from its hero, a young Jew taken to Babylon, where he lived. Strictly speaking, the book does not belong to the prophetic writings but rather to a distinctive type of literature known as apocalyptic. Such literature deals with the last stage of the history of humanity and of the world, and its future consummation in the kingdom of God or the future world. It is written of God or the future world. It is written to sustain the faith of their Jewish contemporaries in the definitive and absolute victory of God over evil, over Satan

and over the historical empires that oppress and persecute the just and especially the people of Israel.

The Book of Daniel was composed during the bitter persecution carried on by Antiochus IV Epiphanies (167-164) and was written to strengthen and comfort the Jewish people in their ordeal. Jesus, in referring to himself as Son of Man, fulfills the destiny of this mysterious figure found in Daniel 7:3-14.

**1** The great tribulation of the end times will result in the vindication of the elect of God. Michael, Israel’s patron angel will arise to assist the redemption of Israel. It is “a time of unsurpassed in distress,” persecution of believers forced to practice pagan culture that are against the law of God. They either will conform to godless ways of acting or be put to death. The last days of this world are always described in apocalyptic literature as times of severe persecution, affliction, and suffering more than ever before (compare Mt 23:4-27). “At that time your people shall escape, everyone who is found written in the book.” The faithful to God even at the cost of their lives will be delivered from these disasters. These are the ones whose names are written in the book of life. They are tested as God’s intimate friends. (See Ex 32:32 and NAB footnote)

**2** “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” Sleep is a euphemism for the dead (Compare Jn11:11-14). “Awake”, that is, they will come back to life. This passage is remarkable as the earliest clear enunciation of belief in the resurrection of the dead (Compare Ps 16:9-11). “Some shall live forever; others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace.” The words “life everlasting” is the first occurrence of this term in the Bible. The righteous will live forever in bliss. Those who die given over to evil and separated from God will “be an everlasting horror and disgrace.” The state and disposition we die with will be ours to live forever.

**3** “But the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament.” The wise are those

who live according to divine revelation. They are filled with divine life and will shine like a brilliant sky (firmament).

“And those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever.” Parents, catechists and ministers of the word who teach others the ways of God will be transfigured with the glory of God in the happiness of heaven forever.

## **Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe Dn 7:13-14**

**D**aniel had been having visions. In this passage, he saw “one like a son of man coming on the clouds of heaven”. What a relief this must have been! To see a fellow human being coming from heaven! This is in contrast to the worldly kingdoms opposed to God, which appear as four horrible frightful beasts (see 7:4-8). These came from the great abyss or the dark depths of the chaotic sea. These represent the four kingdoms or empires whose rulers are described as beasts. These kingdoms were those of Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece. The last he saw was the worst of them all, which represented the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, who tried to destroy the Jewish religion. But the “Ancient One” stepped in and set up a new king and a new kingdom. The kingdom was for all nations—for Gentiles as well as Jews – and one that would be everlasting.

But this son of man is more than human. Not only is he coming on the clouds from heaven, but he is given an everlasting dominion. That means he can't die; he must be divine. “When he reached the Ancient One {in the heavenly realms}, he was presented before him.” There he received an everlasting kingship.

14 “He received dominion, glory and kingship”. It is no wonder that Jesus used this title “Son of Man” as his preferred way of referring to himself. Not only does it indicate his humanity, but his eventual glorification as well. In anticipation

of this moment, we understand why he allowed himself to be proclaimed king and rode triumphantly into Jerusalem in the midst of loud acclamation. He knew that his suffering and death would end in glorification (see Mt 21:1-11).

And as Daniel foresaw, “nations and peoples of every language serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion and shall not be taken away; his kingship shall not be destroyed.” Isn't it consoling and affirming to our faith to see this prophecy fulfilled so perfectly? This king is our magnificent lover and so accessible to us through the virtue of faith. The Eucharist makes him present and available to us in person in his incarnate and glorified state! He is even present in our inmost center by his indwelling!

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