



Understanding the Sunday Old Testament

CYCLE C

by Father Conley Bertrand

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

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Published by *Come, Lord Jesus! Inc.*
1804 WEST UNIVERSITY AVE
LAFAYETTE, LA 70506-2544
Phone: (337) 233-6277 FAX: (337) 233-6144
www.comelordjesus.com

First Printing: September 14, 2015
The Exaltation of the Holy Cross-Feast

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1st SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Jer 33:14-16

The prophet Jeremiah was born about 50 BC of a priestly family near Jerusalem. While still very young he is called to be a prophet in 628 B.C. He is one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament. The kings and people of Judah in his day are more interested in political power and temporal prosperity, than in the things of God. He devotes all his energies to recalling them to a sense of their vocation but for all his pains all he gets is contradictions, persecutions and finally death.

In these verses of today's first reading, spoken about the time Jerusalem has been destroyed and the people taken prisoner to Babylon (587 BC), a fate he had foretold unless they returned to God, the prophet reminds his fellow countrymen that God will still be faithful to his promise even though they have been unfaithful to him.

33:14 "The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah".

This is one of the most important messianic passages in Jeremiah. God has promised David through his prophet Nathan, "I will make his royal throne firm forever" (2 Sam 7:12, 13). The prophecy to David is the basis for Jewish expectation of a Messiah, Son of David, which Jesus the Christ fulfills.

33:15 "In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot; he will do what is right and just in the land".

Jeremiah reminds the people of this promise which God will fulfill despite the might of their enemies.

God will raise up, that is, will cause to be born, an offspring from one of David's descendants. He is here described as a shoot or branch sprouting from the stump or tree of David. He will be just or righteous, endowed with many virtuous qualities.

He will sum up in himself all the finest qualities of the best rulers, and infinitely more.

33:16 "In those days Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure; this is what they shall call her: "The Lord our justice."

The messianic blessings will bring about security and peace in the land. Because of Jerusalem's intimate relationship to the Messiah, it is given the same name by which he is called in 23:6: The Lord our justice.

All of this is being fulfilled in the church, the New Jerusalem. For through baptism, all of her members have been closely united to Jesus, the Messiah. Through his resurrection he has communicated all of his gifts to his people and sanctified them. He is transforming them into his own image (2 Cor 3:18), bestowing on them his own righteousness.

2nd SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Baruch 5:1-9

Baruch was friend and secretary of the prophet Jeremiah and it was he who put in writing at least some of the prophecies of Jeremiah. The Book of Baruch which now follows the writings of Jeremiah in our Bible was most probably not written by Baruch but it contains the teachings and sentiments of both Jeremiah and Baruch. They both lived in a critical period of the history of the chosen people – they saw the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the inhabitants of the city and of Judah taken prisoner to Babylon. It seemed the end of the Jewish people and the failure of God's plan of salvation through Abraham. But grievous as were the sins of his chosen people which caused this calamity; God was still able to carry out his plan and was still willing to keep his promises to Abraham.

The section read today is a poem full of hope and encouragement. The days of mourning are over—

Jerusalem and Israel will be glorious once more and will be recognized by the whole world as God's chosen abode. It is evident that something much more than the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile in 538 BC is meant here. It is the New Jerusalem and the new Chosen People, the writer has in his mind, hence its insertion in the Advent readings.

5:1 This verse reflects the generously resplendent and wonderful effect of God's saving action upon Israel. Jerusalem's exile in Babylonia is now ending. A New Jerusalem is foreseen as becoming the new kingdom of God, endowed with the beauty and glory of God, the messianic kingdom.

5:2 Jerusalem is clothed with the very righteousness of God. She displays the glory of the eternal name. "Sacred to Yahweh: were the words inscribed on the mitre of the high priest of the Old Testament—this will now be the inscription the head of the new citizens of Jerusalem—they will all be consecrated to God.

5:3 All the earth will see the beauty and splendor of this New Jerusalem, the Church

5:4 The conferring of a name in a context such as this involves not only the giving of the name, but the bestowal of the attributes indicated. "Peace" the product of justice, will reign in Jerusalem. She will be an honorable city; her honor will derive from the fact that she worships God.

5:5 The citizens of the New Jerusalem will come from the whole world "East and West". The New Kingdom will not be restricted to the children of Abraham but will embrace the whole human race as was foretold to Abraham (Gen 12:3).

5:6 The return of the exiles will be easy and glorious. Here we can include the Gentiles: As the Jews in Jerusalem had gone into the Babylonian exile because of their sins, so the Gentiles have been for centuries exiles from God because of their sins; but as God brought back the Jews from Babylon, so now will he bring back the Gentiles

from the long exile to the New Jerusalem, his messianic kingdom. He had not forgotten them but remembered them when "the fullness of time had come". They will be "borne aloft in glory as on royal thrones". Both Jew and Gentile will be honored as sons and daughters of God.

5:7 The way will be made smooth and easy for their return (Compare Is 40:3-5; Mt 3:3).

5:8 To make the return journey as comfortable as possible, God will cause shade trees to grow to shield the exiles from the sun.

5:9 God leads his people by the light of his glorious presence. Divine mercy and justice personified accompany God and the exiles on the journey.

3rd SUNDAY OF ADVENT **Zeph 3:14-18**

Zephaniah was a prophet who preached to the people of Judah and Jerusalem during the second half of the seventh century B.C. This was a period of religious degradation. The pure monotheism of Moses was almost forgotten, pagan idols were worshipped even in the holy city of Jerusalem. The prophet chastises the Chosen People and the neighboring pagan peoples who have led them astray. But he ends up with words of hope and consolation. A remnant of the Chosen People will be saved and to that remnant God will fulfill his promise—he will forgive Jerusalem and send it a lasting peace, for he will come to dwell in it as a mighty savior. Our reading today is taken from the hymn of hope.

3:14 Zephaniah invites Zion to rejoice because her salvation is at hand. Having pronounced his woes and threats against Israel and Jerusalem, the prophet now sees the light of hope shining amidst the darkness. In spite of his sons, Zion, that is, Jerusalem will yet have cause to rejoice and to sing for joy.

3:15 “The LORD has removed the judgment against you”...God in his mercy will forgive Jerusalem. Many a time that city, humanly speaking, deserved to be wiped out forever, but God is divine, not human; he is patient, a mercy which our small human minds cannot even imagine. He promises now, through Zephaniah, that Jerusalem will survive its disasters and notwithstanding its citizens’ insults to him through their idolatry, he would yet make it a safe and happy city because he, “the King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst, therefore they need fear no enemy.

3:16 “On that day”—sometime in the future, God will come to Jerusalem as its true Savior, not merely to save it from its earthly enemies, but to bring it back to the true worship and to save it from its sins.

3:17 “The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior”. In his everlasting love for his people, he will rejoice over Jerusalem as his bride and renew her in his love.

3:18 We will rejoice over her and sing joyfully in his gladness. We can see this taking place when the messiah comes to make a new covenant and build a New Jerusalem with a new Chosen People.

4th SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Mic 5:1-4

Micah prophesied in Judah during the second half of the 8th Century B.C. His preaching was especially against the rich exploiters of the poor who will be punished by God. But a remnant—the few faithful ones will be saved and God’s Kingdom will be established. Most of the prophets have references to the coming Messiah, but this prophecy of Micah is one of the clearest in the Old Testament. He names Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah, who will be shepherd and king of not only Israel but of all peoples and his kingdom will be a kingdom of peace.

5:1 Bethlehem-Ephrathah.....Ephrathah was a clan or family of the tribe of Judah which settled in that area. They called the town Ephrathah at first but the name was later changed to Bethlehem (see Joshua 15:59) which means “House of bread”. Ephrathah was a small, almost unknown clan of the tribe of Judah but it had already become famous, from it David the greatest of Israel’s kings had sprung. But a greater than David would yet make Bethlehem more famous still—he would be a ruler for God whose greatness would “reach to the ends of the earth”.

“...whose origin is from of old”, from ancient times refers literally back to Bethlehem and David but typically to the future ruler whose divine sonship was from eternity.

5:2 Because of the evil doings of kings and people in Israel “the LORD will give them up” to be subject to foreigners “until the time when she who is to give birth has borne”. This hints at the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 given some years earlier: “The virgin shall be with child, and bear a son and shall name him Immanuel.” “The rest of the brethren” refers to the gathering of all the clans from north and south, from east and west under the new ruler.

5:3 We immediately think of Jesus, the Good Shepherd at the words “He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock by the strength of the Lord, in the majestic name of the Lord, his God”. Jesus is one with the Father (Jn 10:30. “He shall stand...in the majestic name of the Lord, his God”. reminds us of “God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (Phil 2:9).

“And they shall remain”, his people will never be scattered again like the chosen people of old—his kingdom will last forever. “...his greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth”—we see how Jesus fulfills this prophecy-his kingdom is world-wide.

5:4 “He shall be peace” through the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness he communicates. His commandments of love and care for the poor make for peace through injustice.

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph; St. John, Apostle Sir 3:2-6, 12-14

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

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

One of the worst sins is pride. Submissiveness in obedience overcomes pride and opens us up to God. Humility is required for this. Respect for parents goes far beyond obedience. We must honor them, and love them, and care for them. Holy Scripture is very strong in its condemnation of those who dishonor their parents. Here are just a couple of them: “Whoever curses his father or mother shall be put to death” (Ex 21:17). “The eye that mocks a father or scorns an aged mother, will be plucked out by the ravens in the valley; and eaten by the vultures” (Prov 30:17). An evil end 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’”....

60:1 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).

60:2 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.

60:3 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.

60:4 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.

60:5 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.

60:6 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 40:1-5, 9-11**

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

to God's people by his word and who suffers for them to make up for their sins. This first of the Suffering Servant passages is read on the occasion of Jesus' baptism.

The Fathers' voice proclaims Jesus as his beloved Son. The word son in Greek may be translated as son or servant. Thus Jesus is pointed out by the Father as that mysterious suffering servant prophesied by Second Isaiah. Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of these four servant oracles of Isaiah. Jesus begins to take upon himself the sins of the world as he immersed in the waters of the Jordan. He presents himself as if he, the Holy One of God, were a sinner.

60:1 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.

60:2 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.

60:3 He relates to people with merciful goodness. He treats people with infinite compassion.

60:4 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.

60:6 God himself has called his Servant-Son to overcome all evil through the abundance of his righteousness, his justice. His grasped hand empowers him infinitely to defeat the sins of the whole world. This Servant has been divinely formed from infancy. Thus he is equipped to form a covenant, an enduring love relationship

between God and his people. He will be a light leading the nations to greatly desire to enter into this loving relationship with God.

60:7 He will open the eyes of those who are blind to the spiritual world and the eternal life, blind also to their sin and its contaminating effect. He will free those who are prisoners to their disordered, dominating passions and their demanding addictions. The Servant will also bring out those who are enshrouded in the darkness of sin. He will free those entrapped in the dungeon of unredeemed self and the selfish, self-centeredness that goes with it. They are so far from the brightness and illuminating glorious love and the selflessness of altruism—these also will be freed by the selfless, self-sacrificing love of the Suffering Servant.

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time Is 62:1-5

When the Jews returned from the Babylonian exile (538 B.C.) they found Jerusalem in ruins; its Temple, its walls, its houses razed to the ground; desolation on all sides. This was a sight to cast a deep gloom on the joy of returning and despair was widespread. But God sent his prophet (3rd Isaiah) to cheer and encourage his people—there were great times in store for the New Jerusalem. Her splendor and glory would be admired by the world in the days to come. The chosen people would be God's bride once more and would be "his delight". Literally these verses apply to the Jerusalem reconstructed at that time but it was only in the Christian Jerusalem and in the people of the New Covenant they had their real fulfillment.

62:1 The prophet speaks for God words of consolation and encouragement. Zion, that is, Jerusalem was the capital of the Promised Land, where God had his throne among his people. It was still dear to him, and though now in ruins, it would rise to a glory and a fame greater than it had before.

62:2 The Gentiles did not respect Jerusalem or its people in the past—it was in fact the Gentiles (Babylon) who razed it to the ground. Now they would see that God was with it, that God had come to its aid, and forgiven the sins of his people for which he let them suffer exile, that he would swell once more there as its king.

The kings of the Gentile nations as well as the ordinary people would turn to Jerusalem and admire its glory. A name stands for its nature, the essence of a thing. The Jerusalem which the Gentile Kings and people would admire would be different—it would be something new—the New Kingdom of God in fact, that this new name is "pronounced by the mouth of the Lord" indicates that it is by God's power that this change will take place.

62:3 The New Jerusalem would be a glorious crown in the God's hand. He delights in her, he continues to favor her.

62:4 The forsaken and desolate was a woman abandoned by her husband as Jerusalem during her exile. God her spouse had left her to be punished by Babylon. God is taking her back once more. She will be his spouse, and he will delight in her.

62:5 This will be a new marriage. Jerusalem will be a virgin bride for its builder, God, and she will be a source of joy for him. This was only very partially fulfilled in the history of the returned exiles, if at all. But in the New Jerusalem, in the chosen people of the New Covenant, a people raised to the sublime status of adopted children of God through the Incarnation, the Lord found a Bride the Church, in which this prophecy is fulfilled.

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Neh 8:2-4, 5-6, 8-10

When the Jews returned from the Babylonian exile two of their number played a major part in the

reconstruction and restoration of affairs. Ezra, a priest descendant of Aaron; was the man chiefly responsible for restoring the religious life of the people in Jerusalem and Judah. One of Ezra's first acts was to get the people to renew the Covenant made between God and the chosen people on Mount Sinai seven centuries previously with God, and thus dedicate themselves to his service. This the people gladly did realizing that all their future hopes depended on God alone.

8:2 This was the Law of Moses or the Pentateuch as it is now generally called. It is contained in the first five books of the Jewish Bible. It was most probably a "version" of our present Pentateuch, though there were later additions. It is called the Law of Moses, not because Moses wrote the book, but because much of the legislation in it was handed down orally from his day. All the citizens of Jerusalem gathered in the Temple square including all children old enough to understand what was being read.

8:3 The return from Babylon was like a second exodus. The people knew they owed their deliverance to God and were ready to learn about his laws and to renew the covenant made after the first exodus. Reading out of the book from daybreak till midday while the people listened attentively shows how much they were interested in hearing the word of God and how much they had missed hearing it while in exile.

8:4 Ezra stood on a wooden platform so all could see and hear him.

8:5 He opened the scroll so that all the people might see it. This greatly inspired reverence in them. All the people rose as he opened the scroll out of respect for God's word—even as we stand when the Gospel is read.

8:6 Ezra blessed the Lord by praising and thanking him for many favors, especially for bringing them home again to their promised land. The people responded with a double "amen" to express their sincere agreement. They showed their deep reverenced appreciation for God's word by loving and then prostrating themselves

before the Lord, their faces to the grounds.

8:8 The text that Ezra read from was in Hebrew. But the language spoken then by the returned exiles was Aramaic. So Ezra had to translate and explain it to them.

8:9 The people wept when they heard of God's great goodness to their ancestors, and the laws he had asked them to keep. But they knew how these laws had been seriously violated by their people in the past and by themselves also; A cause certainly for repentance and tears. Ezra tells them to dry their tears, and make this a feast day sacred to the Lord. Despite the sins of the past and the present, the merciful God had brought them back to their homeland once more. Let them thank God and resolve to serve henceforth.

8:10 This was a time to be grateful and rejoice. So he urged them to celebrate it with rich food and sweet drinks. He encouraged them to allot portions to those who had nothing prepared. "Today is holy to the Lord", he said, "Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength".

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time Jer 1: 4-5, 17-19

Jeremiah, one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament times, lived in a turbulent and eventually fatal period of Jewish history (600-550). The people and most of the kings had for years neglected the things of God. They admired the pagan nations and too often the pagan gods. God let the pagan nations punish them.

1:4-5 God tells Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you". The reason the prophet was conceived is because God chose him to be. "Before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you." God set the prophet apart for his special calling—to be a prophet. His mission would include the Gentiles, the other nations besides the Jews. God would endow the prophet with the special gifts he needed to fulfill his role. God assures the prophet

to be with him, , to deliver him from his enemies. He will give the prophet whatever words he needs to speak to destroy the evil and build up the good (8-10).

1:17 Jeremiah must “gird his loins”, that is, get ready for action. “Stand up and tell them all that I command you”. In verse 6 Jeremiah had complained that he was too young to admonish the people; God now tells them to stand up fearlessly and speak the word of God. He has nothing to fear for God is with him.

1:18 God proceeds to describe the strength he will give the prophet in images: he will be like a fortified city, a pillar of iron, a wall of brass against the whole land, against Judas kings, princes, the priests and the people. This humble, young prophet is commanded by God to confront and speak to the high and mighty, the leaders, as well as to all the people.

1:19 God warns the prophet that they will resist him and rebel against him. But God is with him to deliver him from their attacks and resistance.

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 6:1-8

6:1 King Uzziah died in 742 B.C. That same year Isaiah experienced this vision. It took place in the holy place, just in front of the holy of holies located in the Temple. This vision of Isaiah is very important. The prophet’s call by God justifies his teachings to his people. Everything he has to say is commissioned by God himself. God is envisioned as a king because the King was the most powerful and majestic figure in people’s experience. “The train of his garment” reminds us of Ps 104:1-2: “You are clothed with majesty and glory, robed in light as with a cloak”.

6:2 Seraphim, literally “the burning ones” are celestial beings who surround the throne of God. They are intelligent creatures in human form, with face and feet, winged attendants of God who sing

his praises and accomplish his commands. They veil their faces and lower parts of their bodies through reverence. They hover aloft to signify the quickness with which they are ready to obey God.

6:3 “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!” By this triple repetition, the prophet attempts to express that God is most holy—beyond the words of any language. The catechism tells us that “The holiness of God is the inaccessible center of his eternal mystery. What is revealed of it in creation and history, Scripture calls ‘glory’, the radiance of his majesty” (CCC 1809). Holiness expresses God’s utter transcendence, his complete apartness from anything sinful or merely finite. God’s holiness is the unique preeminence which separates him from his creatures. God’s glory is the radiation of this holiness upon the world. Man becomes holy by nearness to God. “Lord of hosts” means that God is the leader of the armies of Israel as well as of the angels. And we can add that he is the Lord and creator of the throngs of all creatures such as the multitude of animals on the earth, in the air and in the sea.

6:4 In this vision when Isaiah heard the sound of the cry of adoration of God’s triple holiness, “the door shook and the house was filled with smoke”. The power of their praise is thus expressed, and the smoke was a sign of the divine presence similar to the cloud that covered the meeting tent and the glory of the Lord that filled the Dwelling (Ex 40:34).

6:5 This experience of God’s holiness and the adoring response of the angels made the prophet keenly aware of his own sinfulness. This encounter with God was so shocking he thought that he would die. He realized his unworthiness to be in God’s presence. He felt that even the words he spoke were unworthy of one who is in the presence of God, so too, of the words spoken by his people. And yet he had the privilege of experiencing this vision of God, the Lord of hosts. This brings out the opposition between God and sin.

6:7 And in a symbolic act of purification, touched his mouth with it. In this way his wickedness was removed and “sin purged”.

6:8 Then the prophet heard the Lord asking the heavenly court “whom shall I send? Who will go [to speak] for us?” In response, Isaiah now purified from his sinfulness, replied, “Here I am, send me!” This is a strong reminder to us to be fit for ministry and a desire to serve God, holiness of life is required. We must live in the presence of God through a strong proper life, with the help of the sacraments of penance and Eucharist.

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time **Jer 17:5-8**

The prophet Jeremiah has been foretelling dire consequences for the people of Judah because of their sins. They will lose their land and their kingdom; they will be exiled in a pagan country, because they insulted and ignored the God who had been so good to them. They trusted in human allies when they should have trusted God. He goes on now to stress, in poetic form, the real basis of true religion: God is the source of man’s true prosperity.

7:5 “Thus says the Lord”- Jeremiah introduces his teaching with this solemn prophetic introduction: he is not speaking for himself but as God’s mouthpiece. “Cursed is the man who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the Lord.” When a person withdraws his heart from God and places his trust in human beings, he can expect the worst to happen to him. He can be sure that he will fall into evil ways. For humans are untrustworthy. Scripture says, “More tortuous than all else is the human heart, beyond remedy; who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9). What is man like when he separates himself from God?

7:6 “He is like a barren bush in the desert that enjoys no change of seasons...but stands in a lava waste, a salt and empty earth”. The person

or nation, who estranges itself from God with unbelief, is like a plant cut off from water. If it survives at all, its existence is a miserable one. It can bear no fruit. It is deprived of any significant nourishment.

7:7 “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord. Whose hope is the Lord”. The ability to trust in the Lord is given to us by the virtue of hope. This theological virtue connects us to God Himself. It enables us to reach out to him in expectation for our needs. It unites us to God with a living bond that nourishes us with divine life. It refreshes us and sustains us in difficult times. We rely, through this virtue of hope, on God’s infinite mercy and promises rather than on ourselves. This virtue, perfected by the gift of the fear of the Lord, makes us become one with the Lord.

7:8 When a hope-filled person is so closely and securely united to the Lord, “He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream” –it is continually watered with streams of divine graced-life. “It fears not the heat when it comes, its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit.” When a person or nation is intimately united to God, there is continuous communion between them through the theological virtues. This secret, higher life continues to thrive even when the external, bodily life is in distress. The trials of life do not hinder its spiritual prosperity. The inner life of knowing and loving and hoping in God goes on endlessly, causing it to bear spiritual fruit: love, joy, peace....(Gal 5:22-23).

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time **1 Sam 26:2, 7-9, 12-13,22-23**

Saul disobeyed God and was rejected as first king of the Jews (1 Sam 15:11). God then chose David to succeed him instead of Saul’s own son (1 Sam 16:13). Saul became jealous of David (1 Sam 18:8-9). David fled from Saul. “So Saul took three thousand picked men from all Israel and went in search of David” (1 Sam

24:3). In today's first reading there is described an event that occurred during this search. It is one of the most touching examples ever described of reverence for an anointed king, mercy for an unjust persecutor and piety for a good man blended by jealousy and anger.

26:2 Saul went in search of David with 3000 picked men.

7 David heard that Saul had arrived near his own hiding place. With Abishar, one of his faithful followers, he stole over to Saul's camp at night, and found Saul and his troops asleep. Saul's spear was stuck in the ground beside him.

8-9 David had an opportunity to destroy his enemy. But he would not touch the king, the Lord's anointed one. He respected God's authority who had anointed Saul as Israel's first king. David patiently awaited Divine Providence's intervention before he would begin to rule. David was a man of faith.

22-23 David took the King's spear and water jug as evidence of his visit. Then he called out later to the king's general to explain how he had spared the King's life. King Saul was repentant and sent for his spear. David expressed his faith that "the Lord will reward each man for his justice and faithfulness"-he refused to harm the Lord's anointed one.

1st Sunday of Lent

Deut 26:4-10

In these verses we have the ritual prescribed by Moses for the feast of the harvest thanksgiving, probably the spring festival of Azymes. The people once settled in the Promised Land are to show their gratitude to the good God who brought them out of the slavery of Egypt and gave them this good land to be their home. They are to offer a basket of the first fruits of the trees and of the fields to God as a token of their thanks.

26:4 The people are to make their offering to God through the medium of the priests of the Temple who were set apart by God for this purpose.

26:5 This prescribed formula repeated year after year was to help them remember their history and all they owed to God. Jacob is referred to as a wandering Aramean: he wandered from southern Canaan to Haran in Aram and later migrated: he and his twelve sons went down to Egypt. At first they prospered greatly in numbers; but some generations later, the Egyptians under a new Pharaoh, became afraid of them.

26:6 The Egyptians maltreated and oppressed them by imposing hard labor upon them.

26:7-8 The Israelites had recourse to God in their tribulations. He answered their cry, and sent Moses to liberate them (see the book of Exodus for details). The miracles which preceded the Exodus, passing through the Red Sea, and accompanied the chosen People through the desert journey into Canaan proved that the mighty arm of the Lord was with them.

26:9 "He gave us this land flowing with milk and honey" is a poetic description of a prosperous country. When compared with their status of slaves in Egypt, and with the barren desert in which they spent forty years, to possess any such land as their own was great prosperity.

26:10 The people brought the first fruits of the products of the soil and offered them to the Lord as a sign of their recognition that everything they had was owed to God. They were to bow down in God's presence as a sign of their reverence as they gave thanks to him.

2nd Sunday of Lent

Gen 15:5-12,17-18

God made a covenant with Abram (Abraham) in which he promised to make him the father of a great race to

which he would give the land of Canaan as their territory. The faith of Abram is praised because he believed God's promise that he would have a multitude of descendants even though his wife Sarah was barren.

15:5 God promises Abram that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky.

15:6 Abram's acceptance of God's word was a meritorious act of faith for which God rewarded him. His total reliance on God puts him in right relationship with God. God graciously responds to faith by crediting righteousness to one who believes. Perhaps we can explain this passage in this way: Abram's faith connected him to God in such a way that God's own righteousness flooded Abram's soul. Our faith in God does the same for us.

15:7 God now promises Abram the land of Canaan in which he was already living.

15:8 Abram had accepted a promise more difficult of fulfillment, namely to have children with a barren wife. Now he asks for a confirmation because the ancient ritual for handing over property demanded a covenant.

15:9 God grants Abram's request and makes a covenant with him, thus sealing the handing over of land.

15:10 The animals offered in sacrifice to seal a pact were split in two and placed apart. The contracting parties walked between the split animals thus signifying that the same fate would befall them, namely they would be divided in two halves, if they did not keep their part of the covenant.

15:11 The birds of prey that swoop down upon the carcasses are symbolic of the dangers that will threaten the covenant. They are, as it were, driven off by Abram's faith.

15:12 This verse contains all the elements expressing the awesomeness of the supernatural

intervention: the setting sun, the deep sleep, terror, and darkness.

5:17 God is frequently symbolized by fiery figures (Ex 3:2; 13:21, 19:18). He alone passes through because the covenant is unilateral. God initiates the covenant and agrees to be bound to it. Abram did not walk between the sacrifices.

5:18 The concluded covenant assures later Israel of the possession of the land. The final verses (18-21) specify the extent of the Promised Land, which corresponds to the extent of the Davidic empire under Solomon.

3rd Sunday of Lent **Ex 3:1-8a, 13-15**

God calls Moses and appoints him to lead the Chosen People out of Egypt where they were being systematically persecuted. Moses through God's providence had escaped the consequences of the cruel Egyptian law which ordered all male Hebrew children to be put to death. He was adopted by a daughter of Pharaoh and given a liberal education. Later in life he killed an Egyptian who was maltreating a Hebrew. To escape certain death he fled to a neighboring country, Madian. He married a Madeanite and settled there, while little thinking that God had a most important role for him to play in the great story of the Exodus.

3:1 Horeb or Sinai is called "the Mountain of God" probably because of the divine apparitions which took place there, such as this occasion and when the Israelites were there after the departure from Egypt. It was here that God later made the covenant with the chosen people and promulgated the Law.

3:2 "An angel of the Lord": the visual form under which God appeared and spoke to men in some Old Testament texts either as God's angel or as God himself (Compare Ex 3:4).

3:3 The Lord appeared as fire flaming out of the bush—but the bush, though on fire was not consumed. So Moses was inspired to go over to look at this remarkable sight.

3:4 As Moses approached the burning bush, God called him by name.

3:5 As Moses responded, God commanded him to stop and to remove the sandals from his feet as a sign of reverence for standing on holy ground. This practice is still maintained by Moslems and Jews when entering their holy places of worship.

3:6 God identified himself as the one who spoke to the Patriarchs, the God who had called Abraham from Haran to make him the father of the chosen people. Moses hid his face; he was afraid to look at God because there was a common belief that no one could look at God and live.

3:7 The Israelites were God's people—he had made them his own in order to fulfill his plan of universal salvation. God was interested in their temporal welfare. He was aware of the affliction they were suffering in Egypt.

3:8 God planned in his mercy to set them free from the life of slavery which they were enduring in Egypt, and he intended to put them into a rich land—the land of Canaan which he had promised to Abraham centuries before (Gen 15:7). It would be a land particularly fertile and prosperous (flowing with milk and honey).

3:13 Moses needed to know God's name so he could tell those he was being sent to. God had told Moses that he had chosen him to set the Israelites free. When Moses objected that he was unsuitable for such a task, God's answer was: "I will be with you"—the power of God will do what human strength cannot. But Moses still needed God to identify himself by name.

3:14 God said, "I am who am"...tell the Israelites 'I Am' sent me to you". Apparently this utterance is the source of the word Yahweh, the proper

personal name of the God of Israel. It is commonly explained in reference to God as the absolute and necessary Being. It may be understood of God as the Source of all created beings. Out of reverence for this name, the term Adonai, "My Lord", was later used as a substitute. The word Lord in the present version represents this traditional usage. The word "Jehovah" arose from a false reading of this name as it is written in the current Hebrew text.

3:15 Moses is to tell the people that the God of the patriarchs whose name is "I Am" sent me. This is what he wants to be called forever. The name stands for the nature or essence. God declares that he is infinite existence and the source of all being.

4th Sunday of Lent Joshua 5:9a, 10-12

After forty years of wandering in the desert, Joshua, the successor of Moses, finally led the people into the Promised Land. They crossed the Jordan River (which God dried up to allow them to pass) near the town of Jericho. Joshua erected there twelve stones, taken from the Jordan, as a monument to indicate to future generations the place where Israel entered the Promised Land. This place was therefore called Gilgal—meaning the circle—made with twelve stones.

5:9 God tells Joshua that the slavery of Egypt and the reproach of being serfs under a pagan dominance are removed at last. The Israelites are now freemen living in their own country.

5:10 The Israelites' first act of public worship and thanksgiving to God for their delivery on entering their new homeland was to celebrate for seven days the festival of Passover. This feast commemorated the last of the ten plagues of Egypt and the one which finally compelled the Egyptians to let them go free. God had then commanded Moses that this great occasion

should be remembered annually forever in the new home he was to give them (Ex 12:1-21). The people remembered this command and carried it out faithfully. The first Passover in Egypt took place on the fourteenth day of Nisan, the first month of the Hebrew calendar. As they counted their year in lunar months, the fourteenth day was the full-moon after the Spring Equinox. Thus the day varied from year to year and it is for this reason that our Easter is also moveable.

5:11 Bread without leaven or yeast was unpalatable—a reminder therefore of their life of hardship and slavery in Egypt. Also, in the urgency to leave Egypt, there was no time to let yeast ferment—the women took the plain dough to bake on the journey. (Ex 12:34). And so, the annual Passover feast was celebrated by eating unleavened bread and roasted grain.

5:12 God had miraculously provided the manna for the nourishment of the Israelites all through their forty years in the desert, but now they had their own land and could produce sufficient food for themselves. The manna was no longer necessary—it ceased.

5th Sunday of Lent

Is 43:16-21

In the verses read today we have a part of the message of encouragement which the second Isaiah (40-55) preached to the Jewish exiles in Babylon. Their liberation is near at hand. God will set them free and return them to their native land. This return will be a new Exodus, and a greater one.

43:16 God is speaking to his people through his prophet. The same God who set their ancestors free from the slavery of Egypt, opening for them a path through the Red Sea is now speaking to them.

43:17 The Egyptian army which followed the escaping Israelites were all drowned when the

waters of the Red Sea covered every single one of them.

43:18 The miracles of the first Exodus will be surpassed by those of the second, the liberation from the Babylonian Exile.

43:19 The exiles must now concentrate on the present; God is doing something entirely new. The God of their Fathers is still with them caring for them. It was already in the process of happening. Cyrus had already captured Babylon, and this was the prelude to the liberation of the Jewish exiles. In the first exodus God provided water from the rock for the people. Now he will have rivers flowing through the Syrian Desert through which the people must pass to come to Palestine.

43:20 Even the wild beasts will be grateful to God because they can live in the irrigated desert. The rivers in the desert are also metaphors for the facilities that the exiles were given for their return journey. They were facilitated in every way by Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-11).

43:21 The Jews were God's Chosen People because he chose them. They did not choose him nor were they worthy of this choice as the following verses (22-28) show. But God's purpose in choosing them was "that they might announce my praise." They were to bring his knowledge to the world and thus his name would be honored. It was only through the Messiah, Christ that this was finally brought about.

Palm Sunday of, A,B,C

Is 50:4-7

This 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 prophesies 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

The Acts of the Apostles was written by St. Luke. It continues where he left off in the third gospel which he also wrote. He probably wrote the Acts around 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 5:12-16

The early Chapters of the Acts describe the growth of the new Christian community in Jerusalem after the great day of Pentecost. The apostles, Peter especially, worked many miracles and while the leaders of Judaism opposed the new religion with all their might, the rank and file of the people admired the patently holy mode of life of the Apostles, and were joining them in large numbers every day.

5:12 Through the power given them by God, the Apostles worked many miracles. The miracles were signs that God was with them. They were wonders that made people take notice. The new Christian community had no building as yet in which they could all meet. They met in small groups in various houses for the “breaking of bread”, the technical term for celebrating the holy Eucharist (2:46) and in the temple area for common prayer and instruction. Solomon’s Portico was a covered corridor near the temple.

5:13 The “others” probably means those closely associated with the leaders and the temple who could not risk being seen with the Christians. The ordinary Jews, who were in any case despised by the leaders, cared little for what was thought of them and so publicly praised the apostles and their followers.

5:14 The number of those who came to believe that Jesus was Lord (God) increased every day.

5:15 As a result of this faith, people carried the sick into the streets so that when Peter came by his shadow might fall on them so that they were cured.

5:16 The news of the divine powers possessed by the apostles was spreading rapidly from Jerusalem out into Judea. The sick were brought from outlying towns and were healed, including those who were disturbed by unclean spirits.

3rd Sunday of Easter

Acts 5:27-32, 40b

The Apostles had been put in prison by the Jewish leaders because they preached Christ and worked miracles. That night an angel set them free and told them to continue their preaching. When the guards went next morning to bring the apostles before the court, they found the prison securely locked but empty. The apostles were outside preaching in the temple area. They brought them before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish Court) “without violence for they feared the people.”

5:27-28 The Jewish leaders were well aware that the ordinary people were joining the new religion in great numbers, being moved by the apostles’ words and miracles. They had been given strict orders to stop teaching in Jesus’ name yet they filled Jerusalem with their teaching.

5:29 It was Peter who answered the high priest. For his primacy and leadership were recognized from the very beginning. He spoke for all. They had to obey God rather than men. It was Jesus, God himself, who had commanded them to preach his message of salvation. The mandate of Jesus to preach the gospel overrides the charge of the Sanhedrin to keep silent.

5:30 The apostles were descendants of Abraham. It was their God, who had revealed himself through Moses, who raised Jesus. It was these leaders who had Jesus killed by crucifying him (hanging him on a tree).

5:31 The resurrection is almost always attributed to God the Father, for it was through the resurrection that the fact that Jesus of Nazareth

was both the Messiah and Lord was proved. The glorified Christ is the leader and Savior of all, including Israel, if they but repent. To forgive sins is God's prerogative, as the Sanhedrin well knew. Thus the divinity of Christ is clearly stated by Peter.

5:32 Since Easter Sunday (Jn 20:23), and again Pentecost day, the Apostles had been given the Holy Spirit to guide and assist them. In their preaching they were but cooperating with him in proclaiming the truth concerning Christ. Jesus had promised that the Holy Spirit would be sent to the Apostles and their followers when he ascended to the Father (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:5; Jn 14:26; 15:26).

5:40 The apostles were flogged, beaten with the Jewish penalty of the forty lashes minus one; they were ordered to stop speaking in the name of Jesus and then dismissed.

5:41 Instead of being intimidated and out of fear stop speaking about Jesus, they were happy to have suffered for him. "And all day long, both at the temple and in their homes, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the Messiah, Jesus" (42).

4th Sunday of Easter

Acts 13:14, 43-52

Saul of Tarsus, a Jew, and at the same time a Roman citizen by birth, had gone to Jerusalem to study the Jewish religion very soon after the resurrection of the Lord. The new religion was just beginning to spread in that city. Saul became a fanatical defender of the old religion and persecuted the Christians without mercy. He was converted by Jesus, our risen Lord, when he appeared to him on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians there. The rest of his life was spent preaching Christ. He preached first to the Jews, the people of his own race; but when they refused to listen, as the majority of them did, he turned to the pagans and became the great

"Apostle of the Gentiles". Paul and Barnabas were set apart for the work to which the Holy Spirit called them. The Church at Antioch in Syria laid hands on them and sent them off (Acts 3:1-3). They traveled from town to town proclaiming the word of God in Jewish synagogues.

13:14 When they reached Antioch in Pisidia, they entered the synagogue and took their seats

13:43 After they had addressed the congregation and were leaving, many Jews and worshipers who were converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to remain faithful to the grace of God. The Jews always gathered in their synagogue on the Saturday, their day of rest. They were scattered throughout the Roman Empire at this time and were influential enough to possess a synagogue in all towns of any size. Paul (he had changed his name from Saul in the early part of this first missionary journey) always went to the synagogue and preached Christ to the Jews—then when they cast them out, as nearly always happened, he found Gentiles willing to listen and he instructed them. Paul had told the congregation that Jesus, whom the leaders of the Jews in Jerusalem had crucified, was the promised Messiah. God had raised him from the dead and "in him every believer is justified" (39). Many Jews and devout proselytes (pagans converted to Judaism) showed interest and invited Paul and Barnabas to come again the next Sabbath day.

13:44 "On the following Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord". The Gentiles had heard of Paul's story and a great multitude of them came to the synagogue.

13:45 The Jews got jealous. Why should the pagans have any part in the promises made to Abraham their father? So they shouted abuse while Paul was preaching.

13:46 Paul's answer was, "since you Jews prove yourselves unworthy of God's promise, we bring it to the Gentiles—they will take your place as God's Chosen People".

13:47 This is what was prophesied through the Servant of the Lord: “I will make you a light to the nations (Gentiles), that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth” (Is 49:6).

13:48 This pleased the Gentiles—God had planned for them too—and they anxiously listened to God’s plan for their salvation.

5th Sunday of Easter

Acts 14:21-27

The letter part of the first missionary journey of Sts. Paul and Barnabas is described in these verses. Paul’s custom was to preach Christ to the Jews first. When they rejected him and his message, as was nearly always the case, he turned to the pagans and had numerous converts in every town. The towns evangelized on this first journey were all in Galatia, then a province of the Roman Empire, today part of Turkey.

14:21 It is amazing how many areas Paul and Barnabas traveled—and that was not easy, especially having to go by ship to various regions—in order to preach the gospel. Now they are retracing their steps to encourage their new converts. These were mostly pagans with a few devout Jews. After their successful sojourn in Derbe, they went northwards to revisit Lystra, Tenomon and Antioch of Pisidia. They had suffered severely from the Jews in their towns—Paul was stoned almost to death in Lystra—yet this did not deter them from returning to confirm and console the converts from paganism and to appoint elders and organize the Church in each town.

14:22 St. Paul made no attempt to minimize the difficulties the pagan converts would have to face if they were to be loyal followers of Christ and so “enter the kingdom of God.”

14:23 Paul and Barnabas appointed presbyters in each church with prayer and fasting through which they called for God’s grace. These selected

men were appointed by the Apostles not elected by the congregation. They were to be the new leaders of the new Christian community both in the Eucharistic celebration which meant that they were given the Sacrament of Orders (1 Tim 5:22; 2 Tim 1:6), and the general running of the community. As they were often more than one (elders in the plural); they formed a kind of college. This developed later into the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

14:24-26 Having evangelized southern Galatia and firmly established the Christian Church there, they returned to Antioch in Syria, where they had begun their mission.

14:27 When they arrived, they called the Church together to report what God had done with them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. This reminds us of how the apostles first were sent off by Jesus to announce the good news of the arrival of the Kingdom and returned to tell Jesus all they had done and taught (Mk 6:30; Lk 9:10). This is what we do in Come, Lord Jesus!: we return each week to report on our work of evangelizing (Step 6).

6th Sunday of Easter

Acts 15:1-2,22-29

Today’s reading from the Acts of the Apostles tells us about the first general council ever held by the Church. It is called the Council of Jerusalem as it was held in that city. It had to decide what was then a very important question as regards the future of the Church. Many Jews of Jerusalem and of the whole of Palestine had become Christians. Gentiles were now flocking to the Church, outside of Palestine. The Jews were God’s Chosen people of the old dispensation, and the rite of initiation into their religion was circumcision, as God had prescribed for Abraham their Father (Gen 17:9-19). Now some of the converted Jews thought that as the Christians were the new chosen people, circumcision should be obligatory on them also. St. Paul, Barnabas and

others denied this. The question was acute outside of Palestine only, as Gentiles did not practice circumcision. It was brought to Jerusalem to be solved by a meeting of the Apostles and elders including Paul and Barnabas. The answer of the council was that circumcision was not necessary for salvation and should not be imposed on the Gentile converts nor should any other precepts of the Mosaic Law be binding on them except the Ten Commandments which are the universal moral law.

14:1-5 When some of the converted Pharisees of Jerusalem discover the results of the first missionary journey of Paul, they urge that the Gentiles be taught to follow the Mosaic Law. Recognizing the authority of the Jerusalem church, Paul and Barnabas go there to settle the question of whether Gentiles can embrace a form of Christianity that does not include this obligation.

15:22 The decision of the Council is being sent in a letter to the Gentile converts at Antioch where the trouble arose. The apostles and presbyters chose Judas and Silas, leaders among the brothers, to accompany Paul and Barnabas to Antioch in Syria.

15:23 Note the truly Christian, humble tone of the letter. The College of Apostles, and the elders (the leaders of the local churches in Judea), call themselves the brothers of the Gentile converts.

15:24 The Council takes exception to the fact that Jewish converts took it upon themselves to say that circumcision was necessary for the pagan converts. This greatly disturbed the Gentile converts. Verses 6-21, not included in today's readings, give the discussion of the question in the Council in which Peter took a leading part. James, as head of the Jerusalem Church, agreed with him, and so did all the others present.

15:25-26 To prove to the Church at Antioch that the Council decided in favor of the Gentiles, Barnabas and Paul are praised for the great work

they have done. They truly had "dedicated their lives in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

15:27 Judas and Silas are sent to convey this message to them by word of mouth.

The Ascension of the Lord

Acts 1:1-11

1:1 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.

1:2 Jesus spent his 40 days after his resurrection teaching the apostles through the Holy Spirit until the day he ascended to heaven.

1:3 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).

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

1:6 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.

1:7 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.

1:8 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.

1:9 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.

1:11 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

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

Pentecost took place fifty days after the Passover. This was a 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

Prov 8:22-31

The Book of Proverbs, one of the sapiential (Wisdom) books of the Old Testament, is a collection of wise sayings and counsels. Its range covers human, as well as divine wisdom, and though intended primarily for the young and inexperienced, it can also help those in a more advanced state of education to wisdom. The section read to us today is a eulogy of Wisdom personified, which existed as distinct from God before creation. It is a fore-shadowing of what

was fully revealed later when Wisdom in the Person of Jesus Christ became incarnate.

8:22 "The Lord begot me, the firstborn of his ways..." Wisdom is of divine origin. It is here represented as a being which existed before all things (22-26) and concurred with God when he planned and executed the creation of the universe, adorned it with beauty and variety, and established its wonderful order (27-30). Here, that plurality of divine Persons is foreshadowed which was afterward to be fully revealed when Wisdom in the Person of Jesus Christ became incarnate. "...the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago"—Wisdom preceded all other works or "prodigies" of God, both in time and in excellence. St. Paul understands these words as said of Christ: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15).

8:23 "Poured forth" implies the equivalent of "born". The Hebrews likened the movement of air and of spirit to that of liquids.

8:24-26 This refers to the formless mass from which God created the heavens and the earth. These verses express in a poetic fashion the fact that personified Wisdom existed before any part of the universe was created.

8:27-30 Wisdom as a Person was present when God brought the world into being. It furnished God with the plan, as it were, for the creation of all things (his craftsman). Wisdom is God's child, playing in his presence, a source of delight for his Father. (Compare "The only Son God, who is at the Father's side....Jn 1:18). God delights in all created things but he especially delights in the sons of men. Man is the masterpiece of creation and would therefore be the source of greatest pleasure to the Architect; but there is also here perhaps a hint at least of the Son's part in men's salvation—the reason why man was the masterpiece in God's creative act.

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

Gen 14:18-20

This incident in the life of Abraham has been chosen for our first reading on this, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, because of the reference to the offering of bread and wine. Abraham was returning victoriously from a battle against four invading kings from the east who had raided eastern Canaan and taken off much booty. He met Melchizedek, the King and Chief Priest of Salem, a pagan city at that time (it was later called Jerusalem and became the capital of Israel) who came to meet and congratulate him.

14:18 King of Salem is interpreted as king of peace in Heb 7:2. The fact that Melchizedek brought bread and wine has some sacrificial significance intended by this action—it was not just an ordinary meal offered to Abraham and his troops it was a covenant meal. This seems clear from what follows. Melchizedek is called “priest of God most high”—he attributes Abraham’s victory to Abraham’s God, Yahweh. This title the “most high” (Elyon) was applied by the Canaanites to their various gods. The Israelites later used these titles for Yahweh, who alone was the Most High. He blessed Abraham—as a priest he asked God to bless this stranger with whom he had now formed an alliance.

14:19-20 Melchizedek blessed Abraham by calling upon the true “God Most High”, the God of Abraham who is the creator of heaven and earth. He goes on to bless, that is, praise God for delivering Abraham’s enemies into his hands. He sees God as the one who gave success to Abraham. God looked upon Abraham, his friends, with love and delivered his enemies over to him, empowering him to defeat them. We too must look to God and draw power from him through faith for success in all our undertakings. Abraham then proceeded to give Melchizedek a tenth of everything. Tithes were the tenth part assigned to priests.

It is said of the Messiah in Psalm 110:7 “The Lord has sworn and will not waver: ‘Like Melchizedek you are a priest forever’”. Jesus fulfills this prophecy. He offered at the last supper a sacrifice of bread and wine (like Melchizedek’s) through which he ritualized his suffering, death and resurrection. Unlike the Levitical priests of the Old Testament, who died, he lives on forever through his resurrection. It is said of Melchizedek, “without father, mother, or ancestry, without beginning of days or end of life, thus made to resemble the Son of God, he remains a priest forever” (Heb 7:3). Genesis 14:18-20, contrary to the practice elsewhere in the early chapters of Genesis, does not mention Melchizedek’s parentage and children, or his birth and death. That he was a real, historical figure is clear, but the author of Hebrews (in accordance with Jewish interpretation) uses the silence of Scripture about Melchizedek’s genealogy to portray him as a pre-figuration of Christ, Melchizedek’s priesthood anticipates Christ’s eternal existence and his unending priesthood.

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Sam 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23

Saul disobeyed God and was rejected as first king of the Jews (1 Sam 15:11). God then chose David to succeed him instead of Saul’s own son (1 Sam 16:13). Saul became jealous of David (1 Sam 18:8-9). David fled from Saul. “So Saul took three thousand picked men from all Israel and went in search of David” (1 Sam 24:3). In today’s first reading there is described an event that occurred during this search. It is one of the most touching examples ever described of reverence for an anointed king, mercy for an unjust persecutor and piety for a good man blinded by jealousy and anger.

26:2 Saul went in search of David with 3000 picked men.

26:7...David heard that Saul had arrived near his own hiding place. With Abishar, one of his

faithful followers, he stole over to Saul's camp at night, and found Saul and his troops asleep. Saul's spear was stuck in the ground beside him.

26:8-9 David had an opportunity to destroy his enemy. But he would not touch the king, the Lord's anointed one. He respected God's authority who had anointed Saul as Israel's first king. David patiently awaited Divine Providence's intervention before he would begin to rule. David was a man of faith.

26:22-23 David took the King's spear and water jug as evidence of his visit. Then he called out later to the king's general to explain how he had spared the King's life. King Saul was repentant and sent for his spear. David expressed his faith that "the Lord will reward each man for his justice and faithfulness"-he refused to harm the Lord's anointed one.

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time **Sirach 27:4-7**

Sirach was a wise and pious Jew who lived about 200 B.C. His purpose in writing was to encourage his fellow Jews to live devout lives following the Law of Moses and the pious traditions handed down to them. This passage emphasizes how a man's speech manifests his character and his religious outlook.

27:4 The farmer, after threshing his grain, placed it in a sieve. The sieve was shaken and the good grain fell through the holes, while the trash remained in the sieve. So do a man's faults appear when he speaks. In this way we can evaluate a person's character through his speech. A few good words fall through while the coarse and unholy ones are remembered.

27:5 If a potter uses the proper clay and the correct mixture, his product will be perfected in the furnace, if not it will crack and break. So the test of a man is seen in his conversation; a man's conversation shows his character and his training.

The evil will come out if his mind is evil, the good if he is good.

27:6 When the fruit tree is pruned and properly manured, it will bring forth healthy luscious fruit. So the person educated in his religion, and in his duties to God and man, will show this education in his conversation.

27:7 It is only when a person manifests his outlook on life, which he does when he speaks that one can estimate whether he deserves praise or condemnation.

9th Sunday in Ordinary Time **1 Kgs 8: 41-43**

King Solomon, who succeeded David as king of Israel, built the first Temple of God in Jerusalem and installed the Ark of the Covenant, the throne of God, with great solemnity in its inner room, or Holy of Holies. He then publicly addressed the people and prayed for himself and for Israel. In his prayer he asks God to be merciful, not only to his chosen people, Israel, but to any aliens (Gentiles) who may come to Jerusalem, because they have heard of him from the scattered Israelites. This missionary zeal developed during the Babylonian exile and is put in the mouth of Solomon by the Deuteronomic author of the Books of Kings.

8:41 The aliens or Gentiles living among the Israelites were already provided for in the Law of Moses (for example Num 15:14); here there is question of an outsider coming to Israel to honor the God of the Jews in the New Temple in Jerusalem.

8:42 When the Chosen People were taken prisoner to Assyria in 722 B.C. and Babylon in 597-587 B.C., they brought their religion with them and these pagan countries heard of the God of Israel and of his great power; many of them were deeply impressed and became converts, or at least interested in this wonderful God.

8:43 Solomon asks God to answer the prayer of these Gentiles who come to pray. In this way all of the peoples of the earth will come to know God. They will come to honor and reverence God as her chosen people do. They will acknowledge God's Temple, his dwelling place on earth, which Solomon built in his honor and for him to swell among them. This prayer was answered by God when Jesus became man and saved all of humankind by his Paschal mystery, giving us Gentiles free access to God.

10th Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Kgs 17:17-24

Elijah, one of the first prophets, was sent by God to the northern Kingdom (Israel) to keep the knowledge of God alive among the people when their kings and leaders were turning to pagan gods! He preached during the first half of the ninth century before Christ. To punish Ahab, the worst of the northern kings, who had married Jezebel, a pagan, and was building altars to pagan gods, Elijah brought a three years drought on the country. This was brought to an end with Elijah's victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:20-40). To escape certain death at the hands of Ahab, during the drought, he lived for a time in Trans-Jordan and later at the home of a Sidonian (pagan) widow. While staying at the widow's home, the incident in this reading occurred.

17:17 The widow's son fell sick and died.

17:18 The widow knew Elijah was a prophet, a man of God. The woman believed God to be present in the prophet. She thought that God was aware of his sins and punished her by taking her son's life. In this way Elijah was responsible for the death – or so she thought.

17:19 Elijah then took the boy to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed.

17:20 He began to pray fervently to God making him aware that this child was the son of the widow where he was staying.

17:21 Elijah stretched himself out upon the child three times and called out to the Lord that breath might return to him.

17:22 The Lord heard his prayer and the breath of life returned to the boy.

17:23 Elijah then took the child down to his mother. "See!" Elijah said to her, "Your son is alive".

17:24 The woman now knew with certitude that Elijah was a man of God. She became fully aware that "The Word of the Lord comes truly from your mouth".

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

2 Sam 12:7-10, 13

David, chosen by God to be the second King of Israel and his representative in charge of the Chosen People, had offended God seriously. He had committed adultery with Bathsheba, wife of Uriah, a soldier who was then absent doing battle for Israel and the King. By recalling Uriah David tried to cover up his adultery, but he failed. He then ordered the officer in charge to put Uriah in a part of the battle line where death was certain fate. Uriah was killed by the enemy, but indirectly murdered by David. David then took Bathsheba as his wife.

12:7 The prophet Nathan confronted David. He began by reminding him how abundantly God had favored and blessed him. He anointed him king of Israel; he was rescued from the murderous attempts of King Saul.

12:8 God bless him with wives and ruler over both Israel and Judah – and many other favors and blessings.

12:9 Even with the multiple blessings David received from God, he has proceeded to spurn and flagrantly disobey his commandments. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband, killed on the battlefield; then went on to marry that soldier's wife.

12:10 The prophet goes on to predict the evils that will befall David because he has despised God through serious disobediences. Through adultery and murder he has seriously insulted God.

12:13 Nathan's words jolted David into realize what his passions had driven him to do. He had committed grave sins. He proceeded to confess that he had grievously offended God. Because he was made to realize the evil he had done, David was grief stricken and quick to admit his sin. The prophet then assures David of God's forgiveness and that he would not die. It is said that David composed Psalm 51 as an expression of his grief over his sins. He begins with, "Have mercy on me, God, in your goodness; in your abundant compassion blot out my offense. Wash away all my guilt; from my sin cleanse me..."

12 Sunday in Ordinary Time **Zech 12:10-11**

Zechariah, one of the twelve Minor Prophets, lived and preached in Jerusalem to the returned exiles (about 520 B.C.). He encouraged the people to rebuild the Temple and settle once more in their native land. He foretells a great future – the Messianic future – when all nations will come to the Holy Land eager to follow the God of Israel. The second part of the book (9-14) was, most probable, written by a later author, but here, too, we have messianic references. Today's reading is one such.

12:10 God promised David, "I will raise up your heir after you... and I will make his kingdom firm...and I will make his royal throne firm forever...Your house and your kingdom shall

endure forever before me..." (2 Sam 7:12-16). The promise given to David by the prophet Nathan is not forgotten, for it was Messianic. His descendant who would sit in his throne would establish his kingdom forever. Deutero-Zechariah promises that this is about to be fulfilled. The people of the new kingdom, represented by the citizens of Jerusalem, will receive a new spirit.

This new spirit of God which the people will receive will enable them to seek God's favor, and to repent of their past misdeeds. They will ask forgiveness and mourn for one they have caused to suffer.

The people have caused the death of someone of great importance. St. John's Gospel shows how the words, "they shall look on him whom they have thrust through" were fulfilled when "one soldier thrust his lance into [Jesus'] side" (Jn 19:34).

We also see fulfilled the words "they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only Son, and they shall grieve over him as one grieves over a firstborn". Jesus' mother and his disciples mourn Jesus' death on Good Friday – and not only they, but the huge multitudes over the centuries mourn Jesus' death caused by their sins. They mourn over Mary's first-born and the only Son of God.

12:11 "On that day the mourning in Jerusalem shall be as great as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo". There was some tradition of a day of great mourning in the plain of Megiddo (northern Palestine). It may refer to the death in battle of Josiah, Israel's greatest king after David, at Megiddo 609 B.C. (2Kgs 23:29). The mourning in Jerusalem, for the death of the Messiah, to be caused by his own people, would be as great as was the grief of that for off day.

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time 1 Kgs 19:16, 19-21

We have here an account of the call of Elisha to the prophetic office. Elijah, the first and greatest of the non-writing prophets, who did so much and suffered so much to preserve the true faith in the northern kingdom, was nearing the end of his days. God tells him that he is to appoint Elisha as his successor. He does so, and Elisha follows him and carries on his work. He almost equaled his teacher and predecessor in the number and spectacular nature of his miracles, for nearly fifty years.

19:16 Elisha's name means "God has saved". His native place, Abelmeholah, was a district in northern Palestine near the Jordan River.

19:19 The fact that Elisha was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen indicates that he was a farmer on a large scale. Elijah's throwing his cloak over Elisha was a gesture to signify he was conferring his office of prophet upon him. Elijah the prophet was well known to all, so Elisha evidently understood what his gesture meant.

19:20 Elisha's request to kiss his father and mother goodbye was a reasonable request. Elijah's response seems to mean, "Go ahead. Have I done anything to stop you?"

19:21 The sacrificial meal on the spot, shared by his neighbors and accompanied by the destruction of his farming equipment, signifies Elisha's renunciation of his previous life for his new vocation as Elijah's disciple. Elisha left and followed Elijah as his attendant. The position, although menial, may have enjoyed certain privileges, for both Joshua and Elisha succeeded in a sense to the place of their masters.

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time Is 66:10-14c

The prophet is describing in poetic and symbolic language the prosperity and peace which the new Jerusalem will enjoy. His intention is to encourage the returned exiles who were depressed and downcast when they saw their beloved capital in ruins. This state of affairs will soon end and Jerusalem will be greater, more peaceful, ore prosperous than she ever wa before. He calls on his fellow Jews to rejoice and be glad.

66:10 "Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad because of her, all you who love her; Exult, exult with her, all you who were mourning over her!"

66:11 "Oh, that you may suck fully of the milk of her comfort, that you may nurse with delight at her abundant breasts!"

Jerusalem is compared to a mother breast feeding her baby, a mother who will fully feed and and comfort her child. Jerusalem will have abundance and sustenance for all.

66:12 "For thus says the Lord: Lo, I will spread prosperity over her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent." The city will be flooded with all the necessary things of life.

Palestine had always been a poor land when copared with Egypt, Mesapatomia and the other pagan countries. Now Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine, and therefore of the whole country, will be inundated with the wealth of these nations. These pagan nations will come to her, bringing their earthly treasures with them.

"As nurslings, you shall be carried in her arms, and fondled in her lap." Jerusalem will be greatly loved by God: she will be hugged and loved and covered with caresses.

The Jews to whom he is speaking will be as happy, contented and free from all care, as a suckling baby.

66:13 “As a mother comforts her son, so will I comfort you; in Jerusalem you shall find your comfort.” It is God himself who now speaks; he will be a mother to them; he will comfort them. It is there, Jerusalem, that he will be a mother to them, giving them all they need and desire.

66:14 “When you see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bodies flourish like the grass”. They will grow in health and strength as the grass grows in the fields. “The Lord’s power shall be known to his servants.” It is God who will do all this, and his servants, his faithful ones, will realize this.

These words of the prophet encouraged the returned exiles to rebuild the city and to continue hoping for the Messianic days in which, according to all the prophets, there would be a New Jerusalem and a new world of peace and plenty for all.

The prophecy was never fulfilled in the earthly capital of Palestine. They were never intended to be fulfilled there. They are already partially fulfilled in Christ’s Messianic Kingdom on earth, but it is only in his heavenly Kingdom that they will be really and truly fulfilled.

The Church which Christ established is the New Jerusalem on earth. It is the capital and the home of all races and all nations. It has the means to lead and direct all mankind to be the everlasting “Jerusalem which is above”.

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Deut 30:10-14

The Book of Deuteronomy is partly a repetition of the Mosaic Law, with many later additions to suit the conditions of the time. It was written about the sixth/fifth century. In today’s extract, Moses is introduced as exhorting the Babylonian exiles to be faithful to the law, which God had given them, when they returned to the Promised Land. They had been

cast out from there because they had despised God and His very law which he had given them.

30:10 “If only you would heed the voice of the Lord, your God”

God speaks to our hearts, deep in our inmost center. Unless we have hardened our hearts by habitually saying “no” to God--which hardens our hearts--we become aware through our consciences that God is communicating with us. He manifests his will for us. We know what we ought to do or avoid doing. The hope is that we will obey his directives. “Keep his commandments and statutes that are written in this book of the law”. What we know in our hearts to be right or wrong is written in Holy Scripture to confirm what our consciences dictate to us. “When you return to the Lord, your God, with all your heart and all your soul”...The people were in exile because their disobedience. They are exhorted to see their error and the sufferings it has brought about. They must learn from their mistakes, have a change of heart, repent and return to God by obeying his commandments. What is needed is a true conversion of heart. Actions must flow from a heart that has turned to God and knows him, a heart that has experienced that true life and joy can only come from union with God.

30:11 “For this command which I enjoin on you today is not too mysterious and remote for you.” God has already written in our hearts what is revealed to us in sacred Scripture. When we read the law of God in the Bible, it resonates with the truth that is already in our hearts.

30:12 “It is not up in the sky” so that some would have to go up and get it in a rocket so we could see and learn it. We are already familiar with it. We know it in our hearts.

30:13 “...nor is it across the sea” so that we would need someone to go and get in a boat. Jeremiah explained what God would do to make it easy to remember God’s word: “I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will

be their God, and they shall be my people...all, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the Lord..." (Jer 31:33,34).

30:14 "...no, it is something ver near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts, you have only to carry it out." It is easy for us to remember God's word written in our hearts to be able to speak it and carry it out. We must ask God for the grace to move us to speak that word to others. We need his grace to do that. He commands us to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8), but we need his grace to accomplish this task. We hae only to ask and be willing to act and he will give us the grace. Human nature does not have the power--but grace does. Unless we become aware of this fact, we will never succeed in speaking about Jesus to others. Hopefully, you have already experienced the difference Jesus makes in your life so that you will want to share this with others.

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gen 18:1-10

Abraham had been told by God to leave his home, his kindred and his native country, and come to a land which God would give as a homeland to his descendants. He was to bevome the father of a great race. From this race could come a blessing for all nations, the Messiah, as he was later called (Gen 12:1-9). Although Abraham's wife, Sarah, was barren and no longer young, he trusted in God's word and came to the land of Canaan. Some twenty years later Abraham was still waiting for God to fulfill his promise. He was still without an heir, but nevertheless he did not lose his trust in God. The incident described in today's reading occurred about this time, when Abraham had pitched his tent near Hebron in a place called the Oak of Mamre.

18:1-2 "The Lord appeared in human form, accompanied bytwo angels who were also in human form (19:1). This meeting occurred as Abraham sat at the entrance of his tent by the terebinth (oak tree) of Mamre. Abraham treated

these three as strangers with all the courtesy of oriental hospitality. He ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them, bowing to the ground.

18:3 He urged them to stay with him.

18:4 Water was brought to them to bathe their feet, a true refreshment for people traveling barefoot or in sandals over the hot sands of the desert.

18:5 Abraham invited them to remain a while with him so he could refresh and give them something to eat--then they could go on their way. They accepted his invitation.

18:6 Abraham got Sarah to make roles for them. He 7 got a servant to prepare a choice steer.

18:8 He also got some yogurt and mild for them. He waited on them while they ate the food he had prepared.

18:9 They enquired where his wife Sarah was. He said she was in the tent.

18:10 One of the three said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah will then have a son." He said this even if the couple was old and beyond the age of conceiving and bearing children. The couple was completely surprised. But nothing is too marvelous for God--he keeps his promises. Sarah laughed, saying, "Shall I really bear a child, old as I am?" The spokesman reassured her that what he said would come true.

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gen 18:20-32

Today's reading is a continuation of last week. Abraham was walking with his guests toward Sodom. The Lord wondered whether he should tell Abraham what he was about to do.

18:20 He was concerned about the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah concerning the gravity of their sin.

18:21 He is going to investigate whether the cry against the inhabitants is well founded. (This way of speaking as if God were a man and needed to investigate is called anthropomorphism.)

18:22 The Lord and Abraham stayed behind while the other two men (angels) walked toward Sodom.

18:23 Abraham proceeded to ask the Lord whether he would sweep away the innocent with the guilty.

18:24-25 We see the charity of Abraham for his fellow man. He was concerned about the innocent being destroyed with the guilty. Surely God would not destroy the city if there were fifty innocent people so that they also would perish! Justice would require the Lord to avoid treating the innocent like the guilty.

18:26 Of course God would not punish the innocent with the guilty!

18:27-32 Abraham continued to plead for the innocent. Aware of his lowliness he dared nonetheless to intercede for them—if there were forty-five or forty, or thirty or twenty—innocent people—would he not spare the destruction of these cities? Yes, God said, he would not destroy them.

The next chapter tells us that after all that pleading not even ten innocent people could be found free from being active homosexuals. Therefore the angels revealed, “we are about to destroy this place, for the outcry reaching to the Lord against those in the city is so great that he has sent us to destroy it” (Gen 19:13).

According to God’s promise, he spared Lot and his family, but “rained down sulfurous fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah”. “He over threw those cities the whole Plain, together with the inhabitants of the cities and the produce of the soil (Gen 19:24-25). (Compare 1 Cor 6:9; Rom 1:24-28; 1 Tim 1:10).

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time Eccl 1:2; 2:22-23

The author of this book, like the author of the Book of Job, poses to himself and to his readers, the insoluble problem of life on this earth for man. He calls himself the son of David and King of Jerusalem. It was a literary device of that time to take the name of some distinguished, well-known historical figure. In this case it was the name of a man renowned for his wisdom that of Solomon, the son of David. However, even if he claimed to have all the Wisdom of Solomon, he could find no answer to his problem. He is looking for a solution in the wrong place, on this earth, where it is not found. The Jews had no revelation, or almost none, concerning a future life. They hoped that they would live on after their earthly death in some way or other. They had, however, no clear idea of how this would be. This author believes in the true God, although the way that God deals with men in this life dismays him. God, he says, does not have to justify his actions. Man simply has to take things as they come. Whereas Joy is trying to understand (why) the innocent should suffer in this life, Ecclesiastes finds a problem even in happiness. What good is it? It is only a deception and cannot last.

1:2 “The Preacher” is one who addresses the congregation or “qahal”: the Greek for Ekklesia. This explains the origin of the name given the author by both the Greeks and Latins Ecclesiastes, that is, churchman. To put it in another way, the title Ecclesiastes given to this book is the Greek translation of the Hebrew name Qoheleth meaning, perhaps, “one who convokes an assembly.” Everything is useless and worthless; nothing is worthwhile—all is vain and empty. The expression “vanity of vanities” is a Hebrew superlative expressing the supreme degree of futility and emptiness.

The author, with his Old Testament background, views everything in this life, the pleasures as well as the sufferings, as empty and purposeless. They have no real explanation. Happily, with our New

Testament background, we understand things differently: “We know that all things work for good for those who love God...” (Rom 8:28).

2:22 He wonders what profit comes to a man from all the toil and anxiety of heart with which he has labored under the sun as he must leave it all when he dies—to someone who has not labored. We are indeed blessed to live in these New Testament times and the revelation it provides. For example we are enlightened by these words: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on...let them find rest from their labors, for their works accompany them” (Rev 14:13). Our good works are transforming us into the imperishable image of God. They are spiritually very valuable.

2:23 The author feels that all a person’s days are full of sorrow and grief—even at night his mind is not at rest. Again, the enlightening revelation of the New Testament comes to our rescue. St. Paul says, “I consider that the sufferings of the present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us” (Rom 8:18). He explains furthermore, that the sufferings of this life are transforming: “always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. 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” (2 Cor 4:10-11).

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wisdom 18:6-9

This book is very probably the last book of the Old Testament. It was written in Greek by a Greek-speaking, pious Jew who lived in Egypt during the first century B.C. Hence, it is not included in the Hebrew Canon, for it was not written in the sacred language (Hebrew) nor in the holy land (Palestine). The purpose of the author, who is unknown, was to edify his co-legionists in Egypt and to encourage them to persevere in their faith in spite of opposition and oppression while he clearly has embittered some of the Platonic philosophy, their well known in

Egypt, regarding man’s composition, his ideas and teaching are based firmly on the religion of the Old Testament. In today’s extract he is referring to the events of the Exodus, in which God showed his mighty power to save his chosen ones from their cruel enemies. This should encourage his contemporaries to trust in the same good God, for he will listen to their pleadings, too.

18:6 “That night was known beforehand to our fathers” refers to the night of the last plague when the avenging angel went through the homes of Egypt killing the first-born of every Egyptian family. The Israelites through Moses, were told of this beforehand (Exodus 12). God had promised Abraham and the Patriarchs that he would make of them a great race and give them Canaan. Their descendants in slavery in Egypt believed these promises of God and felt confident that God would set them free and bring them to their promised land.

18:7 The people awaited their promised salvation and the destruction of their foes. Through Moses the chosen people trusted God. They awaited his intervention which set them free and punished the cruel Egyptians.

18:8 By the miracles God worked during the Exodus, he proved that the Israelites were dear to him. He punished their enemies because they had been cruel to his own people. The Egyptians’ first-born sins were destroyed because the Egyptians tried to destroy God’s first-born, Israel.

18:9-10 The Israelites, as instructed by Moses, offered a year old lamb in sacrifice to God. This was done in secret by each family in its own home. They sprinkled their door posts with the blood of the lamb, and the avenging angel passed over each door thus marked. In this way the sacrifice got the name of Passover. During the succeeding generations, it became one of the greatest of the annual commemorative festivals of the Israelites, and Wisdom rightly calls it a divine institution. It was God himself who ordered it. See Wisdom and Sirach 44-50 for the sung praises of the fathers.

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time Jer 38:4-6, 8-10

The incident in the prophet's life described here occurred during the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians about 588 B.C. Jeremiah had been preaching for years against the folly of political alignments and ambitions on the part of Judah. The fact was that the people of Judah, under a series of irreligious kings (with a few rare exceptions), had gradually fallen further and further away from God and from their religion. Their ambitions were to retain political freedom and economic prosperity. To do this, they tried to play off one of the neighboring powers against the other. At the period in question Babylon had become the supreme power in Mesopotamia and claimed tribute from all the smaller Kingdoms, including Judah. The princes urged the king, Zedekiah, to seek help of Egypt against Babylon. Jeremiah advised the paying of the tribute to avoid a greater evil. He was not listened to. Instead he was maltreated, and often imprisoned. The imprisonment mentioned in today's reading was intended as his death sentence—he was to die of starvation in an empty cistern. Egypt refused to help. Babylon captured and destroyed Jerusalem in 587 and took all the able bodied citizens prisoners to Babylon. Jeremiah's warnings had gone unheeded; his threats now came to pass. Judah lost her independence.

38:4 The princes said to the king, "This man ought to be put to death". Jeremiah advised a conditional surrender to the overwhelming Babylonian army that surrounded the city. It was the only sensible thing to do. The city and the Temple, the greatest treasure Judah possessed, would have been saved. But the brave princes were for resisting to the last citizen. To them Jeremiah was a traitor: they wanted him killed.

38:5 Zedekiah the king surrendered the prophet to their wishes; he could not do otherwise. He himself was "in their power."

38:6 They lowered Jeremiah down into the cistern with ropes. There was no more water but he sank into the mud. This was their plan of bloodless murder, to let him die of thirst and starvation in the cistern.

38:8-10 Ebedmelech, the Ethiopian, pleaded to the king for Jeremiah. He explained that the prophet would die of starvation. The king consented, as Ebedmelech, with three other men, took the prophet from the cistern and thus saved his life.

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time Is 66:18-21

The author of this part of the Isaiah (generally called third-Isaiah) was written after the return from the exile, 538 B.C. His aim was to console the returned exiles, who were depressed when they saw the sad state of Jerusalem and the poverty of the country round about. He foretold the future glory of Jerusalem, which would be the center from which the knowledge of the true God would go out in all directions.

66:18 God is describing what he will do. He will gather nations of every language to come and see his glory. They will be given knowledge of the true God and his wonderful works, especially when he sends his Son, the Messiah.

66:19 God promises to set a sign among the nations. This sign may refer to Isaiah 7:14 when the Lord himself gave this sign: "the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel." Through him the nations will be enlightened. The Messiah will reveal God's glory to all these foreign nations. They will come to know God personally and proclaim his glory, his love, his exceedingly great mercy.

The "fugitives" are the survivors among the Jews scattered among the Gentiles when they were exiled. They brought their religion with them

and gave the Gentile people some knowledge of the true God. But it was in the Apostles and their successors that these words were truly fulfilled.

66:20 “They shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the Lord.” The Diaspora (the Jews scattered in exile throughout the nations) will then end. All Jews will return “as an offering to the Lord.” They will be brought back to give God honor along with the Gentiles who now acknowledge the true God.

66:21 “Some of these I will take as priests and Levites.” Up until then, only the descendants of Aaron could be priests and Levites in the Temple. The new Temple will be served by members of the Gentile races. Jesus is that new Temple who will introduce a new priesthood. He will empower his Apostles and their successors, the Bishops assisted by priests, to offer a new sacrifice: the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-20

The author of the Book of Sirach or Ecclesiasticus as it was generally called up to recent times was a wise and pious Jew who lived about 200 B.C. His purpose in writing was to encourage his fellow Jews to live devout lives following the Law of Moses and the pious traditions handed down to them. In today’s reading we have a few more of the words of wisdom of this saintly man who spent his life meditating on the Law of God revealed to the chosen people.

3:17 Our passage begins with, “My son, conduct your affairs with humility and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts.” Our author speaks to us as a loving father advising his son to always act with humility. We ought always to have a sense of our own lowliness. God created us into existence; of ourselves we are nothing. The book of Genesis tells us, “You are dirt and to dirt you shall return” (Gen 3:19). The Church reminds us

of this fact every Ash Wednesday. We are totally dependent on God for our being, and everything we are and have come from him. Pride, undue self-exaltation, makes us forget who we are. Our talents are gifts of God; we must give him the glory for them. In this way our lives will forever be centered on God. People will love us as a result of our behaving according to the truth. God is the great one around whom our lives revolve. Such an attitude disposes us for union with God who readily accepts us.

3:18 “Humble yourself the more, the greater you are, and you will find favor with God.” The truth is, God is IT! He is the Supreme Being. Realizing that our talents and gifts come from him, we exalt him in gratitude the more gifts we have. Living according to the truth in this way pleases God which causes him to favor us.

3:20 “What is too sublime for you, seek not, into things beyond your strength search not.” We must be satisfied with who we are—limited and finite; we must not attempt to go beyond our limits and beyond ourselves on a natural level. Through faith we have free access to God who takes us into heavenly spheres. He is more than enough to satisfy our infinite longings.

3:28 “The mind of a sage appreciates proverbs, and an attentive ear is the wise man’s joy.” Proverbs, concise popular sayings, containing a truth for proper conduct, were appreciated by the wise person or sage. Such maxims were a delight to the ear of those endowed with wisdom.

3:29 “Water quenches a flaming fire, and alms atone for sins.” Just as water puts out a fire so giving away some of our possessions makes up for our sins. Dispossessing ourselves is a form of detachment that frees us from avarice and other passions that tend to rule our hearts. Giving to others in need is an act of love, and “love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Wisdom 9:13-18

In today's extract the author is stressing man's incapability of understanding the divine plans and decrees. Because we are finite, limited beings, our knowledge is finite and limited. There are many intricately, difficult problems all around us, which we cannot solve. How could we hope to solve the infinite ones?

9:13 Human beings cannot know what God is thinking or what his plans are. But if we live in prayerful communion with him we can know his will for us and that is enough.

9:14 We mortals are unsure, uncertain in our judgments. We have only a limited knowledge; we easily make mistakes.

9:15 The intellectual powers of man depend on the bodily senses and are restricted by them. If we should be heavy of heart, sad or depressed, our minds are hindered in clarity of thought.

9:16 It is only with difficulty that we learn, and even then only partially, the nature and meaning of the finite things of this world. How can we possibly comprehend infinite things?

9:17 The only way we can get to know the deep things of God is when God shares his divine Wisdom through divine revelations or inspiration (Compare 1 Cor 2:14-16).

9:18 God in his goodness revealed himself and his plans for mankind and thus enabled man to see his purpose. Through divine revelation we can know God's will and how we are to live in a way pleasing to him.

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time Ex 32:7-11, 13-14

During the forty days that Moses spent on top of Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments and instructions relating to the liturgy, the people down in the plain got tired of waiting. Although Yahweh, the true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, had miraculously brought them out of Egypt, they thought that he had now forgotten them. So they decided to make an imitation of the sacred bull which they had seen being adored in Egypt. They melted their gold earrings and made a small image of the Egyptian bull, a golden calf. This they declared was "their God who brought them out of Egypt" (Ex 32:4). They had returned to paganism and idolatry. God decided to punish them even to consume them with his anger (32:10). But because of the intercession of Moses "the Lord relented in the punishment he had threatened to inflict on his people" (32:14).

32:7 God was aware of what the people were doing. They were departing from the pure worship and allegiance to God to become depraved by satisfying their lustful passions.

32:8 They parted from their single-hearted allegiance to the one true God to worship an idol—as if the image of a bull had brought them out of Egyptian slavery. It is impossible for the image of a golden calf to adequately image the true God.

32:9 The people are described by God as "stiff-necked", resenting God's gentle yoke, unwilling to comply with his self-revelation and desire for intimacy. They would not remain on that spiritual level.

32:10 This was an insult to God who desired a holy union with his people. His blazing wrath was inclined to consume them.

32:11 But Moses begins to intercede for his people whom God had spent such care over and had delivered them with such power from Egyptian slavery.

32:13 Moses reminded God of his loving relationship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Israel) and how he had sworn to make their descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky; he would also give them that promised land of Canaan as their perpetual heritage.

32:14 As a result of Moses' prayer of intercession for his people God "relented in the punishment he had threatened to inflict on his people." This should encourage us to intercede for the people we love so that they can get back in God's grace.

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Amos 8:4-7

Amos was a shepherd in the kingdom of Judah who was called by God to go to Israel, the northern Kingdom. There he was to speak in God's name to the people. This was in the 8th Century B.C. The country enjoyed material prosperity but idolatry and injustice were rife among the upper classes especially. Against these vices the prophet spoke fearlessly, until he was driven from the kingdom eventually. Today's reading deals with the injustices practiced against the poor and the helpless.

8:4 Those who trample upon the needy do so by increasing their wealth at the expense of the poor. The landlords rendered the holders of the land abject slaves because of the excessive rents they charged. This deprived the tenant farmers of the personal dignity and independence.

8:5 These godless, as well as heartless, collectors of this world's riches, resented holy days of rest (New Moon and Sabbaths dedicated to God) because they and their slaves were not permitted to do servile work on these days. Hence they resented the occasions because of loss of revenue. The ephah was a dry measure (about our bushel) in use among the Israelites. By making a smaller measuring vessel they gave less than they should when selling their grain. The shekel was a unit of weight, a little less than half an ounce. Stones

were used for the weight. By putting heavier stones on the weighing scale when buying, these dishonest merchants would get a larger quantity than they paid for. Whatever means of weighing merchandise they used, they tampered with them so that they always won and their customers lost.

8:6 They can find slaves to produce their wealth at the minimum cost, and without a thought for the needs of the personal dignity of these poor people whom their injustices reduced to poverty. They would mix the chaff with the wheat and thus get paid for what was useless.

8:7 "The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob", that is, the sinful pride detested by God, in contrast to God himself, who is the true pride of Jacob. God never forgot a thing they have done! He will punish them for their oppression of the poor and he will punish them for every single offense. Twenty-five years after the death of Amos, Israel was overrun by Assyria, all the wealth of the country and the wealthy and ruling classes of the land were taken prisoner to Assyria to end their lives as slaves. They who had made slaves of their fellow citizens became the slaves of the foreign pagan power.

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Amos 6:1, 4-7

Last Sunday we heard the prophet Amos condemn the rich men of the northern Kingdom, Israel, for their injustice and their oppression of the poor. In today's reading from Amos we see him denouncing the luxurious living of the leaders in Judah, and foretelling a day of retribution which awaits them.

6:1 The prophet warns those who are at ease and feeling secure. The luxury of the people in Samaria will be punished by exile. The complacent in Zion and the over-confident in Samaria are the proud and self-interested rulers of Judah and Israel.

6:4 Those who lie upon beds of ivory are the rich who live in luxury at the expense of the

poor. Their wooden bedsteads were inlaid with ivory, an expensive and completely unnecessary ornamentation. They had so much wealth that they could live lazily, indolent lives lying on comfortable couches all day. Their gourmet meals consisted of lambs and grain fed calves fattened in stalls.

6:5 They were entertained with music of the harp as they dined.

6:6 Wine in moderation was usually drunk at meals but these people drank it in bowlfuls. They also used the most expensive oils to anoint their bodies. They were pampering the flesh while smothering the spirit—in this way the spiritual life had no chance of surviving. Joseph stands for Israel, the northern Kingdom. It is about to fall prey to Assyria. But this does not worry the leaders of Judah, even though the citizens of Israel are their blood-relatives. They think of nothing but their own luxurious comfort.

6:7 The prophecy that they would be the first to go into exile was fulfilled in 597 B.C. In that year the king of Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem and took Johoiachin the king, with his officers and nobles prisoner to Babylon. Ten years later, the poorer classes of the city and the land were made prisoner. (2 Kgs 24:12-16). As prisoners in Babylon, they did not dull their senses with bowls of wine and lie on their comfortable couches all day.

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4

This prophet wrote about 600 B.C. shortly before the Babylonian invasion of Judah and the capture of the city of Jerusalem. Political intrigue and idolatry were widespread in Judah and Jerusalem at this period. The prophet is arguing with God about this state of affairs—why should God allow these things to happen? God tells him, he has prepared a severe punishment for Judah and its wicked inhabitants but the just will be saved.

1:2 The prophet is complaining to God: “How long, O Lord? I cry for help but you do not listen!” He is concerned about the internal evils of Judah. He is annoyed with God for delaying punishment. He has pleaded again and again but God seems not to hear him. The prophet continues to complain to God: “I cry out to you ‘violence!’ but you do not intervene.” The rich are trampling on the poor, the idolaters are making life almost impossible for those who serve God. This sort of thing is beginning to remind us of our times and our country. Evil in some ways is gradually taking over.

1:3 The prophet continues to lament to God: “Why do you let me see ruin...misery...destruction and violence...strife...clamorous discord.” on all sides the prophet sees ruin (see 2 Kgs 23:33-24:9). The kings set the bad example, neglecting God and turning to idols. The majority of the people follow suit. There was no peace in the land.

2:2 God tells the prophet to write his message clearly on the tablets, the writing materials then in use, so that everyone could read it readily. What the vision he was given to write about is not certain, but it was probably the punishment that Chaldea (Babylon) was to inflict on unfaithful Judah as described in Chapter 1:5-11 or it may refer to the messianic triumph at the end of time (3:13-15).

2:3 The Lord answers that “the vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint.” God is still in charge. What he has promised will come at the appointed time, and it will bring the justice which Habakkuk is seeking. The prophet is told to “wait for it, it will surely come, it will not be late.” Even though God seems to delay, the outcome is certain.

2:4 “The rash man has no integrity; but the just man, because of his faith, shall live.” The rash man is one who proceeds with undue haste; he is lacking in the virtue of prudence and patience

The just or righteous man has faith that connects him to God drawing strength to withstand the trials of life. St. Paul quotes these words (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38) to confirm his teaching that man receives justification and supernatural life through faith in Jesus, the Christ.

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time **2 Kings 5:14-17**

Elisha was the prophet from Abel-Mehula, son of Zaphat. He was the successor of the great prophet Elijah (see 1 Kgs 19:19-21). He lived during the reign of King Ahab (869-850 B.C.), who married a daughter of the pagan king of Tyre. She, backed by the king, introduced idolatry into Israel, and against this Elisha fought fearlessly. He is credited with many miracles, one of which is related in today's reading.

Naaman, a pagan army commander of the King of Aram, was struck with leprosy. He was advised by a slave girl from Israel to go to the prophet of Samaria who would cure him. Having gone to the King's palace, at first thinking he must be a prophet, he eventually found Elisha. The prophet told him to bathe seven times in the Jordan River and he would be cured. Naaman thought this a ridiculous suggestion and was returning home indignant when his servants persuaded him to try what the prophet had told him to do. He did and was cured.

5:14 It was only after Naaman's servants convinced him that he decided to obey the prophet. This blind faith effected a cure in him: "His flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child-he was cleansed of his leprosy.

5:15 Filled with gratitude for being restored to full health, Naaman returned to Elisha, "the man of God". This title was first given to Moses who had been chosen by God to lead the people out of Egypt. Later it was applied to the prophets for they

represented God before the people. This miracle of healing prompted Naaman to have faith in the one true God who had revealed himself to the Israelites through Moses.

5:16 The army commander desired to express his gratitude to the prophet in the form of a gift. But the prophet refused to accept it. Despite Naaman's urging, he still refused to accept the gift.

5:17 Naaman requested two mule loads of earth to take back home with him. He explained, "for I will no longer offer holocaust or sacrifice to any other god except the Lord." The pagans believed that their gods thrived only in their own locality, on their native earth. Naaman thought that the God of Israel could thrive only on the soil of Israel. So, as he wanted to serve the true God only from now on, he thought that he must have some of Israel's soil on which to build a sanctuary for him. Hence the request for two mule loads of earth. He desired to serve only the Lord, the God of Israel.

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time **Ex 17:8-13**

The Israelites on their long journey from Egypt to Canaan had to pass through territories occupied by aboriginal tribes. Naturally, some or most of such tribes objected to letting them pass through their territories as they feared that they might take over their lands or cause serious damage during their transit. The first group of tribes to attempt to prevent the transit of Israel through their territory was Amalek who inhabited the Negeb (the desert area located to the south of Pestene) as far as Sinai. They rose up in arms against Israel and would have annihilated them were it not for Moses' intercession with God.

17:8-9 When Moses heard that Amalek was approaching, prepared for battle, he ordered Joshua to go out with some picked armed troops

to engage this enemy. He himself would go up to the top of a nearby hill and intercede with God. He held the staff of God in his hand. This was the staff through which Moses worked miracles to convince Pharaoh to release the chosen people. This is the staff he struck the rock which caused the water to flow for the people to drink (see Ex 7:17-20; 17:6).

17:10 It was only after Moses climbed at the top of the hill with Aaron and Hur that Joshua engaged Amalek in battle.

17:11 “As long as Moses kept his hands raised up, Israel had the better of the fight.” The position adopted for prayer among the Israelites was standing upright with both arms extended and palms of the hands turned up. While Moses prayed Joshua won, but when Moses got tired and had to lower his hands, Amalek won. This shows us the power of intercessory prayer.

17:12 The battle was a long one. Moses grew tired so they arranged a stone seat for him and Aaron and Hur held his arms aloft. In this way his hands remained steady till sunset. Here we see the need for the support of others to persevere in prayer.

17:13 As a result of this prayerful intercession, Joshua won the battle over Amalek. This is how we also will win our battles. This is how we open ourselves to a divine invasion.

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18

This wise man has some very solid instructions today, on the justice of God, who deals equally with all men and has no favorites. He answers the prayers of all, but the oppressed, the orphan, the widow, the ones who can least help themselves, are always his concern. The prayer of the humble man will be answered.

35:12 “The Lord is a God of justice who knows no favorites.” God treats everybody with absolute justice. Unlike the powerful of this earth, he has

no favorites. Each one will get what he deserves; there is no reward for the undeserving.

35:13 “Though not unduly partial toward the weak, yet he hears the cry of the oppressed.” God is slightly partial to the cries of the weak who are the oppressed, the orphans, the widows, for they are more in need of his special help. They have no earthly protectors.

35:14 “He is not deaf to the wail of the orphan, nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint.” God has a special love for these and is full of compassion for them.

35:16 “He who serves God willingly is heard; his petition reaches the heavens.” The man who keeps God’s commandments willingly, out of love for him, and does his will daily, deserves to have his requests granted. His loyal service of God is a continual prayer reaching to heaven.

35:17 The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal.” The prayer of the humble man, who admits how unworthy he is of God’s attention, will be heard. We have a very striking example in today’s Gospel of the prayer of the proud man and that of the humble sinner.

35:18 “...nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds, judges justly and affirms the right.” The Lord will answer all sincere prayer. Being justice itself, he can treat nobody unjustly. The prayer of the humble is particularly powerful and remains before God until it is answered. God will respond to such a prayer. He will always be on the side of justice and truth, affirming the right.

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time Wisdom 11:22-12:1

The author of Wisdom says that although the whole universe is like a grain of dust, compared with God who created it, yet he loves all the things which he created. It is he who preserves all creation, he who forgives the sins of

men; his spirit is in every creature.

11:22 Before God the whole universe is as a grain from a balance, that is, a tiny particle used for weighing on sensitive scales. The whole universe in relation to God is like a tiny drop of dew.

11:23 God is merciful and benevolent toward all his creatures because he is all powerful. He overlooks the sins of people and withholds punishing them; he gives them time to repent.

11:24 God has love for everything that exists and hates nothing that he made—he would not have created anything that he hated.

11:25 Everything continues to exist because God wills it and sustains all he created.

11:26 God spares and cares for all things because they belong to him—he is a great lover of souls and of life.

12:1 God loves all things to the point that his imperishable spirit is in all things, sustaining them lovingly in existence.

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time **2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14**

The two books of Maccabees describe the war of liberation which the Jews, led by Mattathias and his sons, waged and eventually won against the pagan tyrant king of Syria. The desire and ambition of Antiochus IV (174-163 B.C.) was to abolish the Jewish religion and the Temple of Jerusalem and Hellenize all Jews. He was foiled in this sacrilegious attempt by the courage of the Maccabees, and by the spirit of love for faith and fatherland with which they inspired their fellow Jews. While the first book gives a more basic history of this period of resistance, the second book is more inclined to sermonize and introduce edifying details which

may not always have happened. The story we read today is substantially historical. There were hundreds of such examples of the persecution and death of Jews in the attempt to make them abandon their religion. The cruelties inflicted were common practice at the time not only in Palestine but in Egypt, Greece and elsewhere.

7:1 The persecutors thought that by forcing Jews to eat pork, a food forbidden by the law of Moses, they would make them abandon their faith. The loyal Jews preferred to die rather than violate God's law. By having the mother of seven brothers present, they thought that her love for them and her anguish at seeing them tortured would move her to be them to give in and save their lives. Instead, she encouraged them to persevere and bear their tortures. She herself was martyred last of all (7:41).

7:2 One of the brothers, speaking for the others bravely told the King how foolish he is to believe that he can force them to betray the faith of their ancestors.

7:9 The second brother was tortured as the first. At the point of death he proclaimed his faith in the resurrection of the just: "the King of the world will raise us up to live again forever." For, we're dying for God's laws. Being deprived of this present life he could bear with, for he would receive an eternal glorious life in exchange.

7:10-11 The third brother suffered like his brothers. He gladly held out his tongue and his hands to be chopped off. For, he knows that it was God who gave them to him and he is certain that God will give them back to him again in the next life.

7:12 His persecutors marveled at his courage.

7:13 They tortured the fourth brother in the same way.

7:14 He expressed that he freely died at the hands of these men. But he was firmly convinced of being restored to life again by God. There will be no resurrection for his persecutors.

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Malachi 3:19-20

The prophet Malachi whose name means my messenger or Yahweh's messenger, preached to the returned exiles about the year 450 B.C. Forcibly and bluntly he speaks against the sins of his fellow Jews. Many of them were not proving themselves worthy of the mercy that God had shown them when he released them from their Babylonian exile. In the two verses chosen for today's first reading the prophet has dire threats for the confirmed sinners and words of hope for the just when the Day of Judgment, which is surely coming arrives.

3:19 "The day...burning like an oven" is the day of judgment or retribution: the dispensing or receiving of reward or punishment. This is the day of the Lord when he will punish the wicked and reward his faithful ones. Almost all the prophets of the Old Testament had a reference to this day. Here Malachi says it is coming, it is near at hand. Fire is the punishment that is foreseen for evil doers. This refers to the severe pain of separation from God for whom we were made and whom our being craves. He is the fulfillment of our deepest desires. And yet, if we choose to do our own will contrary to God's, the separation that results from living contrary to God's expressed will, will be our eternal destiny: never to have this joy of union with God and the fulfillment of all our desires.

3:20 On the other hand, for those who respect and obey God, this day of judgment will be a day of joy, a day of sunshine and consolation, a day when all their wounds will be healed by the gentle rays of the sun: the glorious presence of Jesus, the Son of God, and Son of Righteousness.

Solemnity of Christ the King 2 Sam 5:13

Saul, the first King of Israel, was told by the prophet Samuel that the kingship would not remain in his family because he had disobeyed the laws of God. David was chosen by God to replace him and was anointed secretly by Samuel in Bethlehem. Having had to flee from Saul he settled in Hebron. Accepted by the Tribe of Judah he reigned there as King of Judah for seven years. On the death of Saul the northern tribes came to him in Hebron and anointed him king over all of Israel.

5:1 The tribes of Israel came to David and claimed their blood-relationship with him. They and he are sons of Abraham.

5:2 They are referring to the successful battles against the Philistines when David was an officer in Saul's army (1 Sam 17). Shepherd was a familiar metaphor for king (see Micah 5:1-3). The tribal leaders are referring to 1 Sam 15, where we are told that God gave orders to Samuel to go to Bethlehem to anoint David as king of his chosen people.

5:3 Before accepting their offer of becoming their king David made a covenant, an agreement before the Lord, with the tribes. They had to promise fidelity and allegiance to him. David had already been anointed King of Israel by Samuel (1 Sam 16: 2-13). This is a public demonstration that he was accepted by all the tribes north as well as south.

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