



Understanding the Sunday Epistles

CYCLE A

by Father Conley Bertrand

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

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

Copyright © 2013, *Come, Lord Jesus! Inc.*, All rights reserved. No part of this book may be
photocopied, reproduced, or transmitted in any form or by any means without written
permission of the *Come, Lord Jesus!* administrators.

Published by *Come, Lord Jesus! Inc.*

1804 WEST UNIVERSITY AVE

LAFAYETTE, LA 70506-2544

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

www.comelordjesus.com

First Printing: November 15, 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS
EPISTLE COMMENTARIES: CYCLE A

First Sunday of Advent	1
Second Sunday of Advent.....	2
Third Sunday of Advent.....	4
Fourth Sunday of Advent	5
The Nativity of the Lord—Christmas	7
The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.....	8
Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God	11
The Epiphany of the Lord	12
The Baptism of the Lord	13
Second Sunday in Ordinary Time	15
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time	16
The Presentation of the Lord	17
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time	18
Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time	19
Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time	21
Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	22
First Sunday of Lent	23
Second Sunday of Lent	25
Third Sunday of Lent	26
Fourth Sunday of Lent	27
Fifth Sunday of Lent.....	29
Palm Sunday of the Lord’s Passion.....	30
Easter Sunday—The Resurrection of the Lord.....	32
Second Sunday of Easter	33
Third Sunday of Easter	35
Fourth Sunday of Easter	36
Fifth Sunday of Easter	37
Sixth Sunday of Easter	39
The Ascension of the Lord	41
Pentecost Sunday.....	42

TABLE OF CONTENTS—2
EPISTLE COMMENTARIES: CYCLE A

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity	44
The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ—Corpus Christi.....	46
Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles	47
Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	48
Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	50
Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	51
Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	52
Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	53
Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time	53
Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time	54
Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time	55
Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time	56
Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time	57
Exaltation of the Holy Cross	57
Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time	61
Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time	62
Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time	64
Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time	65
Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time	66
Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time	67
All Souls.....	69
Dedication of the Lateran Basilica	71
Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time	72
The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King	73
General Bibliography	75

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Epistle: Romans 13:11-14

“You know the time; it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed” (11).

This letter to the Romans is St. Paul’s longest epistle. It was written about 57 or 58 A.D. He is hoping to visit them on his way to Spain after he has delivered a collection to the poor in Jerusalem (Rom 15: 24-28).

“The end of the ages has come” (1 Cor 10:11). “It is our period in time toward which past ages have been moving and in which they arrive at their goal” (NAB footnote). This “time” is the period of Christian existence—it is the time after the death and resurrection of Christ known as Kairos: the time appointed by divine Providence for the realization of salvation in these end-times. It is the time for us to appropriate for ourselves the riches of salvation that Jesus has won for us by his passion, death, and resurrection. It is the age in which we Christians live. This is the time set aside for us to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord at the very end of time. (The word eschatology is that branch of theology which deals with the last stage of the history of humanity and the world and its future consummation in the Kingdom of God or the future world.)

This “time” is “the hour ... for you to awake from sleep”. The glory of the risen Christ shines upon us. The divine Son has risen. This is the time for holy activity and spiritual alertness; it is a time for wakefulness, enjoying the divine indwelling presence and basking in the light of our glorified Lord. This is not the time for spiritual lethargy, living in a stupor and totally oblivious to the joy of living in the great DAY of Christ. We must not allow sin to enshroud us in darkness and blind us to the glorious, heavenly light of life (Jn 1:3; 8:12).

“Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed”. We have a limited time to grow to full maturity in Christ. The more we surrender to him, the sooner will he be able to take possession of us

and secure our salvation. The hope is that we have made considerable progress in self-surrender to Jesus so that our salvation is indeed nearer than ever. We may be reaching the end of our lives so that judgment is just around the corner, or Christ may soon return to take us to himself and into glory.

“... the night is advanced, the day is at hand. Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (12). “The present evil age” (Gal 1:4) when sin and death still prevail is coming to an end. This darkness will be overcome by Jesus when he appears in the light of glory. This light and judgment will reveal the state of everyone’s soul. The imminence of Christ’s appearance as judge urges us to change our sinful habits. Sinful actions cut us off from Christ and cast us into the darkness of evil. Such sinful activity must stop immediately. We are children of the light and are called to live in the light of God’s presence. We must put on the armor of light to resist “the world rulers of this present darkness...the evil spirits ...” (Eph 6:12). This armor is further described as truth, righteousness, faith and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (See Eph 6:13-17.)

We must realize that we are at war. We are surrounded by powerful enemies who want to capture and enslave us. We must take up these holy arms to defend ourselves. We cannot afford to go to sleep. We must be vigilant and alert—ready to fight and defend ourselves from these evil attacks—lest we be conquered.

“... let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and licentiousness, not in rivalry and jealousy (13). The glory of the risen Christ shines and illumines our world. Jesus shouts this fact in these words: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn 8:12). This light of life begins shining on us when we receive sanctifying grace in baptism. Our minds are illumined to know the truth. Jesus, who is the Truth (Jn 14: 6), reveals the truth. He says, “I came into the world as light,

so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness” (Jn 12: 46). Jesus beams his light upon us by his Person, his grace and his words. Truly, we can say, “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path” (Ps 119:105).

Thus we are living in the light of Christ’s Day. We know the truth that prompts us to live virtuous lives. And God commands us, “To me, therefore, you shall be sacred; for I, the LORD, am sacred, I, who have set you apart from the other nations to be my own” (Lev 20:26).

It is therefore totally unbecoming to misbehave in such bright daylight. Any sinful behavior is absolutely out of place and a disgrace. Therefore, our epistle condemns orgies, that is, drunken parties and excessive sexual indulgences; promiscuous sexual behavior; licentiousness, which is, lacking all moral restraints, especially in sexual matters; rivalries that breed hatred; and jealousy, which arises from suspicion, resentments or mistrust of another. All of these sins are completely out of place in the plain view of everyone in the daylight of Christ.

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh” (14). The white garment given to the ones baptized is a sign that they have put on Christ. These Christians are urged to activate the virtuous qualities exhibited in Jesus’ life. They are plunged into Christ at baptism. They must now show by virtuous living that they possess his virtues and that he actually lives in them.

The “flesh” stands for everything that is weak in human beings, that is, the sinful inclinations that tempt us to do evil. St. Paul has this to say about it, “For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. The willing is ready at hand, but doing the good is not. For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want” (Rom 7: 18-19).

St. Paul exhorts us not to follow these sinful desires arising from our sinfully-inclined human nature. These desires only lead to unhappiness and misery: “The concern of the flesh is death.

... For the concern of the flesh is hostility toward God. ... If you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Rom 8:6, 7, 13).

It is possible to abstain from following the sinful desires of the flesh by the power of the spirit. The indwelling Spirit empowers our spirit to overcome the sinful desires of the flesh. “For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the law of sin and death”(Rom 8:2). “... in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us” (Rom 8:37).

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Epistle: Romans 15:4-9

“Whatever was written previously was written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope” (4).

All of Scripture is the inspired word of God, both the Old and the New Testaments. They both form one cohesive whole. Together they contain our salvation history. These Scriptures make God’s plan known to us. The Old Testament foretells and prefigures what happens in the New. The New fulfills the Old. The Scriptures enliven our hope. Time after time the prophetic utterances are fulfilled which give us hope that those still unfulfilled will be realized. They encourage us to bear patiently with our trials because we profit from them: they purify and spiritualize us and earn for us a great reward (2 Cor 4:16-18; Rom 8:28; 5:3-5).

“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus” (5).

It is God who gives us the fortitude to be able to endure the sufferings of life that come our way. That is why it is so important that we remain connected to him by faith and a continuous recollection of him. In this way we draw encouragement from him who loves us dearly—

for we are his children by grace. His love, it is, that brought us into his family and made us his beloved children.

God unites us together by his grace so that we form a family in communion with each other. We form one body in Christ (1 Cor 12:13). Born of grace, we are drawn toward a holy “concern for one another. If one part [of the body] suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part [of the body] is honored, all the parts share its joy” (1 Cor 12:25-26). This harmonious living in the love of one another is “in keeping with Christ Jesus”. That is his great desire: “As I have loved you,” he says, “so you should love one another” (Jn 13:34).

“... that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (6).

Each is taken up and joins forces with everyone else to acknowledge the greatness and goodness of God in sustaining them in life’s trials. They are united in harmonious praise of the God from whom they have personally experienced salvation. He it is who has empowered them to persevere in maintaining fidelity to him despite their weaknesses and failures. They are utterly grateful to God and express their gratitude in abundant praise. They cannot glorify him enough for the great victory over their formidable enemies and seemingly insurmountable obstacles to their sanctification.

“Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God” (7).

Christ’s warm welcome and loving embrace of each of us sinners challenges us to do the same for one another. Jesus overlooks our sins and receives us with total love. We must respond to his love by extending that same love to one another. We are called to overlook individual differences and even the sins that tend to separate us so that love and mercy will prevail in our dealings with one another. All of this we do for the glory of God. He is the source of all of this goodness we express by our welcoming one another. It is to him the glory belongs.

“For I say that Christ became a minister of the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs” (8).

Jesus was born a Jew, a member of David’s family, as God had promised through the prophet Nathan (2 Sam 7:12-17). He has spent most of his time ministering to the Jews. He says, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 15:24). Likewise, when Jesus sends Apostles on their mission he limits their activity to the chosen people only (Mt 10:5-6). He is true to God’s promise, as the prophet Micah declares, “You will show faithfulness to Jacob, and grace to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from days of old” (Mic 7:20). But that promise also includes the Gentiles.

“... but so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written: ‘Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing praises to your name’” (9).

God sends his Son Jesus through the Jews (the circumcised) as he has promised. In this way he plans to save the Jews as well as the Gentiles, that is, the whole world. God tells his servant: “It is too little, he says, for you to be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the survivors of Israel; I will make you a light to all nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (Is 49:6).

He creates all human beings in his own image and likeness. He is merciful toward all and has gone to great lengths, as seen in Jesus’ Incarnation and Passion, to bring everyone to salvation: he wishes to save all from sin and share his glory with all in heaven. Our response as Gentiles, the non-Jewish nations, must be to praise God for his mercy. The Gentiles glorify God for his mercy as a result of hearing the good news from the Apostles. This fulfills the prophecy, “I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing praises to your name”. After the resurrection Jesus commissions the Apostles, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations ...” (Mt 28:19. As a result of their ministry we

have the privilege to hear the good news and are caught up in praise of God for his marvelous mercy and love toward us Gentiles.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Epistle: Jas 5:7-10

“Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains” (7).

St. James, who writes this epistle, is believed to be one of the “brothers” or cousins of Jesus mentioned in Matthew 13:55. He was the head of the Church in Jerusalem (compare Acts 12:17; 21:18; Gal 2:9). He is distinguished from James, the apostle, who is John’s brother. He plays an important role in the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-22). He remains head of the Jerusalem Church until his martyrdom in 62 A.D.

James addresses his faith community as “brothers”. From the very beginning Christians recognized one another as “brothers”, children of the same family of God. Jesus himself says, “Whoever does the will of God is my brother. ...” (Mk 3:35). He told Mary Magdalene, “... go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’ (Jn 20:17). The epistle to the Hebrews says that Jesus is not ashamed to call those who are consecrated to God at baptism “brothers” saying: “I will proclaim your name to my brothers ...” (Heb 2:11-12). St. Paul calls Jesus “the first-born among many brothers” (Rom 8:29). So we can easily understand how the custom of addressing each other as “brothers” took place. St. James is addressing the Jewish converts to Christianity living outside Palestine. These may have been suffering persecution from their fellow Jews who were not converted to Christianity. James exhorts these brothers to be patient. They do not have long to wait, he thinks, before the Lord Jesus will return to bless and reward them. It is generally

believed in the early days of Christianity that Jesus will return in glory soon after his ascension. That is the hope that keeps them strong and faithful in bearing persecution. Jesus promises, “Behold, I am coming soon. I bring with me the recompense I will give to each according to his deeds ... yes, I am coming soon” (Rev 22:12, 20). But what does soon mean for God? St. Peter explains, “But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day” (2 Pet 3:8). So we really do not know how soon or how long before the Lord Jesus returns.

Therefore we need to endure our trials patiently as we await the Lord’s return. The farmer is familiar with that kind of patient waiting for the crops to grow and mature. The early (winter) and later (spring) rains have to come for the plants to attain full maturity so that they can be harvested. The farmer is quite certain—as experience has taught him—that his patient waiting will bring a rich reward. “Blessed is the man who perseveres in temptation, for when he has been proved he will receive the crown of life that he promised to those who love him” (Jms 1:12).

“You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand” (8).

The urgency to be patient in trial is reiterated. Suffering in order to be faithful to Christ builds virtue and character (Rom 5:3-4). The spirit dominance required to endure disposes us for a deeper union with God. Love for God increases. Maintaining firmness of heart means a stronger commitment to God. It makes us like the Suffering Servant who says, “I have set my face like flint” (Is 50:7). We have a “determined determination” to be faithful to God’s will no matter what. We can persevere in this endurance because “the coming of the Lord is at hand”. We take it one day at a time, and even one moment at a time if the suffering is intense—for the Lord is at hand, within our reach. Such closeness to him enables us to draw power for us to be able to endure.

We count on his quick arrival to be able to hold on—he brings his recompense with him (Rev 22:12). “For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor 4: 17).

“Do not complain, brothers, about one another, that you may not be judged. Behold, the Judge is standing before the gates” (9).

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory ... he will sit upon his glorious throne” (Mt 25:31), he will appear as our sovereign Judge. He has warned us in his Sermon on the Mount, “Stop judging, that you may not be judged ... why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye? ... remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother’s eye” (Mt 7:1, 3, 5). We must be like the saint who, when he notices a fault in someone, thinks to himself, “There go I but for the grace of God”. At the same time, through self-examination, we realize that we have our own faults and sins to correct. We pray to overlook the faults of others. Noticing theirs reminds us of our own and calls us to repentance. In this way, when the Judge appears, he will be lenient on us. Working to correct our own faults in this way will help us grow quickly in virtue and at the same time overcome our bad habits or vices.

“Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord” (10).

We are told that “arrest, imprisonment, and public disgrace” are the lot of the prophet Jeremiah. He is forced into Egyptian exile by a band of conspirators. There, according to an old tradition, he is murdered by his own countrymen. (See *New American Bible Introduction to the Prophet.*) We are told in the introduction to the prophet Hosea of “the painful experience he underwent in his married life: The prophecy pivots around his own unfortunate marriage to Gomer, a personal tragedy which profoundly influenced his teaching.” The prophet Amos is expelled from the shrine of Bethel because of his threatening

message against Israel in obedience to God. These are just a few examples of what the prophets have to suffer in patience to deliver God’s condemnation of the actions and lives of his people. Jesus himself tells us “Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Mt 5: 11-12). Our NAB footnote states, “the disciples of Jesus stand in the line of the persecuted prophets of Israel. Some would see the expression as indicating also that Matthew considered all Christian disciples as prophets.” Jesus gives this order to his disciples as he is about to ascend to his Father. These are his parting words: “But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Epistle: Romans 1:1-7

“Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God...” (1).

Paul uses his Greco-Roman name to identify himself to the Christians in Rome. Before this he goes by his Hebrew name, “Saul”. (See Acts 13:9 when he begins to use the name Paul.)

He considers himself to be a servant, and even more—a slave of the Christ, that is, the Messiah whose name is Jesus. Paul uses the word “slave” to express his total dedication and undivided allegiance to the Messiah who is the Eternal Word of God made man. His supreme dignity calls for absolute commitment to him and the service of his Gospel. Moreover, that word which he is called to preach, contains and gives those who believe in it eternal life. In this light, each of us, when we understand this truth in its full reality, will be prompted to be the servant and voluntary slave of Christ and “preacher” of his Gospel of

Eternal Life. The discovery of the Supreme Life available in Jesus Christ and his word drives us to proclaim it every opportune moment, in some way or other.

Paul has the privilege of meeting the risen, glorified Christ, who calls him to be his apostle (Acts 9: 3-6, 15). That divine encounter totally and radically transforms Paul into a valiant apostle. In a lightning moment Jesus does for Paul what it takes years for us to accomplish by painstaking effort through the practice of virtue. Henceforth he feels interiorly compelled to proclaim the glory of the Christ whom he has personally experienced. He travels the ends of the known world to acclaim Jesus to everyone, Jew and Gentile, who will listen to him.

Paul is “set apart for the gospel of God”. He is set apart from the rest of the world even from his mother’s womb (Gal 1:15). He is like the prophet Jeremiah who is told, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you” (Jer 1:5). From the moment Saul meets Jesus, he becomes a completely changed man. He becomes Christ’s. He understands definitively that Jesus is divine. The light of his glory transfigures him, Paul, into a son of God. He begins to proclaim “the gospel of God” the Father who sends his Son as Savior of the world: the good news of Jesus who is God’s infinite love manifested in the flesh, given over to us for our salvation.

“[The gospel of God] which he promised previously through his prophets in the holy scriptures” (2).

The good news of Jesus Christ proclaimed by Paul in the New Testament is a continuation and fulfillment of what the prophets proclaimed in the Old Testament long ago. Paul can now proclaim “the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages” (Rom 16: 25-26). Now we can understand more clearly what the prophets are revealing. They look toward the Christ and his saving plan to unite all and save them in his

love. That is why the catechism teaches us that “The Old Testament is an indispensable part of Sacred Scripture. Its books are divinely inspired and retain a permanent value ... (CCC 121) “Indeed, ‘the economy of the Old Testament was deliberately so oriented that it should prepare for and declare in prophecy the coming of Christ’. ... (CCC 123)

“... the Gospel about his Son, descended from David according to the flesh” (3).

From the very beginning when God tells Abraham, “all the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you” (Gen 12: 3) God plans to send his Son to fulfill this promise. God keeps this in mind when he tells David, “I will raise up your heir after you, springing from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm. ... and I will make his royal throne firm forever” (2 Sam 7:12-13). When the angel Gabriel appears to Mary he tells her that the son she will conceive will “be great and ... called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father ... and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Lk 1: 31-33). God is faithful to his promises to Abraham and David when the gospel or good news of his conception by Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit takes place.

“... but established as Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (4).

In verses three and four, St. Paul seems to be citing an early Christian statement or belief. The eternal Son of God becomes human and shares our weaknesses as man. But the resurrection glorifies him. He is thus empowered by the Spirit of holiness to become a life-giving Spirit to sanctify all who become joined to him through baptism. He accomplishes this through his glorified human nature. Through this glorification he has become the transcendent, dynamic source of holiness in the Church. He has unleashed and sent his Holy Spirit to sanctify us with a spirit of holiness. Through his Spirit, the resurrected

Jesus is in the process of sanctifying and raising the whole world to a new level of existence. Somehow, he is accomplishing this holy exaltation despite the opposition of the dead weight of the resisting flesh and man's malicious use of his free will. But in the end, eternal, infinite love, however gradually, will conquer all through this spirit of holiness issuing from the glorified humanity of the risen Christ.

"Through him we have received the grace of apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith, for the sake of his name, among all the Gentiles" (5).

After Paul's encounter with the risen Jesus, he is told, "Go, I shall send you far away to the Gentiles" (Acts 22:6-8, 21). His mission is to proclaim Christ and his redemption through his passion, death and resurrection. Then he will stir faith through his preaching. The people will accept as true what he says and submit to it through the virtue of obedience. In this way they will be united to God through baptism to which their faith will lead them. They will live their lives then according to the word of God through which he has revealed his will. Even the non-Jews, the Gentiles or nations other than the Jews, will live "for the sake of his name": they will live according to God's will, in a way pleasing to him. Their lives will revolve around God, far away from all self-centeredness.

"Among whom are you also, who are called to belong to Jesus Christ" (6).

We, like the Romans, are the ones to whom St. Paul is writing: we are the non-Jews, the Gentiles, who are privileged, along with the Jews, to belong to Jesus, the Christ (Greek) or the Messiah (Hebrew) of God, that is, the Anointed One (English) of God. He is full of God, saturated with the Spirit of holiness, the Holy Spirit, to sanctify us. We belong to him and he belongs to us. Our connectedness is maintained by divine love and its sanctifying grace. We fulfill what was written in the Song of Songs, "My lover belongs to me

and I to him" (6:3). We are joined by a union of reciprocal love. He desires us even more than we desire him, "I belong to my lover and for me he yearns" (Sg 7:11). It is his love for us that causes him to become one of us and give up his life so that we can be united to him in an enduring bond of love. We belong to this glorified, exalted Son of God: Therefore we must be careful to live accordingly. We must not allow any other love to draw us away from him or replace him.

"...to all the beloved of God in Rome, called to be holy. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (7).

We are dearly loved by God like the Gentiles of Rome. That is why he came to us through his Son. We are called to be holy, that is, separated, called to be apart for the worship and praise of God, separated from all sinful, selfish behavior, devoted to God's will and good pleasure. May God's grace and favor be upon us and God's peace fill our hearts. This grace and peace come from the Father through the redemptive work of Jesus, his Son and communicated to us by the Holy Spirit.

THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD — CHRISTMAS

Epistle: Titus 2:11-14

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

The Grace or favor of God has appeared in the Person of Jesus when he becomes human. "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (Jn 1:14). The beloved disciple, who has heard, seen and looked upon Jesus with his own eyes and has touched him with his own hands (1 Jn 1:1-2) feels compelled to add, "and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). John, the evangelist, has the privilege of experiencing the glorious, divine qualities shining in Jesus' human features.

He encounters the grace of God incarnate in his very own person. What wondrous grace! And we have this unmerited privilege as well! Through the virtue of faith we also are able to be with the risen, glorified Jesus into whom we are baptized (Rom 6: 3). We can live in his presence continuously and be sanctified by its radiance. The only disposition we need is purity of heart to be able to live in intimate fellowship with him—just as John the beloved disciple did. Glory to the Father who has made this indescribable grace available to all of us who desire it!

Our epistle continues, *“and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age”* (12).

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus’ redemptive suffering and death cleanse us from all sin when we, in faith, open ourselves to his redeeming love. His great desire is to free us from the sin that stands between us and God to obstruct union and communion with him. We have but to surrender and entrust ourselves to his saving grace. He will then free us to be receptive to divine love and live a life of joyful communion with the living God. Having become God’s own, we then are impelled to do what is good. We become true children of God like Jesus who “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38).

THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH

Epistle: Col 3:12-21

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

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

Christians are God's specially chosen ones. He calls us out of love to be his own special people, set apart and close to him. We are particularly dear to God and loved by him. He loved us into being. We share his very life. This divine life that we share with God through his sanctifying grace has supernatural powers, called virtues. We share divine qualities through them. They incline us to act virtuously, the way Jesus lived. We are motivated to live holy lives both because we are God's beloved children called to be holy and because we are equipped and called by God to do so.

These various moral virtues are enumerated: "Heartfelt compassion": We have an in-depth feeling for and with others' distress and pain, inclining us to want to alleviate them.

"Kindness": We relate to one another in a pleasant manner, with respectful goodness and affection.

"Humility": We have a sense of our own lowliness and dependence on God, which inclines us to serve others and give God the glory.

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

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

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

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

Love informs all of the moral virtues that are mentioned above. They also flow from love (compare 1 Cor 13:4-7). Love holds them together and perfects them. Love is a power that assists these other virtues and brings them to completion. Thus, they are carried out to the

end and to a perfect degree. Love unites us to God: "God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him" (1 Jn 4:16). Selfless-love flows from God, enabling us to know God: "Love is of God; and everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God" (1 Jn 4:7).

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

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

Our hearts are freed from divisiveness when our sins are forgiven by the shedding of Jesus' blood. Now they are at one within themselves and can again experience God's presence as peace. Peace is a divine quality. God reveals his name to Gideon as "Yahweh-shalom", that is, God is peace. Through God's peaceful presence, Jesus keeps our hearts in an ordered tranquility. At peace within ourselves, we tend to radiate that peace to others. Established in the peaceful righteousness of God, we relate rightly and peacefully to one another. Such peaceful righteousness unifies us into one harmonious body, each member caring for the other.

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

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

It is important that we take God's word into our hearts. The word contains and reveals the righteousness of God for our salvation (Rom 1:16-17). We must consume and devour God's word like the prophet Jeremiah: God's word becomes his joy and the happiness of his heart (Jer 15:16). God's word contains and reveals his

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

St. Paul also challenges us to put these sacred words into song so that we can sing to God and one another with words inspired by the Holy Spirit. Thus we will use every opportunity to speak and sing with God’s inspired words so that we can integrate them into our lives. In this way we will use God’s word to praise him in song as the psalmist did: “Rejoice, you just, in the Lord; praise from the upright is fitting. Give thanks to the Lord on the harp; on the ten-stringed lyre offer praise. Sing to God a new song; skillfully play with joyful chant” (Ps 33:1-3).

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

We love Jesus, our Redeemer. We owe our all to him. We are created through him, in his image. And he saves us from our sins that separate us from God. We want to do everything good out of love for him. We direct every thought, word and action toward him, motivated by our love for him. We do God’s will for him, to please him. All is directed to his praise and glory. Thus, we live in communion with him. And he gives eternal value to all of our thoughts and actions. Of ourselves we cannot give adequate thanks to the Father for the endless gifts that are constantly being showered upon us. So we join ourselves to

Jesus “who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God” (Heb 9:14) to give thanks to God. This is particularly true when we are celebrating Mass and joining the Incarnate Lord Jesus and giving thanks to the Father through Jesus’ self-offering in the paschal mystery.

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

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

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

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

The husband is called to the kind of love Jesus has for his bride, the church, in the exercise of his headship. He is wise, considerate and self-sacrificing. He spends himself indefatigably for the love of his wife. The couple vies with each other in loving and sacrificing themselves for each other in mutual self-gift.

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

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

In this way, children learn submissiveness to authority. This virtue of obedience unites them to God from whom they draw divine grace for the practice of virtue. The submissiveness involved helps them overcome pride and self-centeredness.

This virtue unites them to their parents. Thus, they are open to receive the human wisdom which their parents learned from their many years of life’s experience. This union of love with their parents fosters union with God so that they continue to grow in the divine virtue of love.

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

Parents must be reasonable in the demands they make of their children. They must not be abusive and overbearing. Love rather than harshness must prevail. Children need a firm, persistent, loving support in their learning to practice virtue. They need a steady oversight that will help them see things through and accomplish the tasks assigned them. Thus, they will grow in virtue and strength. A sporadic and overly demanding harshness will not accomplish this important aspect of the children’s formation. More than anything else, they need a faithful, strong, loving presence to guide, correct and teach them. They are as yet weak and imperfect while young and still developing. This wisdom and strength required at this time of formation demands great virtue on the part of parents. Their own virtuous performance will be put to the test.

SOLEMNITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD **Epistle: Gal 4:4-7**

“When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman ...”

Commenting on this phrase “fullness of time” Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* wrote: “Speaking of the birth of the son of God, Saint Paul places this event in the fullness of time

(cf Gal 4:4). Time is indeed fulfilled by the very fact that God, in the Incarnation, came down into human history. Eternity entered into time: what “fulfillment” could be greater than this? ...Thanks to God’s coming on earth, human time, which began at creation, has reached its fullness. “The fullness of time” is in fact eternity, indeed, it is the One who is eternal, God himself. Thus, to enter into the fullness of time means to reach the end of time and to transcend its limits, in order to find time’s fulfillment in the eternity of God” (No. 9).

God sent his Son, Jesus, in the same way we come into the world: he was born of a woman, the Blessed Virgin Mary. He was born under the Old Testament law given by Moses. By his suffering and death on the cross Jesus ransomed the people in the Old Covenant who believed in him. We Gentiles were also redeemed by the blood of Jesus. Faith in Jesus led to our baptism, which gave us a share in the divine life. This sanctifying grace lifted us up to a new level of being as God’s adopted children. We are a new creation with supernatural powers enabling us to live in intimate communion with God.

We were anointed by the Holy Spirit who unites himself to our spirit and makes us realize we are God’s children: he inclines us to call God “Abba” Father. Jesus himself taught us this in the “Our Father”. We are no longer slaves in the bondage of sin. We enjoy the freedom of the children of God. We, as sons and daughters of God, are heirs to eternal life. We will possess and enjoy the glorious kingdom of God in heaven.

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Epistle: Eph 3:2-3, 5-6

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

St. Paul is writing to the Christian community of Ephesus from his Roman imprisonment. He is reflecting on his mission to the Gentiles, the non-

Jewish nations. He was called as an apostle to be a steward and administrator of God’s grace to them. He considered this call to be a special grace for him. God’s plan for the Ephesians would be realized through Paul.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Epistle: Acts 10:34-38

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What does this baptism and anointing mean? The Catechism explains, "The baptism of Jesus is on his part the acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God's suffering-Servant. He allows himself to be numbered among sinners; he is already 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.' Already he is anticipating the 'baptism' of his bloody death. Already he is coming to fulfill all righteousness, that is, he is submitting himself entirely to his Father's will: out of love he consents to this baptism of death for the remission of our sins. The Father's voice responds to the Son's acceptance, proclaiming his entire delight in his Son. The Spirit whom Jesus possessed in fullness from his conception comes to 'rest on him.' Jesus will be the source of the Spirit for all mankind. At his baptism 'the heavens were opened'—the heavens that Adam's sin had closed—and the waters were sanctified by the descent of Jesus and the Spirit, a prelude to the new creation" (CCC 536). "Jesus' gesture of allowing himself to be baptized is a manifestation of his self-emptying" (CCC 1224).

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

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

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

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Epistle: 1 Cor 1: 1-3

“Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Sosthenese our brother ...” (1).

St. Paul writes to the Corinthians from Ephesus in 52 A.D. He speaks to them with the authority of an apostle, because like the twelve, he was called by Jesus himself—on the road to Damascus (Acts 9: 1-19). This miraculous event occurred when Paul was a bitter opponent of the followers of Christ. It was only by the initiative of God in Christ that Saul was converted to St. Paul and became a valiant apostle. Paul experienced the glory of God in Jesus. He then knew for himself that Jesus is divine as well as the anointed one, the Christ, who was to come into the world. Paul also knew definitively that God wanted him to be his apostle to announce the

good news to the world. Paul often mentions his co-workers to those to whom he is writing. Here he mentions a certain Sosthenes. Perhaps he was originally the synagogue official mentioned in Acts 18:17 whom the Jews who were opposed to Paul beat up. It may be that it was because Sosthenes favored Paul (and eventually joined him) that he was mistreated by the Jews.

“... to the church of God that is in Corinth, to you who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be holy, with all those everywhere who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours” (2).

The church of God refers to the local church community in Corinth that is part of the universal church. It recalls “the community of the Lord” spoken of in Deuteronomy 23:2-4, the assembly of God’s chosen people. From the very beginning the Christian community considered itself to be God’s chosen people of the new covenant.

By baptism we have been united to Christ and made holy by his sanctifying grace. We have been set apart and made holy for the service of God. We have been called to live virtuous lives, free from sin, and pleasing to God. Our being “in Christ”, signifying our intimate union with Jesus, by its very nature includes a compelling obligation to strive for holiness of life. We are part of that larger Christian community who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus. We are one in believing that Jesus is Lord, that is, divine. We call upon him in prayer just as we call upon God the Father. We are not the only ones who worship Jesus as God—there are many others who do. We ought to be encouraged in seeing that there are many others who recognize the divinity of Jesus. Calling upon his name strengthens our union with him and indicates that we form a living bond with him. We live in a loving communion with him. We form a communion of saints in and with him. By calling upon his name we show our faith and belief that he can help us in our various needs.

The name signifies the person, in this instance, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, Jesus. That name is all-powerful. We ought to call upon that name often. Jesus himself will respond to that call. The angel told Joseph to name Mary's child "Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). Calling upon Jesus will bring us forgiveness and free us from our sins. The name means "Yahweh saves". That is Jesus' mission. So we must speak that name often as we struggle to overcome sin in our lives. The apostles told Jesus when they returned from their missionary journey, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name" (Lk 10:17). The demons fear that name. We must speak it when we sense that the evil one is at hand.

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (3).

Grace and peace are the usual blessings invoked to open or end Christian letters. The word "grace" means favor. St. Paul prays that God's favor which comes from the Father through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit will be given to his people in Corinth. This blessing is effective in that it is uttered in faith which attains God and draws his favor upon the faith-filled who receive it. That favor is conferred in the form of grace which inclines the devout recipients to goodness. The blessing also includes the gift of peace and reconciliation between the people and God.

The blessing of peace supposes sorrow and forgiveness of sins through which a person becomes once more united to God or whose union with God is strengthened. That received mercy is then extended to others through forgiveness and reconciliation. We pass on to others the mercy we ourselves have received from God. This is the blessing that St. Paul requests God to give his people.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Epistle: 1 Cor 1:10-13, 17

"I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose" (10).

St. Paul urges the Corinthians "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" that they overcome their divisions because it was Jesus' fervent prayer and desire that those who believe in him might be one as he and the Father are one in the Spirit. He said, "... I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me ..." (Jn 17:22-23). Their unity would be a sign that they were truly united to Christ and were in his grace. St. Paul wants them to agree in what they say. Perhaps that means that they must lay aside their petty differences or at least that they must agree to disagree in peace and love. But in matters of faith and doctrine there must be no divisions in belief. The truths of faith are the same for all. For example, we all believe that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist.

We can have "the same mind" because we follow the apostolic tradition in our belief about the Eucharist. Our understanding comes from Jesus himself as handed down to us by the Apostles, and our purpose is to glorify God and make known to others the beauty and glory of our holy faith.

"For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters, by Chloe's people, that there are rivalries among you" (11).

This report shows us that St. Paul kept himself informed about the Christian communities that he formed. His challenge now is to help these Christians put their faith into practice by actually living it with love. We do not know who Chloe was. We have no more information about her. St. Paul informs us in the next verse as to what these rivalries were.

“I mean that each of you is saying, ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Kephas,’ or ‘I belong to Christ’ ” (12).

These early Christians were putting their teachers on the same level with Christ. Their allegiance to the particular individuals who brought them into the faith seemed to be more important. We can understand why St. Paul was so disturbed and frustrated by such ignorance. We know who Paul, the Apostle, is. Who are these others? Apollos was an Alexandrian Jew, “an eloquent speaker ... an authority on the scriptures ... instructed in the way of the Lord ... with an ardent spirit [who] spoke and taught accurately about Jesus ... He vigorously refuted the Jews in public, establishing from the scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus”. (See Acts 18:24-25, 28.) Kephas, Aramaic for rock, refers to Peter, the name which Jesus gave to Simon when he first met him (Jn 1:42).

“Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (13).

St. Paul desperately tries to make the Corinthians see the absurdity of their thinking. Christ is the all important one in their faith life. They were baptized into union with him—not one of his apostles. It was Christ who was crucified for them and who brought salvation to them—not his ministers. Such argumentation should once and for all set things straight so that the full attention of the Corinthians would be brought back and centered on Christ.

“For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with the wisdom of human eloquence, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning” (17).

The Corinthians seemed to put too much importance on which minister baptized them—rather than his minor role of baptizing them into Christ, the one who gives them divine life. Paul acknowledges that he has baptized very few of them (1 Cor 1:16). He gave this duty to his assistants. His call rather is to evangelize, to preach the gospel to as many as possible. They must come to know about

Christ. He is the God-man who overcame death and offers divine life to all who believe and are baptized into him.

The kind of preaching Paul does is not one of fancy eloquence—rather his focus is simply on Christ. He won salvation for us by the shedding of his blood. He was crucified out of his great love for us undeserving sinners. This astonishing fact needs no oratorical embellishment to open people’s heart to a grateful receptivity. St. Paul could not get over this undeserving redemptive love that God has for us in Christ. And he never got tired of speaking it out with all his might. This love had saved him from his blinding hate for the first Christians. He experienced this supreme divine love in Christ which changed the angry Saul into a peaceful, love-filled Paul. This grateful love drove Paul to the ends of the earth to proclaim the salvation it brings to all who receive it.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD Epistle: Hebrews 2:14-18

When Jesus, the Son of God, becomes a human being, he shares our flesh and blood. That means he has begun to take part in our human nature with its weakness and limitations. Thus endowed with our mortal nature he is able to suffer death and destroy for us the power of death brought about by the devil when he induced man to sin.

Since Jesus who shares our human nature, passes through death and rises with the glorious resurrected life, he takes away much of our fear of dying. People of the old Testament for a long time did not know about life after death. In that sense, they lived in fear that their life would end forever. They became enslaved to the fear of dying.

In this way, Jesus does not come to help the angels who do not die, but the children of Abraham. These are either Jews who are descendants of Abraham, or Gentile Christians who share the faith of Abraham.

Since Jesus has become like us in every way by becoming human, he experiences our human weakness and much suffering. He is thus disposed to have compassion on us. He is able to be a merciful and faithful high priest who stands before God to intercede for us. By his suffering and death he wipes away, expiates our sins. Since he has been tested through what he has suffered, he is able to help us who are being tested.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Epistle: 1 Cor 2:1-5

“When I came to you, brothers and sisters, proclaiming the mystery of God, I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom” (1).

St. Paul first comes to Corinth around 51 AD (Acts 18:1). He proclaims to them the mystery of God. His secret plan is to save both Jew and Gentile through Christ (Eph 3:3-12). By Christ’s suffering and death he redeems the world. God’s stupendous love in Christ brings us salvation, without any merit on our part. Christ crucified is the cause of our salvation. God’s infinite love decides to do this. We have nothing to do with it. When we think about it we are struck with amazement, that God in Christ would go to such great lengths to show us his love and the evil of sin as well; that he would want to unite us all, Jew and Gentile, in one body in love.

Some translations use the word testimony instead of mystery. In this case God testifies that Jesus is his divine Son as seen in his resurrection from the dead.

The stark reality of Jesus’ suffering by crucifixion because sin is so horrible and because God loves us so much is enough to shock anyone into belief. That startling fact is so amazing that it calls attention to itself. That historical fact alone can convince one and bring him to his knees in adoration and love. It is enough that one proclaims Christ crucified. No further embellishment of words is needed.

“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (2).

Paul is inextricably caught up in love for Jesus crucified for love of him. He just cannot get over such selfless, altruistic love—so undeserving—taken up as he had been in extreme anger and hate for Jesus’ disciples. He can only utter with bewilderment, “He loved me and gave himself up for me” (see Gal 2:20). And would it not be right for all of us to have the same response to Jesus’ crucified love for us? If we would contemplate sufficiently that mystery of love, we too would be in the same kind of consternation over being loved so undeservedly to such an extreme. We, like St. Paul, would just be unable to get over it. The amazement over it all would simply remain with us for days and beyond.

“I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling” (3).

Exactly what is St. Paul referring to here: weakness, fear, much trembling? Is it some form of sickness? He speaks of “a thorn in the flesh” given to him, “an angel of Satan, to beat me.” He boasts of his weaknesses (2 Cor 12:7-10). Is it some kind of debilitating ailment from which he suffers?

This weakness, fear, and trembling may also be the result of some supernatural experience. “Fear and trembling” is a common Old Testament expression indicating awe and a disconcertedness resulting from some supernatural experience. For example, Daniel was terrified by the visions he saw (Dan 7:15), or he fell prostrate in terror (Dan 8:17); on another occasion upon seeing a vision great fear seized the men who were with Daniel—they fled and hid themselves; Daniel became powerless and fell face forward in a faint (Dan 10:7-9). In the New Testament, Zechariah was troubled when the angel of the Lord appeared to him and fear came upon him (Lk 1:11-12). St. Paul himself had such supernatural experiences (see 2 Cor 12:1-10).

“And my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive [words of] wisdom, but with a demonstration of spirit and power” (4).

Human words, no matter how persuasive or flowery and embellished remain in a merely human plain—bereft of the divine. They do not go beyond our finite human sphere of existence. They cannot convey to the hearer the divine Spirit or bring him into contact with the divine by stirring the power of faith that can bring us into the divine presence. They leave the gifts of the Holy Spirit uninspired and inactive. The mystical is left dormant, as if non-existent.

St. Paul, through faith, is in touch with and lives habitually in the presence of the divine. When he speaks, he is drawing power and inspiration from his communion with God. He experiences himself to be “in Christ,” united to and totally saturated with the glory of the risen Jesus. Through a living and personal relationship with our glorious Lord, Paul speaks words of God, words that are inspired, filled with God’s own Spirit to attack and break down strongholds of resistance within each heart. That is why he is so effective in his preaching: he is so thoroughly united and inebriated with the divine. He gives God to his hearers—to those who are disposed to receive them in faith.

Occasionally he may have performed miracles of physical healing or even brought one back to life who has died (Acts 14:8-10; 20:8-12). But the demonstration of spirit and power are principally in the spiritual realms which effectively bring people to faith and communion with God.

“So that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God” (5).

The power of God experienced by Paul’s hearers when he preaches brings the people into a living contact with God through the faith which his inspired words elicit. They experience something beyond the human. Their faith brings them into contact with God. This experience ascertains

for them the truth, that God is indeed a reality beyond the shadow of a doubt.

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Epistle: 1 Cor 2:6-10

“Yet we do speak a wisdom to those who are mature, but not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away” (6).

St. Paul is given deep insights by our glorified Lord regarding truths of our faith. He is able to share these truths with the Corinthians who are spiritually mature. That wisdom is totally different from the wisdom of this age. Those who claim such wisdom are blinded by sin and are not even able to recognize and worship God the Creator—although “his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made” (Rom 1:20). And those who study the scriptures are too influenced by political power and worldly ideas to be able to recognize Jesus as Messiah. They completely overlook the spiritual role that the suffering Servant of Isaiah will have in bringing about the salvation of the world.

Paul has been endowed with “the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God” (Rom 11:33). That wisdom is in such contrast with the cunning wisdom of “the rulers of this age”. For example, Herod the Great attempts to deceive the magi into reporting to him the location of the “newborn king of the Jews” (Mt 2:2). But his cunning is no match for the divine wisdom which warns the magi and Joseph of his murderous intent. Such wisdom of the flesh utterly fails and the ruler of this age who contrives it has passed away. Similarly Herod Agrippa, who exercises his worldly wisdom in having James, the brother of John, killed by the sword (Acts 12:2), passes away, and experiences a horrible death: Even as the crowd acclaim his voice as that of a god. “At once the angel of the Lord struck him down because he did not ascribe the honor to God, and he was eaten by worms

and breathed his last” (Acts 12:22-23). Such is the end of those who live and rule by worldly wisdom.

“Rather we speak God’s wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory” (7).

St. Paul rejoices in amazement for having been chosen “... to bring to light [for all] what is the plan of the mystery hidden from ages past in God ... so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church ...” (Eph 3:9-10). Who could have believed that this hidden mystery of God’s plan would include God’s becoming human? What a surprise! That God would love us enough, or rather, so much that he would choose to be born as a member of our weak and sinful human race, suffer, die and rise for our sake. He wants to show us how to live by actual example: glorification through crucifixion is the wisdom of God, revealed in Christ. (see Gal 5:24). In other words, “Christ crucified and risen is the wisdom of God”. He shows us how to obey and suffer, accepting peacefully an unjust condemnation and death itself. Now we know how to be through his example. Love must prevail at all times—no matter what! He shows us in his resurrection where we are headed—we are glory-bound if only we follow his example and do God’s will in our lives. We can only marvel at God’s loving, mysterious plan which he has kept hidden until our time. We ought to remain stunned in wonder at this fully developed mystery.

God’s desire is to share his glory with us. That is what the unfolding of his plan is all about. We need to be truly a grateful people, humbled that we should be so greatly loved and served by such a generous, loving God.

“... and which none of the rulers of this age knew, for if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (8).

The rulers of this age are the political leaders of the Jewish nation, such as the chief priests and their council, the Sanhedrin. The political leaders

of the Roman government such as Pontius Pilate would also be included under “the rulers of this age”. They collaborated to condemn and order Jesus to be crucified. We can also include the cosmic powers that influence these rulers. These powers are given the names of “principality, authority, power, and dominion” (Eph 2:21). All of the human and angelic perpetrators do not realize that they are playing into God’s hands and carrying out his plan which is for their undoing. They think death will be the end of Jesus and his teachings. Instead, he overcomes death and returns to rule his faithful followers, as well as become the judge of the world, and the king of all. All of his enemies will have to submit to him upon his glorious return. He will destroy “every sovereignty and every authority and power” (1 Cor 15:24). Jesus’ teachings survive his death and are given new life through his resurrection and gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. Now his rule of love is accepted by multitudes throughout the world, to the chagrin of all his enemies. The human rulers are too blinded by their pride and passions to appreciate the refined teachings of Jesus. They are too engrossed in themselves and maintaining their status and power to understand what Jesus is all about as “the Lord of glory”, the word made flesh.

“But as it is written: ‘What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him’” (9).

This quotation seems to be a paraphrase of Isaiah 64:3. St. Paul uses these words to continue to stress how God has kept these wonderful blessings secret until these times. And now they are being revealed and given to those who love God. Only those who are well disposed are capable of receiving this knowledge.

“This God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God” (10).

The spiritual realities that “God has prepared for those who love him” can be known to some degree to the pure of heart who are disposed to know God (Mt 5:8). St. Paul is a chosen instrument to reveal these hidden truths to us. The Spirit of God who dwells in him reveals these deep secrets to him. Those who are pure of heart are also given knowledge of some of these mysteries hidden in God. This is the kind of infused knowledge that God gives in contemplative prayer. (Compare 2 Cor 3:18; 4:3-6.)

SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME Epistle: 1 Cor 3: 16-23

“Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you” (16)?

St. Paul is writing to the Corinthian Community. Each of them has been baptized into Christ (Rom 6: 3). At that moment they are joined to Christ and become a member of his body, and his Holy Spirit begins to dwell in them. They have become a temple of the living God. Jesus promises to give us another advocate to be with us always. He says we will know it, because it will remain with us and be in us (Jn 14:16-17). In the passage we are reflecting on, St. Paul is making his people realize that the whole community is a temple of the Holy Spirit. The temple in Jerusalem, which is still standing in 56 A.D. when St. Paul writes this letter, has been replaced by the risen body of Christ to which the Corinthians are joined—just as Jesus has promised (Jn 2:19). The whole community has become “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph 2:22).

“If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God, which you are, is holy” (17).

The Corinthian community is one body in Christ and has become God’s dwelling place. There is a danger that the factions and divisions being caused by some will cause the body of Christ,

which is his temple to be destroyed. The serious sins against charity will cause the Holy Spirit to leave them. This will destroy the temple of God. We call this mortal sin. The supernatural life dies in a person or community. The one who causes such destruction is liable to judgment and severe punishment in hell. St. Paul is trying to show his people that these hateful factions cause the disintegration of God’s temple. It ceases to be a holy place where love prevails. God’s Spirit can no longer dwell there. Their behavior must become loving and unifying. They must become again the one body of Christ in love and a worthy dwelling place for the God who is love.

“Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you considers himself wise in this age, let him become a fool so as to become wise” (18).

The leaders of different factions vying with each other are acting as worldlings. As if this or that quality in one over the others that would make him the best really matters. It is he who has redeemed them and gives them eternal life. They must imitate him and humbly take the last place as servants of others—just as Christ, their true leader, has done. The cross seems to be a foolish way to attain the salvation of the world. But that is precisely how Jesus suffered to redeem the world. So, too, each one must humble himself and embrace the cross to be purified and be disposed for grace to enter his heart for holiness of life. That is the true wisdom exemplified by Christ.

“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God, for it is written: he catches the wise in their own ruses” (19).

Whether one or the other of their teachers is superior to the others doesn’t really matter. To fight over such human qualities is worldly wise and vain or empty. That serves no purpose. They are spinning their wheels about useless matters. What really matters is Christ. He must become the center of their attention. They must focus on their redeemer, the Lamb of God, who takes away their sins and gives them divine life.

St. Paul quotes Job 5:13 to prove his point, that those who think they are wise by pitting one apostle against the other is foolishness and comes from a false wisdom: these worldly wise have completely missed the mark and made a fool of themselves.

“... and again: ‘the Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain’” (20).

Again St. Paul quotes the Old Testament in Ps 94:11 to bring home his point. The know-alls who think they are wise really lack true wisdom which has eternal value. The cleverness of those who are “wise” about the things of this world is futile and empty.

“So let no one boast about human beings, for everything belongs to you,” (21).

Preferring one apostle over the other is neglecting the fact that they all belong to us. Each has his gift and spiritual insights and particular way of presenting the gospel truth to us. We must not deprive ourselves of the giftedness of those we like less. They also have a grace for us. Let us rejoice that all of the apostles and evangelists belong to us. All of them present Christ to us. He is the one we ought to be mainly concerned about. His messengers are secondary.

“Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or the present or the future: all belong to you” (22).

It is not that we belong to this or that apostle as those who are leaders of the factions claim. It is they: Paul, Apollos, and Cephas (Peter) who belong to us. They are our servants. In light of Christ everything else is for our benefit: The world is ours to use to serve God and grow in holiness; life serves us in making it possible for us to receive God’s saving grace; death finally frees us from this earthly existence so we can enter into the glorious life of heaven this present time of our existence is for us to grow rich in God’s grace by loving and doing his will in preparation for eternal life; the future is ours to prepare for eternity by endless

good deeds. It is ours to become ever closer to God and serve him as we live in his presence. All of these are ours for our good.

“... and you to Christ, and Christ to God” (23).

And we belong to Christ Jesus. He saves us from evil, the devil and eternal separation from God. He has paid a heavy price for us by his suffering and death. He has taken possession of us through the gift of his Spirit who invades us for God. Now we belong to him—and he, Christ, belongs to God: He lives totally for God (Rom 6: 10).

EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME Epistle: 1 Cor 4:1-5

“Thus should one regard us: as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1).

In a way, the Corinthians are passing judgment on Paul, Apollos and Cephas when they claim that one is superior to the other. Christ, not his servants, is the only one that really matters. The apostles and evangelists are mere stewards or managers entrusted with the administration of the Master’s property. They have an inferior position to that of the Master. They are stewards of the mysteries of God. These servants have been appointed by Christ to preach the mysteries of the faith that he has revealed. The truths that they preach come from Christ, they are not their own. The apostles are working for him—not for themselves.

The mysteries hidden from all eternity in God are now being given to the apostles so that they can make them known. To some extent they remain mysteries because the human mind can understand them only in a limited way. In carrying out their mission assigned by the Master, Christ, they are accountable only to him. He, and only he, has the authority to pass judgment on them—not certain ones among the Corinthians.

“Now it is of course required of stewards that they be found trustworthy” (2).

Paul is quite aware of the fact that he is expected to manage the mysteries of God according to the will of his Master, Christ. He must administer the word of God as he is directed. He has been entrusted with a precious mission. He is expected to carry it out exactly as he is told. The truth must be preached as it is revealed, without the least deviation. It must be interpreted correctly in complete faithfulness.

“It does not concern me in the least that I be judged by you or any human tribunal; I do not even pass judgment on myself” (3).

Paul is very conscious of his responsibility to dispense the mysteries of salvation commissioned him by Jesus. It is to Jesus that he is accountable—not to any human being or group of people. He believes that he is doing as directed. He is very conscientious about doing it well. But no one is a good judge in his own case. Only God or his Master, Christ, can evaluate and judge him in all truth. As much as he tries to do exactly as commanded, Paul cannot be absolutely objective in judging himself and his actions. That is why he must leave the ultimate judgment to Christ. No human being can perform that function.

“I am not conscious of anything against me, but I do not thereby stand acquitted; the one who judges me is the Lord” (4).

It is difficult for us to be completely objective when we judge ourselves. We may not be conscious of any wrongdoing or perhaps we are unaware that the task we have been commissioned to do has been done imperfectly. Maybe there has been slight negligence on our part. Only God can evaluate the intricacies involved and judge us in all fairness and objectively. The final judgment pronounced on Paul’s ministry must await Judgment Day.

“Therefore, do not make any judgment before the appointed time, until the Lord comes, for he will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and

will manifest the motives of our hearts, and then everyone will receive praise from God” (5).

We do not have all the facts to pronounce judgment: the inborn weaknesses of a person, the obstacles he has to work against, the extent to which he has used his talents, the genuine sincerity of his heart and all the complexities that make up a human being—only God is equipped to understand and judge a person. He knows us through and through. He even knows the hidden intentions of our hearts. He will reveal the hidden saints among us. All who have done their best to do good and follow God’s will are going to be revealed and praised by God. Meanwhile it is for the Corinthians and us to abstain from judging others—that is God’s business. They and we are totally inadequate to perform such a function. We are often completely wrong in our judgments. We don’t have the facts to properly evaluate the people we want to judge. We may see certain actions and consider them right or wrong. But we do not know the person, his reasons for so acting, or what his intentions are. We must lift our hearts to God and ask him to be merciful to us and them. We must turn all of these spontaneous judgments of ours into a prayer to God to help us think favorably of others. Love must come to inform all of our thoughts, actions, and judgments.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT Epistle: Rom 5:12-19

“Just as through one person sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all, inasmuch as all sinned” (12).

God warns Adam not to eat the “fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden”. He says, “You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die” (Gen 3:3). The command is a serious one, for the penalty for disobeying it is death – both physical and spiritual. By his disobedience Adam has lost all his rich spiritual inheritance that has been given to him. Therefore, he has nothing to pass on to his children. Moreover, the human nature he shares with us through

generations contaminated with an inclination to sin. Since grace no longer assists human nature nor inclines it toward friendship and obedience to God, it is prone to go off on its own as a renegade, far away from God. We are born with a rebellious nature, inclined to disobey God. We are seriously affected by Adam's original sin. It is deeply imbedded in us, so that we tend to behave the way Adam did. We ascribe to Adam's behavior by our own personal disobedience and sins. Instead of being God-centered, we are born self-centered. We ourselves become the center of adoration. Thus we insult God and merit death.

"... for up to the time of the law, sin was in the world, though sin is not accounted when there is no law" (13).

Even before the Old Testament law of Moses is revealed, sin exists. St. Paul explains, "they are a law for themselves even though they do not have the law. They show that the demands of the law are written in their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even defend them ..." (Rom 2:14-15).

This passage explains that the law of God is written in our hearts. When we go against it and sin, our consciences make us aware of our sin and reprimand us. We, therefore, are blameworthy. We sin against the truth revealed in our hearts. But externally, there is no written law to condemn those who sin. The sin is not made explicitly known.

"But death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin after the pattern of the trespass of Adam, who is the type of the one who was to come" (14).

Even if there is no explicit law being transgressed, people continue to suffer and die. The devastating and enduring effects of Adam's sin prevail. Adam is "the type of the one who was to come," that is, Christ. Adam, as a type, points to a future mystery. Adam has affected the condition of the human race in a negative way. Christ, who is to

come later, affects the existence of humanity in a positive way. The ill-effects of Adam's sin on the human race give us a preview and example of how Christ's righteousness is going to affect humanity in a most beneficial way. The orientation to self and sin inherited from Adam by all the human race is counteracted and replaced by the righteousness of Christ which inclines us toward God and his will. Christ's saving death and resurrection have affected the whole world. All who receive that righteousness in the form of sanctifying grace become children of God.

"But the gift is not like the transgression. For if by that one person's transgression the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one person Jesus Christ overflow for the many" (15).

The gift of divine grace and its life-giving power is quite different from ill-effects of Adam's sin. If the penalty of death has been passed on to all people, much more has come to the human race through the gift of grace won for us by Christ. Adam is a mere man so that the effects of his disobedience are far less than the marvelous effects of the God-man, Jesus Christ.

The earthly Adam is replaced by the heavenly Christ who is a life-giving Spirit (see 1 Cor 15:45). The superabundance of life he transmits to us is far greater and more effective than the negative effects of Adam's sin. The latter makes us earthly; the former lifts us to heavenly realms.

"And the gift is not like the result of the one person's sinning. For after one sin there was the judgment that brought condemnation; but the gift, after many transgressions, brought acquittal" (16).

The gift of grace by Christ and the condemnation resulting from Adam's sin are quite different. Adam's sin conveys the punishment of death to all. Christ's saving death and resurrection takes away the sins of the world and makes us right with God. We have but to receive Christ's overflowing life through faith which leads to baptism.

“For if, by the transgression of one person, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one person Jesus Christ” (17).

Adam’s sin has caused death to come into the world. Christ’s obedience to death has brought about superabundant life to all who receive it. The gift of justification which makes us right with God through sanctifying grace is a sharing in God’s divine life. We become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4) and children of God (1 Jn 3:2), living that superior divine life that Adam lost.

“In conclusion, just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so through one righteous act acquittal and life came to all” (18).

Adam’s sin and its effects of loss of grace and death are passed on to all of his children by our being born into the human race. Jesus’ obedience to death, that one righteous act, has brought us forgiveness and freedom from original sin. Jesus’ righteous act has also gained us access to the presence of God and his abundant grace which gives us divine life.

“For just as through the disobedience of one person the many were made sinners, so through the obedience of one the many will be made righteous” (19).

The repercussion of Adam’s disobedience to God’s command has resulted in our being born in a sinful state. But Christ’s heroic obedience unto death and his glorification obtains the gift of righteousness for all of us. For this to happen we must be connected through faith to the glorified Christ and the divine life he offers.

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Epistle: 2 Tim 1:8b-10

“Bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God” (8b).

St. Paul urges Timothy to embrace the hardships involved in proclaiming the gospel. He reminds him of the power he has been given when ordained. He must use that power to stand up for the gospel. He will draw that power from God that resides in him through the sacrament of Holy Orders. He must keep in touch with God residing within him through prayerful awareness. The theological virtue of faith whose object is God is activated by prayerful communion with the indwelling God. This will tap into the virtue of fortitude to enable him to bear with the sufferings and hardships inherent in the ministry.

What St. Paul is saying to Timothy can easily be applied to us who have received the sacrament of baptism and confirmation. We are fully equipped with the fortitude needed to undertake the challenges involved in ministry. For example, you will be tested and tried when you attempt to teach catechism to children who have absorbed the secular culture. They may tend to be distracted and misbehave. They are so accustomed to entertainment that you may find it difficult to keep their interest and attention in proposing to them the teachings of faith. But your strong love for them accompanied by your zeal will enable you to persevere in your task. You are also graced to deal with the difficulties innate to your state of life.

“He saved us and called us to a holy life, not according to our works but according to his own design and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began” (9).

Through Jesus, God saves us from the bondage of sin. He takes away our sins by the blood he shed for us. He forgives us. Thus freed from the enslavement of sin he calls us to live a sinless life, pleasing to God. Living a holy life means being separated from all that is not in accord with God’s will. “Therefore, come forth from them and be separate” says the Lord, “and touch nothing unclean” (2 Cor 6:17). To be holy means to distance

oneself from sin and evil. It also means living according to God's word and his commandments. "As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct, for it is written, 'Be holy because I am holy'" (1 Pet 1:15-16).

Through faith we attain the all holy God and draw power from him to be virtuous and do his will by living according to his word. Thus we conduct ourselves in the way he wants. In this way we live in union with him and acquire some of his holiness.

St. Paul is always careful to teach us that God saves us according to his merciful designs and not because we deserve it through our good works. These good works are the result of his grace given us in Christ (see Eph 2:8-10). God has determined to save us from eternity. His plan has been to save us from the beginning, even before we have done any good deed. He accomplishes this in Christ, that is, by uniting us to Christ by the sacrament of baptism. Through this union with Christ, with whom we can live in continuous communion, we draw divine life to accomplish God's will.

"... but now made manifest through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus, who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel ..." (10).

Jesus manifests himself to us when he is born of the Virgin Mary. By embracing the vulnerability of our human nature he suffers and makes up for our sins and destroys death. By his glorious resurrection he brings us life and immortality. Faith and baptism connect us to Jesus' risen body and person through which we draw divine life from him. This wonderful truth is made known to us by the proclamation of the good news known as "the Gospel".

By overcoming death through the glorification of his human body Jesus has come back from the dead to show us our marvelous destiny of immortality.

The glory he is enjoying after dying is experienced in our own human nature. He brings to light our immortality. If we are united to Christ by grace when we die physically, we pass through death to live an immortal life—we cannot die anymore. On the last day our bodies will be resurrected so that we will enjoy in our bodies the glory that Jesus entered into by his resurrection.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT **Epistle: Rom 5:1-2, 5-8**

"Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1).

The theological virtue of faith leads to baptism through which we are united to Christ our redeemer. He takes away the sin that separates us from God. Sanctifying grace is poured forth into our hearts and permeates our whole body-person making us right with God. We, therefore, have peace with God since the sin that has offended God has been repented of and been forgiven. Now there is no more antipathy between us and God. We are at peace. All is in good order. We are again in accord with God's will. We are good friends again. This is made possible by Jesus' redemptive suffering, death and resurrection. He has made up for our sins and shares with us his glorious new life.

"... through whom we have gained access [by faith] to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God" (2).

It is because of the merits of Jesus, acquired through his redemptive act, that we have been given free access to this grace. The virtue of faith has been infused into us through baptism. This virtue or power enables us to attain the risen, glorified Christ and the superabundant spiritual riches in him. It is such a consolation to realize that we "stand" in this grace and ongoing relationship to Christ Jesus. We are privileged to live in this graced atmosphere and can thus

breathe the divine air of God. It is the beginning of heaven. How blessed we are! All of this is a foretaste of the glory to come. In this experience we are given the hope of glory in heaven. We have reason to hope. We already have an intimation of what is to come (see 1 Cor 2:9-10, 12).

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

The virtue of hope connects us to God and reaches out to him with desire and expectation. We trust in his promises and rely on his strength and the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit (CCC 1817). With this disposition of holy dependence on God, the Holy Spirit pours forth God’s own love into our hearts. Hope is a powerful virtue that causes divine love to be poured into us. This activity of the Holy Spirit within us makes us realize that God is truly present in our hearts. “This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us, that he has given us of his Spirit” (1 Jn 4:13). We are thus strengthened to persevere in the trials of life and overcome the obstacles to our salvation.

“For Christ, while we were still helpless, yet died at the appointed time for the ungodly” (6).

We had been totally incapable of doing anything good to help remove ourselves from our sinful condition when Christ came to our rescue. God had owed us nothing except punishment for rebelling against him. But his love and mercy have prompted him to intervene in our favor at that particular time in history. He has gone to extremes to express his love for us by voluntarily embracing our human condition so he can suffer and die for our redemption. This is what he actually has done. He has actually carried out this plan of his for our salvation!

“Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die” (7).

Dying for another is an extremely costly endeavor! We would be reluctant to give up living for the sake of a magnanimously good person. Our life is our own and we cannot be rightfully coerced to surrender it for another’s. That would call for heroic love—even to save a truly good person.

“But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (8).

The Father gives credence of his love for us by actually sending his Son for our salvation. He is one with his Son in his love for us. For the Son images the Father in his utter love for us manifested in his selflessly dying for us when we were most unworthy of it. He pours out his love for us by his dying for us when we are only worthy of his wrath. No wonder St. John tells us, “God is love” (1 Jn 4:16)! We can begin to fathom the extent of that love if we dwell at length upon it. Sitting at the feet of the crucified Christ as we gaze in awe upon his suffering or dead body can help us grasp, at least somewhat, his fathomless love for us. Only a heart-to-heart communion with him as we look upon him with love can begin to attain some understanding and appreciation of this mystery. The gifts of understanding and wisdom need to be activated by the Holy Spirit for us to receive a contemplative knowledge of it.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Epistle: Eph 5:8-14

“You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light” (8).

When the Gentile Ephesians are still pagans and without God they are living in the darkness of sin and separation from God. They are ignorant of supernatural truths that come from the revelation of Christ. We take for granted the knowledge of heaven, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. We have been enlightened on how to live by God’s word in accord with his will. We have been illumined by the influx of divine life and light when we are baptized and God and his

gifts begin to light up our psyche. We read in John's gospel regarding Jesus, "through him was life and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness ..." (Jn 1:4-5)

The divine life in us lights up our being. We have a knowledge and consciousness that is illumined by the presence of God. We must realize that this light comes from God's indwelling presence and our openness to him in love and his will. The secret to this enlightenment is communion with God through prayer and purity of heart by remaining pleasing to him and being in the state of lovingness toward him. Being one with him in love keeps us open to that light-giving life.

St. Paul exhorts us to live as children of light. Obedience to God's will is the mark of a true child of God. We must be like Jesus who says, "I always do what is pleasing to him" (Jn 8:29). We do what is right; we do his will; we obey his word, his commands. We want to respond to the manifestation of God's will for us the way Mary does. Once the angel tells her what God wants of her, she says, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

"... for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth" (9).

We can understand why this light produces every kind of goodness if we remember what John's Gospel tells us, "In him (the Word or Son of God) was life, and the life was the light of men" (Jn 1:4 RSV). The light proceeds from the life of the glorified Son of God into whom we are plunged and immersed at baptism. The light of Christ both illumines our inner being as well as strongly inclines us toward goodness. The life from which the light flows fills us with the righteousness of the sanctifying grace that comes from the glorious Son of Man.

Truth comes from him as well. He, Jesus, is the Supreme Reality, Truth that illumines our whole being through his Presence in us. Jesus says, "I

am the Truth" (Jn 14:6). He enlightens us regarding what is the truth, what is real, what is lasting and has eternal value. So we cling to the truth. We do what is right which is the truth. The Spirit of truth gives us an understanding of what truth is and enables us to relate to the world in which we live in accord with truth.

"Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord" (10).

We must view every act we do in the light of the truth to see if it is pleasing to the Lord. The truth is revealed to us externally by the Word of God and internally by the light of grace. In this way we can discern what is God's will and what pleases him.

"Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness; rather expose them" (11).

The works of darkness are sinful deeds that go contrary to the truth and God. They are self-centered and cannot prosper the perpetrator spiritually. Rather they harm the one who carries them out. They separate him from God whom they offend. Sinful acts plunge the doer into darkness. They only bring sadness and sorrow. The pleasure that sinful acts might bring are momentary and quickly pass; whereas, the harmful effects are enduring.

Fruitless works of darkness ought to be exposed for what they are so that others might be deterred from practicing them. And those who have fallen into them ought to expose these deeds to the sacrament of penance so that they can be forgiven and healed.

"... for it is shameful even to mention the things done by them in secret" (12).

The shameful actions done in secret should be left undisturbed lest the knowledge of them in detail harm others. The secular world has made the description and imaging of such sinful deeds a literature business. They ensnare many into addictive, sinful habits for which they will be judged severely by God. May they come to realize the moral damage they do so that they can repent.

“... but everything exposed by the light becomes visible” (13).

When we expose the evil deeds done in darkness to the light of Christ we can see their deformity. The beauty of the virtues taught and fostered by Christ expose the ugliness of such shameful vice. Sinful habits are shown for what they are and lose their attractiveness. Rather, the light of Christ enlightens us to shun and avoid them at all costs.

“... for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says: ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light’ ” (14).

When the nature of something is exposed, we see it for what it is. It becomes known and all lit up for us to see it—clearly as in the day. St. Paul seems to be borrowing part of an ancient hymn used at baptism in this passage. It exhorts the adult convert to awaken to the daylight of Christ. He was asleep and in darkness. He was dead to the things of God. Now he is invited to come to the light of day, fully awake to the reality of God. He is called to rise from the dead to the new life and light of Christ. Again, we go back to the theme: “In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (Jn 1:4 RSV).

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Epistle: Rom 8:8-11

“... those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (8).

The flesh and its sinful inclinations prompt us to live lawlessly and disobey God. The flesh inclines us toward every kind of sinful behavior. St. Paul gives fifteen different kinds of sins as examples of the works of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21). And the list is not an exhaustive one. To be “in the flesh” means to operate from that position. The principle of activity is weak, unredeemed human nature. It is self-centered and unconcerned with God’s will. Rather, it is bent on pleasing itself, regardless of what the word of God

states. That is why it is so necessary to go against the desires of the flesh so that we can follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit. That is why St. Paul says, “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:24). We must abstain from fulfilling the sinful desires of human nature until they die out and leave us at peace and free to be good and virtuous.

“But you are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him” (9).

Because we are baptized and have suffered with the life-giving Spirit we are no longer under the dominion of the flesh. It is no longer the principle of our activity. Rather, that which is highest in us, spirit, indwelled by the Holy Spirit, is the source of our activity. We are situated in the Holy Spirit who resides in the core of our being, which is spirit. From this position of spirit dominance we are able to rule over our passions and disordered inclinations. For example, the spirit activates the virtue of temperance so that we are able to control our pleasure passions. We practice moderation in our eating and drinking or in our various forms of recreation. We practice self-control in our sexual powers. Similarly, we activate the fortitude in facing hardship and difficult challenges. We can be patient in trials and embrace suffering when we are afflicted with sickness and physical pain or suffer severe losses. Our own spirit is fortified by the Holy Spirit so that we live as Christ lived. Such holy, virtuous activity shows that we belong to Christ. He operates in us through his own Holy Spirit. We become like him. He lives in us and we live in him. We respond to the movements of his Spirit in us through actual grace. Those who do not have the indwelling Christ and his Spirit are left to themselves. They do not have such a strong impulse of actual grace as we experience impelling us to goodness. They easily become slaves to their passions and the devil and his evil suggestions. Even those who do have the Spirit

may resist him to the point of expulsion so that they become slaves to various passions and desires.

“But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness” (10).

Christ’s presence in us is vivifying. He sanctifies us with his overflowing righteousness. He imbues us with sanctifying grace empowering us to act rightly. We co-respond to his grace urging us to act as children of God—like Christ. We are spiritually, supernaturally alive. Our spirit is enlivened by the Holy Spirit—“... although the body is dead because of sin ...” The body in its unpurified state is dead to the impulses of the Holy Spirit. It has to undergo a thorough purification for it to be able to come alive and become sensitive to the movements of grace. The body must become spiritualized by undergoing trial. The senses have to be cleansed by suffering. Thus the body must undergo a transformation to become sensitive to the movements of grace. Sense must be accommodated to spirit. The body must be redeemed from its deadened state for it to become alive to God. All of this is accomplished through accepted suffering: In the words of St. Paul, “... 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).

“If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through the Spirit that dwells in you” (11).

It is the Holy Spirit who glorifies the dead body of Christ and restores him to life. Just as he has raised Jesus from the dead so too will he raise us up if he is living in us. This is true not only in the general resurrection at the end of the world. It is also true in our present state. By following his lead we embrace the sufferings of life and are

gradually transformed into God-likeness. The Spirit divinizes us and gradually invades our whole being to make us a dwelling place for the glory of God. Then our transformed flesh begins to radiate the glory of the divinity. This is what happens to the saints. “all of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18).

This transformation is made to take place not only through accepting the sufferings of life (2 Cor 4:16-17), but also through “gazing on the glory of the Lord” through prayer. We must keep looking at our indwelling Lord. It is while Jesus is at such prayer that “... his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white” (Lk 9:29). Keeping our gaze fixed on Jesus’ glorified presence in us allows him to pervade our whole person with his glorious light, transforming us into his very image.

PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD’S PASSION

Epistle: Phil 2: 6-11

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

St. Paul presents Jesus to the people of Philippi as a model of selflessness and humility. For this purpose it is believed that Paul is quoting an ancient Christian hymn in this passage. Jesus is “in the form of God” means that he possesses the divine glory and status. But he does not cling to his equality with God. He gives up that eternal dignity and takes on the condition of a slave. Adam grasped at becoming equal to God. Jesus empties himself of his exalted position to become human like us.

Being one with God in union of wills is where true happiness lies. Grasping for anything beyond

that is to lose the essence of happiness. Jesus exemplifies the right attitude. Adam has lost all by his grasping attitude. Christ regains all for us by his letting go of all for the sake of love, love for his Father and love for us.

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

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

“... he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (8).

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

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

The Father responds to Jesus’ self-emptying and humiliation. He glorifies him in the resurrection and exalts him to the highest heaven to reign with him over all creation. He could not endure Jesus’ self-abasement any longer. The Father raises Jesus “far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things” (Eph 4:10). The humble self-effacing Jesus is raised high above all the angels and saints. His obedience and self-annihilation are contrasted with adulation and glorification. His humiliation is superseded by the heights of glorification.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Jesus is Lord!” means that the Father has made Jesus the Supreme master and sovereign ruler of all creation. Jesus in turn uses his power to reconcile the world to God. He is hence-forth in the process of reclaiming the universe to God’s supreme rule so that all creation will submit to

him and give him the glory that is rightly his. “When everything is subjected to him [Christ], then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one [the Father] who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

EASTER SUNDAY: THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD

Epistle: Col 3:1-4

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

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

We want to be with Jesus, who has won complete victory over sin, evil, and death. We seek to be under his gentle rule of grace, peace and love. Jesus is seen as “seated at the right hand of God”

in fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy (Ps 110:1). God himself has made him “Lord” over all creation and has seated him at his right hand. There he enjoys God’s favor. We want to be with him in spirit. He is our beloved Savior. He wants us to abide with him in love where he is with the Father.

Our epistle continues, *“Think of what is above, not of what is on earth”* (2).

Our thoughts must remain with our Lord who sacrificed himself out of love for us and freed us from sin and eternal damnation. Our concern is to be with Christ. Our love will not allow us to leave him. We want to live in his company constantly. Our hearts are welded to him. Even in the midst of various activities, our hearts, if not our thoughts, are on him. Earthly dealings weigh us down. But our spirit lifts us up to live with Jesus, our glorious risen Lord. We will not allow earthly matters to hold us down. We were joined to Christ at our baptism and we will not allow ourselves to be separated from him. He took us to be with him in the presence of the Father and that is where we live. We are careful to spend exclusive time with him in prayer so that, when we must concern ourselves with the duties of our earthly condition, our hearts continue to be united to our Lord and Savior. Earthly life without him would be miserable. We must be on our guard so that the attractions and pleasures of this earth do not ravish our hearts and stir our passions. We can easily be blinded by these passions so that we forget and lose touch with our glorious Lord. We must make a concerted effort to remain detached from such earthly attractions. We must lead disciplined lives to steer clear of them so that our hearts will remain true to our great Lover and Savior.

Our epistle tells us why: *“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God”* (3).

In other words, baptism united us to the death of Jesus. This grace inclines and urges us to die to any earthly desires that interfere with our life in Christ. That grace empowers us to renounce

sinful habits that prevent us from living the life of Jesus. We are called to mortify our passions as a way of life so that they will remain subdued and unable to overwhelm us and precipitate us into sin.

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

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

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

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Epistle: 1 Pet 1:3-9

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (3).

God the Father is to be praised and magnified for his great mercy. He gives us a new birth, a new supernatural existence which we receive at baptism. We have

been given a share in the very life of God. To experience this supreme life through the gifts of wisdom and understanding gives us a living hope, a foretaste of the glory to come. This experience gives substance to the expectation of heavenly glory: The gifts of the Holy Spirit put us in touch with the divinity of the resurrected Christ who has triumphed over death. All of this glorious life is given to us through no merit of our own but through the magnanimous mercy of the Father who has given us his Son. We now share his glorified life.

“... to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you ...” (4).

Since we are children of God, we inherit the kingdom with Jesus the Son of God (Mt 5:3, 10; 25:34). Our glorified bodies will partake of God’s glorious being which is eternal and imperishable. We will shine with the brilliance of his glory (Mt 13:43). The Lord God’s glorious light will permeate our whole being and make them imperishable. We will no longer be contaminated with sin. We will be totally pure, without the least moral defect. Seeing God face to face will be absolutely all-satisfying so that any sinful deviation will be precluded (Rev 21:27). The glorious kingdom is unfading; it proceeds from the eternal God. The holy city comes down out of heaven from God, gleaming with the splendor of God (Rev 21:10-11). It is eternal; it remains undiminished. It retains forever its everlasting beauty.

“... who by the power of God are safeguarded through faith, to a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the final time” (5).

Faith unites us to God who shields us from evil. He protects us, and, through faith, we draw power from him to resist evil in our lives. The moral virtues are thus empowered to relate to the world we live—in such a way, that we avoid sin. This virtuous living keeps us open for Jesus’ final coming at the end of time when the definitive salvation from all sin and evil will be given to us.

“In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials ...” (6).

The presence of the indwelling God experienced through the gifts of the Holy Spirit gives the Christian a foretaste of the supreme joy of that salvation that will later be revealed in all its fullness. This down-payment of that future salvation fortifies God’s people to be able to endure patiently the various trials that come their way. They will remember Jesus’ words and want to be like him when he says, “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Lk 24:26). These trials are very purifying for their human nature and readying them for glory. Their body-persons are being spiritualized through that suffering.

“... so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (7).

The endurance of suffering tests our faith which is made stronger through the fidelity of perseverance. Meanwhile they are being sanctified and purified through the suffering. The spiritualization of their persons is rendering them imperishable. When Jesus reveals himself at his second coming, they will be honored, praised and glorified by him. Adherence to belief, despite the trial of suffering, proves faith to be genuine.

“Although you have not seen him you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy ...” (8).

The faithful to whom Peter is writing have never seen Jesus our glorious Lord with their physical eyes. But the eyes of the heart see and know him. St. Paul explains, “For God ... has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). This knowledge in the heart of the glory of God on the face of Jesus is known through faith perfected by

the gifts of wisdom and understanding. This gives us an intuitive knowledge of the glorified Christ living in our hearts. This knowledge conveys to us how lovable Jesus is. We have good reason to love him because of his Incarnation and Redemption.

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Epistle: 1 Peter 1:17-21

“Now if you invoke as Father him who judges impartially according to each one’s works, conduct yourselves with reverence during the time of your sojourning”(17).

Since God is our loving Father, we do not want to disappoint him by sinful conduct. We love each other too much for that. We do not want to sadden him by disobeying him. We want to do what is right in his sight. Moreover, we will have to face him as judge. He is just and will not overlook our sins. We will have to give an account for any negligence on our part for failure to carry out our Father’s will. We must therefore conduct ourselves reverently while on our way to eternal life. We must be holy and obedient to God. We must avoid sin at any cost.

“... realizing that you were ransomed from your futile conduct, handed on by your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold...” (18).

The sinful conduct of the past is over with now. We are ransomed and freed from such behavior. The price of our redemption is unusually costly. Material things such as money or gold can never earn our deliverance from slavery to sin or free us from the bondage of the devil. We are liberated by someone who has paid dearly for our release.

“... but with the precious blood of Christ as of a spotless unblemished lamb” (19).

It is no mere human—however precious—who has redeemed us, but the Son of God made man. He is the one that Isaiah has spoken of, “Like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth.

Oppressed and condemned, he was taken away ... he was cut off from the land of the living, and smitten for the sin of his people, a grave was assigned him among the wicked and a burial place with evildoers, though he had done no wrong nor spoken any falsehood. “But the Lord was pleased to crush him in infirmity. ... and he shall take away the sins of many, and win pardon for their offenses” (Is 53:7-10, 12). John the Baptist points Jesus out saying, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). He is the one whose blood is poured out to free us from condemnation (Jn: 19:34). Jesus is that “unblemished lamb”, the paschal lamb “without blemish” (Ex 12:5), the one who would be offered in sacrifice (Lv 22:17-19), the one who would pour out his life as blood for us (Lv 17:14). In light of this awesome cost, we cannot return to a life of sin. We must be a grateful, redeemed people who will spend the rest of their lives thanking and glorifying God for the gift of redemption.

“He was known before the foundation of the world but revealed in the final time for you ...” (20).

From all eternity God has known what he was going to do to redeem the world. His wisdom determined how he would liberate the world helplessly entrenched in sin. It would take his precious Son, the unblemished Lamb of God, to free mankind from sin. It would cost his son’s life in sacrificial death to show how evil sin is. It would also demonstrate the Father’s exceedingly great love: that he would go to such great lengths to deliver his dear children.

When the fullness of time arrived, known only by the wisdom of God when humankind would be ready, God manifested his plan to unite all in Christ by sending him to us, born of the Virgin Mary. His coming initiates the final time of man’s religious history until it ends with Christ’s final manifestation at the end of the world. Past ages had been moving toward this period of time. Now it has reached its goal. We are so privileged to live in these times when the Messiah has come to teach us how to live as children of God. By his

resurrection he has clearly shown that the end of humanity is glorification and life everlasting.

“... who through him believe in God who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (21).

Jesus is raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. After Jesus is risen, he plainly shows himself to be alive on many occasions. His disciples see and touch him so that they can see for themselves that he is the same Jesus, their beloved Master, who had been crucified and was now glorified. They eat and drink with him as he remains with them some forty days. He speaks with them and continues to teach them until he is taken up to heaven before their very eyes. (See Lk 24; Jn 20-21.)

The many eye witnesses who experienced Jesus after his resurrection, including some 500 brothers (1Cor 15:6), give us reason to believe. This initial faith leading to baptism brings us into a living experience of his presence in us—just as he has promised: “on that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you” (Jn 14:20). Jesus even goes further and makes this promise: “and whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him” (Jn 14:21). When we love Jesus and live in close union with him by obeying his word, we come to know him living in us so that our faith is strengthened and our hope in him is increased.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER **Epistle: 1 Pt 2:20b-25**

“If you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God” (20).

St. Peter is exhorting those Christians who are slaves to be patient with those who mistreat them, even when they are doing good. The holy fire of pain passing through their whole being is going to purify them. The humiliation suffered from the abuse is going to

lower or annihilate their pride and egotism. Such an experience is going to greatly sanctify them. Jesus says, “By your endurance you will gain your souls” (Lk 21:19 NSRV). Bearing with the evil at hand is very purifying. Accepted suffering possesses a mysterious redemptive power both for the one who endures and for the one who inflicts the pain. It is through such suffering that Jesus is glorified and saves the whole world.

“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps” (21).

We, like the Christian slaves St. Peter is writing to, are also called to patient endurance in times of trial. Christ is our model; he is “the way” to the Father. He is glorified because he suffers patiently the injustices of those who persecute him. He does not deserve the pain inflicted upon him. But he endures it patiently for love of us and for our redemption. We are called to imitate Jesus in the kind of virtuous life he lived. Suffering with him is co-redemptive. Each of us members of his body has our part to play (see Col 1:24). He suffered for love of us. We are called to suffer for love of him.

“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth” (22).

This verse is a quote from Isaiah 53:9. The whole reading of this Sunday’s epistle may be a Christian hymn composed from Isaiah 53:4-12. Jesus is fully human but a divine Person who is totally free from any and all sin. St. John, who has known Jesus so intimately writes, “You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin” (1 Jn 3:5). Jesus himself challenges the Jewish leaders with these words, “Can any of you charge me with sin?” (Jn 8:46). No one can respond with a charge. The epistle to the Hebrews states, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15).

Another translation reads, “Though he had done no wrong nor spoken any falsehood.” Jesus himself proclaims, “I am the Truth” (Jn 14:6). His very nature is absolutely opposed to any untruth or lie. And yet he is made to suffer to make up for our sins. If he willingly suffers for us, although he has done no wrong, all the more should we who need to make up for our sins by patient endurance.

“When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten; instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly” (23).

Jesus perfectly fulfills what the prophet Isaiah has said that the Suffering Servant of the Lord would have to undergo. This part of Isaiah, known as Deutero-Isaiah, was prophesied some six centuries before Christ. It is amazing how accurately the prophet describes the Suffering Christ in 52:13—53:12. The New American Bible footnote says, “An extraordinary description of the sinless Servant, who by his voluntary suffering atones for the sins of his people, and saves them from past punishment at the hands of God. Only in Jesus Christ is the prophecy perfectly fulfilled. Jesus, the Suffering Servant of the Lord, kept his self-possession when he was being mocked and abused. He did not lash back at those who insulted him; he meekly kept his peace. He handed himself over to his Father who willed him to endure his sufferings to redeem us sinners. He did not understand at the time but he entrusted himself to his Father. He put absolute trust and confidence in him while he was being tested to the maximum. And his Father sustained him because Jesus was so intensely connected to him from whom he drew sustaining power to endure.

“He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (24).

St. Paul explains that “Christ ransomed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us,

for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree,’ that the blessing of Abraham might be extended to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:13-14).

Isaiah explains, “yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, while we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins. Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed” (Is 53:4-5).

As a result of his accepting punishment for our sins, we are now freed from sin and able to live in God’s own righteousness poured upon us by the Holy Spirit. Our wounds can be so completely healed that our whole inclination is toward virtue and pleasing God.

“For you had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls” (25).

Our experience of sin assimilates us to the prodigal son who comes to his senses through the painful effects of sin. The good shepherd receives us with joy and now guards us from future evil: “The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack. In green pastures you let me graze; to safe waters you lead me; you restore my strength. You guide me along the right path ...” (Ps 23:1-3).

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Epistle: 1 Pt 2:4-9

“Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God” (4).

Peter is inviting us to come to Jesus, the glorified Christ, who has become a life-giving spirit (1Cor15:45). Although rejected by some, he is a living stone to which we must join and connect ourselves so as to

become living stones in God's temple—like living cells in the human body that communicate life to each other. We must live in communion with this living stone so we can live on a divine level. He contains superabundant life, the divine life of the Father who has glorified him. He has become one with the divine Father through his marvelous transformation in the mystery of the resurrection. And now we have the privilege of being joined to him, becoming one with him ourselves. The world has rejected Jesus as it still does. But he is utterly pleasing to God and most precious in his sight.

“And, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (5).

We form a compact unit with the risen Christ—all of us together become a spiritual temple or house with him. We cluster around him and are intimately united with him and each other. We share in his priesthood through baptism so that we are able to offer spiritual sacrifices with him. Since he purifies us from our sins, we can offer pure spiritual sacrifices to God with him. His Spirit enlivens us so that we become living stones, alive with God's life. Our whole body-persons can now be offered “as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Rom 12:1). Our whole being is consecrated to God by the Holy Spirit, set apart for God as it is, to live for God (compare Rom 6:10). Such a sacrifice is made acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. His marvelous self-sacrifice on the cross makes up for and cleanses us from our repented sins. They no longer stand in the way or contaminate our self-offering. We can now live free from our past sinful behavior—we can now live wholly for God.

“For it says in Scripture: ‘Behold, I am laying a stone in Zion, a cornerstone, chosen and precious and whoever believes in it shall not be put to shame’” (6).

Peter quotes Isaiah 28:16 to show how Jesus fulfills that prophecy as he becomes, through his resurrection, the cornerstone of the spiritual temple of the Christian community. Jesus was so meek and humble as he submits himself to his Father's will in the extreme humiliation of accepting the shameful death of a criminal in crucifixion. Jesus' total self-emptying attitude is particularly pleasing to the Father who takes extraordinary delight in him. Believing in Jesus unites us to him so that his own goodness and love flow into us, enabling us to be like him in pleasing the Father. We too become pleasing like him to the Father.

“Therefore, its value is for you who have faith, but for those without faith: ‘the stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’” (7).

That stone is extremely valuable for us who have faith because it is really the risen Christ to which faith unites us. Through this union we draw divine life to enliven us with the supernatural life of God, the eternal life of heaven. This passage is a quotation from Psalm 118:22. What seems undesirable to human beings and therefore rejected has become most precious through having been chosen by God. This is our Jesus who shows us the way to be pleasing to God by becoming like him.

“And ‘a stone that will make people stumble, and a rock that will make them fall’. They stumble by disobeying the word, as is their destiny” (8).

The author again quotes Isaiah (8:14) to show how Scripture prophesies the rejection of the messiah when he comes among his people. The world stumbles upon him as they would a stone because their ways are so different from his. His life and teaching are in perfect accord with God's will and mind. But their lives are totally opposed to them. We should not be surprised, therefore, that so many reject Jesus and his teachings. Human nature is wayward from God's straight path as lived and expressed by this anointed one.

The selfless love of God that he has demonstrated is the opposite of the selfish ways of the world. And yet he comes to give us the divine life that inclines us to be loving and selfless as he. But we need to struggle to change our selfish ways to conform to his loving ways. Prayer is needed for us to live in communion with our risen Lord to draw power from him for holy living.

"... but you are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises' of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (9).

We are not among those who have rejected God's anointed one. We are the ones chosen by God like Israel of old (Is 43:20). We are privileged to have been chosen before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4). "... the people", God says, "whom I formed for myself, that they might announce my praise" (Is 43:21). Having experienced God and the life of the Spirit, we cannot but make it known to others.

God tells ancient Israel, "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation" (Ex 19:6). Now Peter tells us that we, too, all the baptized, participate in the priesthood of Jesus. We call this the priesthood of the laity, distinct from the ministerial priesthood established by Jesus at the Last Supper. The priesthood of the laity empowers them to offer the sacrifice of Jesus along with the ministerial priest who has the power to make present Jesus' sacrifice on the altar. They can also offer themselves and spiritual sacrifices to God in union with Jesus' sacrifice. This remarkable gift enables God's people to make a continual offering of themselves to God in union with Jesus' unique sacrifice which gives theirs infinite value.

We are a "holy nation" set apart for God. This is how God originally explained it to the chosen people, "Therefore, if you hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people,

though all the earth is mine. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation" (Ex 19:5-6). We, the new Israel, are consecrated to God through baptism. We have been set apart to serve and love him.

God has called us from the darkness of paganism and its sinful, immoral living, leading to various forms of enslavement, to live in the joyful light and freedom of the children of God.

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Epistle: 1 Pt 3:15-18

"Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope" (15).

We must live in communion with our glorious Lord Jesus who has come to dwell in our hearts with the Father and the Spirit (Jn 14:15-17, 23). We ought to be continually aware of his indwelling presence as glorified Lord so that we can give him constant due reverence. His human nature has been deified. He is God in his glorified flesh. We must bless and praise and thank him. We must adore and worship him. "For in him dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily" (Col 2:9). "For in him were created all things. ... all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:16-17). He suffered and died and rose again in our human nature so we could be forgiven, sanctified and able to live the divine life and life forever in heaven. We owe him total love and adoration. We ought to be able to give a reason for our hope for eternal life to anyone who inquires. "The sacred Scriptures ... are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus". It is "useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:15, 16). For example, if Christ's human nature, which he assumed in common with us, could be glorified and overcome death, so can ours. Jesus himself

explains, "You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. ... I am going to prepare a place for you ... I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be" (Jn 14: 1-3).

"... but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame" (16).

God is love. If we live in communion with him, he will fill our words and sentiments with his divine love to touch the hearts of those to whom we explain our faith that gives us hope for eternal life. That love in our hearts will contact and affect them. They will want what we have. They will experience the peace coming from our hearts that surpasses understanding (Phil 4:7) and will want to become like us. All of this will come from us because of our intimate union with our indwelling Lord Jesus who affects us by his glorious presence.

This kind of loving, respectful attitude will convince those who have the wrong impression about us that they have been mistaken in their judgment. They will be embarrassed to realize that we have the truth and that they were wrong. Our transformation into loving persons by our prayerful union with Jesus and his Spirit will convince them of their error.

"For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that be the will of God, than for doing evil" (17).

If we suffer for doing good we are like Jesus our model. We are in union with God who sanctifies us through our sufferings, just as he did Jesus. Suffering in compliance with the will of God is sanctifying. It purifies us from sin. We patiently endure because of our union with God who sustains us with his love. He empowers our self-possession so that our union with God is strengthened and brought to perfection. As we suffer we cling to God with all our might and so our love for God is strengthened. The converted criminal who was crucified with Jesus is rapidly sanctified by his accepted suffering

and is guaranteed paradise by Jesus that very day. The unrepentant criminal rejects his sufferings and his reviling attitude toward Jesus shows him to be confirmed in evil. His sufferings only cause his sinful behavior to increase.

"For Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God. Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the spirit" (18).

Christ suffered for our sins once because as divine person his sacrifice is of infinite value. He has redeemed the whole world of sin by his sacrifice of love. He gives us the example of suffering mistreatment for the very ones who were crucifying him. Not only does he forgive his persecutors, he prays for their forgiveness because they do not know what they are doing (Lk 23:34). He, the righteous one, suffers for the sake of the unrighteous. Such is his love to exemplify the kind of love that is in God and how we are called to love evil men. This wholly selfless love, so foreign to us, leads us to God for more of the same kind of love to be like him and become true children of God.

Jesus is put to death in the flesh. He dies as a true human being. He shares the same human nature that we have. He dies the same way we must die. Yet his human nature is glorified and overcomes death. That very nature of ours in Christ is transformed and becomes immortal and spiritualized, capable of living the eternal life of heaven with God. Baptism joins us to the risen Christ. We receive that same divine life in him that overcame death empowering us to do the same. This is the reason for our hope that we must share with others. Jesus has been brought to life in the spirit not only for himself but for all of us who have been joined to him through faith and baptism. He has become "a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45). To participate more fully in this life of the spirit we also, must die to all sinful behavior so we can live for God. That is what our baptismal grace is always urging us to do.

ASCENSION OF THE LORD (7TH)

Epistle: Eph 1:17-23

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

St. Paul prays for the Ephesians. He asks Jesus’ Father, who is the source of glory, for a spirit of wisdom so that his people may penetrate the inner depths of God. In this way they can come to know him personally. The gift of wisdom enables us to know and experience God as he is in himself. St. Paul prays that God may reveal himself to the Ephesians so that they will have a living knowledge of God – not just facts and truths about him. Thus they would be drawn to live in communion with the divine Persons and be strengthened in their faith.

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

The heart is considered to be the center of one’s being, spirit, from which thinking, willing and feeling proceed. Thus the intellect and will, elevated by faith and love and perfected by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, enable us to experience God in the core of our being. It is in this way that the “eyes of our hearts” are enlightened with an experiential knowledge of God.

This knowledge of our glorious indwelling Lord gives us a foretaste of heavenly glory: Such knowledge stirs hope and expectation of the future glory that will be ours in heaven. This is what we are being called to. Our full inheritance is already perceived initially through our mystical knowledge of God’s indwelling presence. We can thus know somewhat “the riches of glory” that is contained in our inheritance among the saints and angels, the holy ones.

“... And what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might” (19).

The knowledge of our glorious Savior living in us helps us to understand the “surpassing greatness” of God’s power for us who believe. Jesus has been crucified, died and buried. Yet God’s life-giving power divinizes him and gives his dead body the fullness of divine life which he now communicates to us. We need to reflect upon this marvelous miracle worked by God’s creative power. Now Jesus’ glorified body transmits and sustains that divine life through sanctifying grace to all the children of God throughout the world. God does this by exerting his divine power through Jesus, the mediator between God and us.

“... which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens” (20).

The greatness of God’s power can be seen in his raising Jesus from the dead and exalting him at the Father’s right hand in the heavens. The resurrection, ascension and glorification are seen as one great continuous act of the Father. This act does not stop there but extends to all his children who, through baptism, have been raised with Christ. We have been plunged into the paschal mystery with Christ. This glorious power has been brought to earth so that we can share in it. Through faith and prayer we draw this power available to us in the sacraments of the Church.

“... far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come” (21).

Jesus’ exaltation places him above all these angelic groups both good and evil who are thought to rule the world. He exercises supreme power at God’s right hand in fulfillment of Psalm 110:1: “The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Take your throne at my right hand, while I make your enemies your footstool.’” (Victorious kings put their feet on the prostrate bodies of their enemies.) These angelic spirits have no more power over human beings. Nothing interferes or stands in the way of God’s plan for humans in union with Christ. These words would

impress upon the Ephesians the glorious position to which they have been called in Christ. He who is above all created beings both visible and invisible is for them. He is at their disposal to conquer all evil forces.

“This age” refers to the one we are presently living in, the Messianic age. The age to come refers to Jesus’ return in glory when the present age of history will end and the future age of eternity will begin. Jesus’ sovereignty will stand forever. Even in his human nature he is divine and is above every other name or being as he reigns in union with the Father.

“And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the Church” (22).

This phrase, “put all things beneath his feet,” alludes to Psalm 8:7. The psalmist marvels over the fact that God has crowned Adam and his descendants as rulers over his creation (Gen 1:26). St. Paul sees Jesus as the New Adam, the head of a new mankind. He has brought to completion Adam’s role to dominate the visible world. Jesus extends it to the invisible world of angels as well. “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:25-26).

The whole of creation will then bow before a man, who is the Word-made-flesh. What a marvelous dignity this gives to us! We pray that we can measure up to our calling: to image God as Jesus does.

Above and beyond Jesus’ dominion over all creation, God has made him head of his Church. In this headship, his dominion has reached a supreme and glorious height. We are privileged to have the exalted Son of God as our head. He knows the way and leads us to eternal life. Moreover, he joins us to himself, who is divine. He shares his divine life with us. We can live in intimate communion with him and through him with the Blessed Trinity.

He endows all who are united to him with his own spiritual riches and lifts us to a new level of being. This is far more important than his being ruler over

all creation. We are brought into his own divine world and are given a share in his own divine life through his headship of the Church.

“... the Church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way” (23).

The Church is the receptacle of Jesus’ glory. All of his spiritual riches have been poured into her. The Church is closely united to Jesus as his body. All of us united together, the Church, receive Jesus’ fullness. As St. John tells us, “From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (Jn 1:16 RSV). Jesus fills the whole universe and sustains it with his divine presence. He also fills the Church with his inexhaustible spiritual riches. That means he communicates to all of us who are receptive to his love the divine life and the supernatural graces that are his. His special presence in the Church through the sacraments makes him available to us. It is through the Church, his body, that he can be readily encountered and received. He speaks to us through his word; he gives himself to us in his fullness through the Holy Eucharist and the other sacraments. It is in that sense that the Church completes Christ. It is through the Church, his body, that Jesus extends himself to all of us. He reaches out and touches us by means of his body, the Church. It is through her that he is present in time. In her, he becomes visible, audible and touchable.

PENTECOST SUNDAY (VIGIL AND DAY)

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

Our epistle begins with, “*No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’, except by the Holy Spirit” (3b).*

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

Faith is the testimony of God revealing himself through the Holy Spirit within our heart. Jesus

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

Our epistle continues, “*There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit*” (4).

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

“... *there are different forms of service but the same Lord*” (5).

The fact that these different gifts are used by different individuals to serve the needs of the church should not be divisive. Rather, since they come from God, who is love, they tend to unify and spread goodness and love. To serve is to love and to reign with God.

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

“... *there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone*” (6).

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

Thus, the words, “*To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit*” (7), are clearly realized.

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

Epistle: 2 Cor 13:11-13

“Finally, brothers, rejoice. Mend your ways, encourage one another, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you”. (11)

Rejoice—God has given himself to us! The glorified Christ has poured out his Holy Spirit upon us in the mystery of Pentecost.

All three Persons of the Blessed Trinity have come to live in our hearts. The God of joy has come to live in us to fill us with his heavenly happiness: the bliss of heaven. Our love for him prompts us to open our hearts to receive him with joy. He has favored us immensely. He has lavished his love upon us. His abundant spiritual gifts have made us entirely new: these spiritual gifts enable us to know God personally and experience the joy of his presence. We have reason to rejoice. Only sin and selfish living can mar our joy and obstruct the joy of God’s self-gift to us.

“Mend your ways ...”—St. Paul exhorts us and the Corinthians to change and correct whatever in our behavior is improper. We must image Christ, the true image of God, in every way. We need to be true to our calling as images of God. We model ourselves on Jesus, who has come to restore the true image of God in us. It is important that we constantly look upon Jesus and meditate daily on his life and words so that we conform our behavior to his. We must live in communion with him to draw grace-power from him to become more and more like him. Only his grace can thrust us forward to be like him. This is a supernatural endeavor beyond our natural ability. We depend on him to carry us forward and draw us to himself.

“... encourage one another ...”—we need each other. We must influence each other towards the good. Love impels us to want to lead others to the immense spiritual good that we have discovered. We cannot keep it for ourselves. We must share with others. The charity of God in us overflows unto others. We desire to communicate to others the joy that has been given to us. For example, we will want to tell others who are suffering the tremendous value of accepted suffering. It is through such accepted sufferings that Jesus has saved the whole world from sin and damnation. He keeps the wounds of crucifixion even after he is glorified to show us the victorious power of our sufferings. He invites us to join ours to his to save the world in its precipitation to self-destruction.

“... *agree with one another* ...”—If we have the mind of Christ and conform our lives to his teachings, we have common ground to stand on. There are so many truths that we hold in common; we have so much about which to agree. When it comes to personal likes we accept each other in our differences. Variety gives color and beauty to life. We can be different and still be happy together. Ultimately, we can at least agree to disagree. We are different—that’s all. You are you and I am myself, both secure in who we are. Individual differences in taste are quite acceptable.

“... *live in peace* ...”—God is peace (Judges 6:24), and communicates his peace to us (Jn 14:27). He takes away all our sins and enables us to live in loving communion with him. He is eternal stability. He holds us together so that we are not easily upset or “fly off the handle”. We, therefore, in our peaceful union with God, exude peace in our very persons. We accept what is, what must be. Outside disturbances do not take away our peace. We can more easily in this way live in peace with others.

“... *and the God of love and peace will be with you*.”—our loving and peaceful disposition, as we have explained, are made possible by God’s presence. He fills us with his love and peace. Unless we reject the gifts, God will remain with us. In fact, we may become aware of his presence as the source of that love and peace that fill our hearts.

“*Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the holy ones greet you*.” (12)

“*Greet one another with a holy kiss*.”—This holy kiss is a gesture of affection and a sign of Christian brotherhood. It is a common expression of friendship in the near East. It is something like our handshake as a friendly greeting. St. Justin, converted to Christianity in 130 A.D., relates that the holy kiss was a regular part of the worship service in his day. We express this sign of mutual respect and love in the liturgy even to this day by a holy embrace or handshake.

“*All the holy ones greet you*”—Sometimes “the holy ones” is translated “Saints”. All who are in the state of sanctifying grace are holy and saintly to some degree. In that sense all who are in God’s grace are saints. God himself is the great Saint. We share his holiness through sanctifying grace.

St. Paul is apparently writing from Macedonia. The people there send their greetings to the Corinthians. They, as we, are united as one body by the grace of God.

“*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the holy Spirit be with all of you*.” (13)

“*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ*...”—This Trinitarian blessing, which is one we use at the beginning of Mass, begins with the grace of Jesus. All grace comes from the Father, through the Son in the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the one who has obtained God’s grace and unmerited favor by his suffering, death and resurrection. This grace originally comes to us at baptism and makes us right with God. Through faith we continue to draw this divine grace from the risen Christ. This happens, for example, when we receive in faith the blessing given at the beginning of Mass. We receive this grace when we lift our hearts in prayer or when we read the word of God.

“... *and the love of God* ...”—The blessing that is being invoked upon the Corinthians and us is the divine love. God is love itself. (1Jn 4:16) It is the Father’s love that has caused him to send his Son to earth to save us from sin and damnation. (Jn 3:16) This is the merciful love that is being called upon and conveyed through the blessing.

“... *and the fellowship of the holy Spirit be with all of you*.”—It is the Holy Spirit who brings about fellowship. He is the one Spirit of God given to each of us and unites us in himself to form one body of Christ. “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ... we were all given to drink of one Spirit” (1Cor 12:13). Through love we are in interpersonal communion with each other. We have fellowship by relating to

each other personally in the state of love. We communicate that love of God in us to each other. Our relating is far more than simply socializing. We communicate love and God to each other!

THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF JESUS

Epistle: 1 Cor 10:16-17

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (16-17) ...

The cup of blessing is the name given for the third cup of wine drunk at the Passover Supper. This is the cup that Jesus has blessed and consecrated at the Last Supper. “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” he said (1Cor 11:25).

The consecrated wine in this third cup of blessing is changed into the blood of Christ which seals the New Covenant. When we drink from the cup we are actually given a share in the blood of Christ. Jesus tells the apostles at the Last Supper to do what he has done. “Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me”, he commands (1 Cor 11:25). In this way he ritualized his suffering, death and resurrection which he is going to undergo in the paschal mystery the next three days. His sacrificial death and the shedding of his blood are made present again on the altar. When we consume the consecrated wine, then, we participate in the blood of Christ. This is the blood that is “shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26: 28). If we receive the precious blood with contrite hearts, we are cleansed of all our sins and made new again. When we receive Jesus’ blood, we are thoroughly inebriated with the divine life. Our whole persons are permeated with the glorious, divine life of Jesus. We participate in everything that he is. We are spiritually enriched beyond measure.

“The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?”

“The breaking of the bread” (Acts 2:42) is an expression for the Holy Eucharist, the body of Christ himself. The ritual of the Last Supper has made present and possible the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise: “the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world” (Jn 6: 51). Participation in his glorified flesh gives us supernatural life—the very life of God. “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ... Just as the loving Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me” (Jn 6:54-55, 57). We are sustained in the spiritual life by God himself. He himself is our food, our sustenance. It is imperative that we remain connected to him by a continuous communion with him. Thus, we draw divine power from him to practice the virtues and live holy lives.

“Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (17).

A loaf of bread was consecrated in the early Church and given to the faithful. Each one received a piece of the loaf, the Body of Christ. In this way, the many communicants were joined together and united to Christ and to each other. The Eucharist solidifies the unity of those who receive it. They are more firmly joined together to each other and to Christ. They become more completely the one body of Christ. The Eucharist builds the Body of Christ. The recipients are united to Christ and among themselves, and become one in the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ. Baptism incorporates us into Christ’s risen body. Holy Communion strengthens and cements this union.

The Catechism states that “Holy Communion augments our union with Christ. The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus ...” (CCC 1391).

“Communion with the flesh of the risen Christ ... preserves, increases and renews the life of grace received at Baptism” (CCC 1392).

“The unity of the Mystical body: the Eucharist makes the Church. Those who receive the Eucharist are united more closely to Christ. Through it Christ unites them to all the faithful in one body—the Church. Communion renews, strengthens, and deepens this incorporation into the Church, already achieved by Baptism. In Baptism we have been called to form one body. The Eucharist fulfills this call ...” (CCC 1396).

All of these sanctifying effects could never take place if the Eucharist were a mere symbol of the body and blood of Christ. The Eucharist is truly the glorified Body and Blood of Christ. That is the only way its beneficent effects could be achieved.

SAINTS PETER AND PAUL, APOSTLES **Epistle: Galatians 1:11-20**

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

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

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

St. Paul looks upon his strenuous work in proclaiming the good news of Jesus as a valiant athlete who has totally exerted himself to win the event in which he has competed. He is like a savage boxer who has won the fight, a fast and hard runner who has won the race. The Lord

tells Ananias regarding “A man from Tarsus named Saul,” “I will show him what he will have to suffer for my name” (Acts 9:11, 16). Paul has done just that. He has accomplished his task in a mighty way, and he has “kept the faith”. He has proclaimed Jesus as Messiah and fulfilled the task he has been assigned. He has faithfully taught the true faith received from Jesus and proclaimed it in conformity with the other apostles (Gal 2:1-2, 6-10).

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

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

Those who have won athletic contests are awarded with a crown of laurel, pine, or olive. Those who struggle to do God’s will and proclaim Jesus and the salvation he offers will also receive a crown, but in their case, the crown of righteousness. This is true for all who long for Jesus’ appearance on the last day. As just judge he will reward his faithful followers with the crown of righteousness. Sanctifying grace is our participation in God’s own holiness or righteousness. It is the beginning of eternal life. (See Jms 1:12.) The crown of righteousness in eternal life is the life of glory in heaven.

On earth, persevering in the trials of life requires virtue and growth in love of God. Such virtue is crowned with God’s righteousness (see Rom 5:3-5). This righteousness in heaven becomes glory, which is the crown of heavenly life. Through the light of glory we see God – face to face! Thus, the difficulties braved to live a holy life are fully rewarded. St. Paul assures us, “For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor 4:17).

“At my first defense no one appeared on my behalf, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them!” (16).

How lonely St. Paul must have felt when everyone deserted him! This occurred at the preliminary hearing in his second Roman trial. No one is present to defend him. He knows how Jesus felt when his friends fled and left him all alone. His desire, as a true saint, is that their abandoning him be not held against them. Who are these people? Earlier in this letter, or epistle, St. Paul tells Timothy, “You know that everyone in Asia deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.” But he is not without some supporters. He says, “May the Lord grant mercy to the family of Onesiphorus because he often gave me new heart and is not ashamed of my chains. But when he came to Rome, he promptly searched for me and found me ...” (2 Tim 1:15-17).

“But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the proclamation might be completed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was rescued from the lion’s mouth” (17).

Paul feels Jesus’ ongoing presence and protection. Jesus has told him, “Do not be afraid. Go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you. No one will attack you or harm you ...” (Acts 18:9-10). On another occasion Jesus stands by him and says, “Take courage. For just as you have borne witness to my cause in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness in Rome” (Acts 23:11). Jesus is true to his word, he so assists Paul that he is able to give witness that Jesus is Messiah even before those who are trying him. He uses the moment of his defense to proclaim the Gospel to his judges and to all who are present. To proclaim the Gospel before the imperial court is an ultimate triumph for Paul in his mission to the Gentiles. This brings him to the height of his career and a supreme witness to Christ. To be rescued from the lion’s mouth is a metaphor for deliverance from extreme peril. (Compare Psalms 7:2-3; 17:12; 35:17; 57:5; 58:7.)

“The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen” (18).

St. Paul is fully confident that Jesus will deliver him from every evil threat. He has had many narrow escapes (2 Cor 11:23-27) – and the Lord has preserved him from death on these occasions. When his mission is finally finished, the Lord will bring him safely to his heavenly kingdom. On that occasion death will be a great good—for at last, Paul will be freed from the burden of facing hostile crowds to be with his Lord forever in heaven — that was his great longing: “For to me life is Christ, and death is gain...I long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Phil 1:21-23).

Paul gives glory to God and to Jesus, his Lord, for everything. That is his whole life — to give glory, praise and honor to Jesus who has delivered him from his former life and has given him such joy.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Epistle: Romans 8:9, 11-13

“You are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him” (9).

The flesh refers to that which is weak and sinfully inclined in human nature. The flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to the law of God nor can it. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom 8:7-8).

The Romans who have been baptized, like ourselves, are no longer guided by the sinful inclinations of the flesh. Instead we have been endowed with the Holy Spirit who dwells in us and guides us according to the law of God (Jn 14:15-17, 26; 16:12-15). St. Paul explains, “For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2).

The impulse toward good and the will of God given by the Holy Spirit is stronger than our inclination toward sin and disobedience. This supposes that we frequent the sources of the Spirit such as the sacraments, the word of God and prayer. We draw power from the Holy Spirit through living in close communion with our risen Lord. The risen Christ is the source of the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit, the Catechism tells us, who has marked us at baptism with the seal of the Lord (CCC 1274). “Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark (character) of his belonging to Christ” (CCC 1272).

“If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you” (11).

The Father raised Jesus from the dead through the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. So, too, he will raise us up by the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. Jesus’ body that has been raised from the dead at the resurrection is the same kind of human body that we have. We can be confident that the Father can and will raise our mortal bodies on the Last Day just as he raised Jesus’ body. He exercises that power through the Holy Spirit. That same Holy Spirit is the one who vivifies us with the divine life. We must give him free play in our lives so he can sanctify us and invade our whole being with the presence of God.

“Consequently, brothers, we are not debtors to the flesh, to live according to the flesh” (12).

We do not owe the sinful inclinations of the flesh obedience. On the contrary, we must resist them. We must follow instead the promptings of the Spirit. The Spirit and the flesh are opposed to each other. St. Paul mentions fifteen different works of the flesh, for example: impurity, hatred, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, drinking bouts and the like. We can see clearly from these examples why we must not obey the desires of the flesh that produce these sins. “I warn you”, St. Paul concludes, “that those who do

such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:21). The Spirit does not abide in those who do such things. And without his presence we cannot be glorified and shine with the saints when the Lord Jesus returns (Mt 3:43).

“For if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (13).

To live according to the flesh is to live in opposition to the Spirit. The “flesh lusts against the Spirit” (Gal 5:17); and God is Spirit (Jn 4:24). The flesh is blind to the ways of the Spirit. It moves in the direction of self, away from God. The self replaces God as a person’s central focus. The self is then in opposition to God. Its sinful actions are serious (Gal 5:21), and cause a person to disinherit the kingdom of God. Such actions are mortal sins; they kill the life of grace and cause the Holy Trinity to depart from living in a person. (Compare Jn 14:23.)

It is for this reason that we need to practice spirit assertiveness. We must assert that which is highest in us and most like God, spirit, to oppose the evil inclinations of the body. In a sense, we must put them to death by abstaining from carrying out their movements so that they will die unfulfilled. For example, the virtue of prudence would have us avoid fulfilling the desire to watch certain immoral scenes on television or computer. We devote ourselves to the reading and study of Holy Scripture until the desire ceases. Another example, we avoid meeting with worldly friends who tend to speak in vulgar language or impure jokes so we can live in the presence of God and not become distracted by their irreverent ideas, and the images through which they convey them. Freedom from these enable us to walk in purity of heart and communion with God. We are then able to live on a higher level—the level of Spirit in a divine atmosphere. This divine life is the highest obtainable on this earth. Through it we are able to enjoy the fruits of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5:22-23).

**FIFTEENTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME
Epistle: Romans 8: 18-23**

“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us” (18).

St. Paul knows the pains of suffering—they are in no way light: he tells how he is beaten: he receives on five different occasions forty lashes minus one; he is also beaten with rods; he is stoned and left for dead; exposed to cold, hunger, thirst, sleepless nights and endless toil; shipwrecked on three occasions, he suffers from various dangers many times, and imprisonments. (See 2 Cor 11:23-28.) He speaks of “always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus” and “constantly being given up to death” (2 Cor 4:10-11). Yet Paul experiences even in this life how his sufferings are disposing him for the invasion of divine glory. He puts it this way, “Therefore, we are not discouraged; rather, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to what is seen but to what is unseen; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor 4:16-18).

St. Teresa experienced some of that heavenly glory. “One day,” she writes, “when I was at prayer, the Lord was pleased to reveal to me nothing but his hands, the beauty of which was so great as to be indescribable ... A few days later I also saw that divine face, which seemed to leave me completely absorbed ... But there is such beauty about glorified bodies that the glory which illumines them throws all who look upon such supernatural loveliness into confusion ... I will only say that, if there were nothing else in heaven to delight the eyes but the extreme beauty of the glorified bodies there, that alone would be the greatest bliss ...” (*Life*, Ch. 28, E. Allison Peers). Sufferings are temporary and come to an end. But these accepted sufferings gain for us an eternal

weight of glory that will never end.

“For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God” (19).

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, states, “The Church ... will attain her full perfection only in the glory of heaven. Then will come the time of the restoration of all things (Acts 3:21). Then the human race as well as the entire world, which is intimately related to man and achieves its purpose through him, will be perfectly re-established in Christ” (Ch. 7, No. 48). Thus, the council speaks of “the restoration of all things,” and “the entire world ... will be perfectly re-established in Christ.” The epistle of St. Peter states, “But according to his promise we await new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13). No wonder, then, “Creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God.”

The material universe is intimately bound up with human beings. Just as it has shared the fall of man so too will it participate in his rise and transformation when Jesus returns (Gen 3:17-18; Is 35:1-2).

All of creation will be glorified to be on the level of the children of God. We will be able to enjoy its beauty and God himself who will inform all of nature. Just as through the gift of knowledge we can find joy in God who is in creation, so then the glorification of nature will be much more obvious and our joy in it much greater.

“... for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope” (20).

The *Navarre Bible* comments, “The futility to which creation is subject is not so much corruption and death as the disorder resulting from sin. According to God’s plan material things should be resources which enable man to attain the ultimate goal of his existence. By using them in a disordered way, disconnecting them from God,

man makes them into instruments of sin, which therefore are subject to the consequences of sin” (Rom 8:19-21).

Exegetes tell us that the following is a difficult part in the verse to explain. The best we can figure is that God is “the one who subjected it.” For example, God told Adam, “cursed be the ground because of you!” (Gen 3:17). But God also placed that instinctive hope in creation for its renovation.

“... in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God” (21).

Decay and corruption will no longer exist even in lower creation. The material world will also share in some way in our immortality and incorruptibility. In some way what is said of us can also be said of all creation, “... we will all be changed. ... For that which is corruptible must clothe itself with incorruptibility, and that which is mortal must clothe itself with immortality” (1 Cor 15:51, 53).

And what is this glorious freedom of the children of God? St. Paul explains that our bodies will be raised incorruptible, glorious, powerful and spiritual (1 Cor 15:42-44). We will no longer be slaves to corruption, deformity, weakness and the limitations of the natural body. Ours will be like Jesus’ own glorified body. He can appear and disappear at will. He can become invisible. He can go through closed doors and rise through the enclosed stone tomb. He can make himself difficult to recognize and then be quite recognizable to his disciples. He can mysteriously acquire fish and bread and prepare a picnic lunch for his apostles ...

“We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now” (22).

Creation shares the general frustration and unhappiness of man. Man abuses creation in endless ways. Forests are destroyed and completely

annihilated. The wild animals are brought to extinction. The earth is polluted. Domesticated animals are abused. All of creation is suffering and groaning in pain as it awaits redemption and restoration to its former beauty and proper use.

“And not only that, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (23).

The firstfruits in agricultural terms refer to the very first part of the crop that is reaped at the beginning of the harvest season. It is the guarantee and down payment or pledge of what is to come. When offered to God it is a sign that the whole harvest is consecrated to him.

As we await with yearning the full redemption and liberation of our bodies and persons through glorification, we already begin to experience it through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. He gives us a foretaste by his redemptive presence of the glory that is to come. This is particularly true the more we attain purity of heart and clarity of a mind singularly devoted to God. Our experience of the indwelling Spirit (Jn 14:15-17) is a pledge of the total glorification that awaits us and for which we long.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME Epistle: Romans 8:26-27

St. Paul, in the inspired words of Holy Scripture, tells us, “*The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness*” (26).

We are so weak, we cannot even make an act of faith such as “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). We believe that Jesus is God because the Holy Spirit is in our hearts testifying to Jesus’ divinity. (See 1 Jn 5:10). The Holy Spirit enables us to experience this conviction and realize its truth.

Furthermore, “The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8:16). The Holy Spirit inspires us to realize not only that Jesus is divine, but also that we are children of God. We know that we are God’s children because “God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out ‘Abba Father’” (Gal 4:6). We experience ourselves through the Holy Spirit to be children of God. Prayer for us, then is that of a child calling with love upon its beloved Father.

Similarly, “We do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings” (26).

Such “inexpressible groanings” convey to us with what power and urgent pleas the Spirit intercedes to God on our behalf. If we open ourselves during prayer to the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts, he can take us beyond ourselves into intimate communion with God. We need to be conscious that we are intimately united to the Holy Spirit living in us and advert to his presence when we pray. He brings us into communion with God.

St. Paul urges us, “with all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit” (Eph 6:18). We must try to surrender our hearts to the Holy Spirit so he can intercede for us and even take over and become our prayer. In this way we pray “in the Spirit”, intimately united to him, who takes our prayer into the presence of God to plead our cause.

**SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME
Epistle: Rom 8: 28-30**

“We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

If we love God, our intention will always be to please Him. Our decisions will be in conformity with His will. Thus, our lives will be lived in union with God. We will live

according to His plan. And, His plan for us is to share His glory with Him in heaven. That is His purpose for us. This was His plan for us from all eternity (Eph 1:4). In order that His plan might be accomplished, God destined us “to be conformed to the image of His Son so that He might be the first born among many brothers”. We were created in His own image. But that image has been distorted through original sin. Through baptism into Christ, the image of God (2: Cor 4:4), we are renewed in the image of our creator (Col 3:10). And by living according to the example and teaching of Jesus, that image is being perfected in us by the Holy Spirit through a gradual transformation into Christ-likeness (2 Cor 3:18). That image will reach perfection through glorification. Thus the resurrected Jesus will be the first born among many brothers. (Rom 8: 29). It is for that reason that God calls and justifies (sanctifies) us through baptism. His great desire is to share His glory with us. We have but to accept and cooperate with His plan for our eternal happiness. This is God’s ultimate goal for us. By His wisdom, power and love for us, He will order everything that happens to us for our good. He will turn even the bad things that happen to us into spiritual profit. God will use the very sufferings we must endure in life to bring us to perfection—just as He has done for Jesus (Heb 2:10). He will use even the mistakes we make to wiser and sanctify us. He will also use the weaknesses in our character to make us holy—if we but learn to lean on Him for strength. God can even turn our sins to our benefit by prompting us to a deeper conversion. We have but to entrust ourselves entirely to Him and He will bring us to glory.

**EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME
Epistle: Rom 8: 35, 37-39**

“What will separate us from the love of Christ?”

No earthly trial or difficulty can separate us from the love Christ has for us. For that love is infinite, far greater than any earthly threat. And that love has been extended to us and invaded our hearts. God demonstrates His infinite love for us when He gives up His only Son to redeem us from the grips of sin and evil (Rom 8: 32). Jesus, the Son, expresses that same infinite love for us when He becomes human and embraces the extreme suffering of crucifixion to save us from condemnation; Now glorified He is at the right hand of God interceding for us (Rom 8:34). “In all these things (anguish, distress, persecution, famine and danger to life itself) we conquer overwhelmingly through Him who loved us” (Rom 8:37). Like the martyrs, we are victorious over all of these trials “because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). We possess that very love of God in our own hearts which moves us to love God heroically—like St. Paul has done. He has been totally enraptured by God’s amazing love for himself and for us in Christ. That amazing love has kept him going tirelessly. He has been empowered by that endless love to endure every kind of suffering and trial imaginable. (See 2 Cor 11: 23-28) But they have never broken Paul. For example, when in Lystra he is stoned, dragged out of the city and left for dead; but he gets up and re-enters the city (Acts 14: 19-20). The astounding love of God in Jesus sustains Paul. He is utterly grateful that God’s powerful love has saved him from his sinfulness (Tit 3:3-6), and he can not stop proclaiming to all the world that same love that God has for each of us in Christ. God’s boundless love for Paul and for us sinners is totally reciprocated by Paul’s unrestrained love for God in Christ. It topples over every obstacle

that gets in his way. As St. Paul puts it, “the love of Christ impels us” (2 Cor 5:14). That is what God’s love in Christ is capable of doing in each one of us.

**NINETEENTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME
Epistle: Romans 9:1-5**

St. Paul has “great sorrow and constant anguish in [his] heart” For his fellow Jews. Their failure to accept Jesus as Messiah greatly saddens him. He has experienced the saving power of Jesus whose very presence has totally transformed him from an angry, hateful person to a peaceful, loving one. After experiencing the heavenly bliss of encountering Jesus in glory, however precious the law in which Paul has been so thoroughly steeped and schooled in, he now, in comparison, considers it all rubbish (Phil 3:7-11). Paul wants so much for his own people to experience the joy of meeting Jesus as Messiah as he has and be changed from an obstinate, hating people to a docile, loving one. He has longed to see his fellow Jews shift from their own self-righteousness as he has, to the very righteousness of God that depends on faith, and to know Jesus and the power of his resurrection (Phil 3:9-10). Yet, despite such extreme effort and expenditure of energies, Paul has been unable to bring his people as a whole to see and accept Jesus as the Christ that they have so long awaited. He almost wishes that he could be accursed and separated from all his share of happiness in Christ if that would bring Israel to the salvation he has experienced in Jesus. Paul speaks of them as “my kinsmen according to the flesh”. Though they have been very bitter against him on so many occasions he speaks with personal endearment toward them. St. Paul feels that way toward his fellow Israelites just as God continues to love them.

He then proceeds to enumerate the spiritual benefits with which God had blessed the chosen

people and through them all of humanity. These are tokens of God's irrevocable commitment to Israel whom he loves above all other nations (Deut 14:2). Let us look at each of these benefits.

- 1) *"They were Israelites"*—a title of honor and divine favor (Ps 114:2).
- 2) *"Theirs the adoption"*—They became God's children: "Israel is my son, my first-born" (Ex 4:22)
- 3) *"the glory"*—God manifested his glorious presence to them at Sinai, in the tabernacle in the temple of Jerusalem (Ex 24:16; 40:34).
- 4) *"the Covenants"*—the enduring love-relationship that God made with the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex 2:24; 19:5; 24:7).
- 5) *"the giving of the law"*—It was a great privilege for God to give this holy way of living to Moses for his people (Ex 20:1-17; Deut 4:7-8).
- 6) *"the worship"*—the liturgy according to the law of Moses in the tabernacle and later in the temple of Jerusalem: This involved the priests, the sacrifices, and the feasts. While other nations were worshipping and serving false gods, the Israelites were serving the true God the way he dictated (Lev 1-9 etc).
- 7) *"the Promises"*—were those concerning the Messiah (Deut 18:15-18; 2 Sam 7:11-16; Lk 1:30-33; Acts 3:13).
- 8) *"theirs the patriarchs"*—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who were so favored by God (Gen 17:1-19:26; 23-25; 28:10-22).
- 9) *"and from them, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is over all, God blessed forever"* (Lk 1:26-33).—The Messiah is their own flesh and blood—he is their crowning gift. This was the greatest privilege of the Jews. Jesus is not only "over all" as mediator; he is God, blessed forever.

We can see, then, why Paul's heart is so filled with sadness and regret after all these blessings, God's chosen people as a whole, would not accept Jesus, the glorious Son of God as Messiah—despite the fact that Paul has preached him with such forceful certitude and conviction. What a terrible disappointment it is for him.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Epistle: Rom 11:13-15, 29-32

St. Paul is writing to the Gentiles, that is, converts to Christianity from non-Jewish nations. For God has commissioned him as apostle to these pagan nations. He delights in this ministry. The apostle's hope is that when his fellow Jews, whom he dearly loves, see how many Gentiles are accepting the Gospel, they too will be moved to accept it and be "saved". For the Gospel will enlighten them further about the truth. St. Paul wants to save his fellow Jews from so many useless external practices and from the arrogant self-righteousness of the Pharisees. He desires the righteousness of God for them, which comes from faith in Christ Jesus.

The Jews' rejection of Jesus as Messiah results in the reconciliation of the world, that is, all other people than the Jews. They have been given an opportunity to become God's friends again through the forgiveness of sins. The unbelief of the chosen people has opened the way for Paul to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. This has made it easier for them to accept the Gospel when it is separate from the Jewish culture. Paul hastens to preach the Gospel to the whole Mediterranean world hoping that the Gentiles' acceptance of the Gospel will cause the Jews to be jealous and finally accept Jesus as Messiah. When they do accept him and his Gospel, the result will be "life from the dead". In other words, the conversion of the Jewish people will be such a magnanimous favor from God that it can be compared with the final resurrection at the end of the world. This is not to say that there is a necessary connection between the conversion of Israel and the Second Coming. But their belief in the Gospel will bring about their passage from death to life; they will receive the glorious life of their risen Lord and Messias.

“For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (29).

God’s choice of Israel cannot be altered or called back even with its present unbelief. The reason is that God has favored it because of its famous patriarchs (28). Therefore, God will always have a respectful remembrance for his choice. His concern for their offspring will not change.

The Gentiles, who have been once disobedient, are shown divine mercy when the chosen people refuse to submit themselves to the Christ and his Gospel. The Gospel is then revealed to the Gentiles. In the same way, we can be sure that God will show similar mercy to the Jews whom he first called: They will see and accept the good news of their Messias.

“For God delivered all to disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all” (32).

All, both Jew and Gentile, have been sinful and disobedient to God. God has given them free rein to do as they please. Thus they will experience the evil, damaging effects of sin and be ready to receive his saving mercy: “Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more” (Rom 5:20). Such is the graciousness of our God and his overpowering love and mercy.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME Epistle: Romans 11:33-36

After reflecting on God’s plan to save both Jew and Gentile, St. Paul concludes his thoughts by extolling the infinite wisdom of our merciful God. He expresses his amazement and awe at the unsearchable and incomprehensible design of God to save humankind. The manner which God used to reach out to the world is beyond our ability to grasp. He rejects the Jews momentarily for their hard-heartedness and receives the Gentiles, but with the purpose of eventually taking in the Jews also.

St. Paul begins his boundless wonder at God’s providence in this way, *“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways” (33).*

He marvels at the depth of the riches of God’s mercy, wisdom and knowledge as he goes about fulfilling His desire and plan to save the people He loves—both Jew and Gentile. Paul is full of admiration and praise for the way God’s providence plans to save all of them.

God passes his “inscrutable judgments” on Jews and Gentiles as history unfolds to make them realize the misery to which their sinfulness leads them. Thus, they have come to see through experience their need for divine assistance. God’s ways are beyond our understanding. We can’t figure out to our satisfaction how He deals with intricate human beings. The complexity of free will and the innate tendency to good as well as to evil make it impossible to understand how God deals with them as he mercifully guides them to salvation.

“For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his Counselor?” (34).

St. Paul paraphrases Isaiah 40:13 in combination with Job 41:3, 11: *“or who has given him anything that he may be repaid?” (35).*

Thus he shows that God owes no one anything, regarding either His planning or for His gifts. Everything proceeds from His own gracious plenitude. He needs to consult with no one. Everything is grace. No one can earn the gift of salvation or claim that he has a right to it.

St. Paul summarizes everything by proclaiming the sovereignty of God: *“For Him and through Him and for Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen”*

Everything comes from God, the Father, for He is their Creator. It is for Him that all are created so that in the joy of His presence we can give

Him glory and praise for all eternity. And St. Paul further explains, “There is ... one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are and through whom we exist” (1Cor 8:6). It is through God’s wisdom, His Word and Son, that He has created us, the world and everything in it. To Him—through whom we came to exist and continue to be sustained moment by moment—to Him be glory and honor with the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, be all glory and honor forever and ever. Amen.

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Epistle: Romans 12:1-2

“I urge you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship” (1).

With the authority of an apostle, St. Paul exhorts the faithful in Rome: Since God has shown so much mercy to both Jew and Gentile (11: 30-32), they must respond to his infinite love expressed in his merciful forgiveness. But how can they reciprocate? They must express their gratitude and love by offering their bodies as a living sacrifice. We become living sacrifices by dedicating ourselves entirely to God’s service. We express this service to God through our bodies by good works toward our neighbor. We abstain from all forms of evil and sin.

We devote ourselves to God by carrying out our duties of state in obedience to His will. We master our bodies and keep them ready and alert for service by holy discipline. We practice holy temperance in dealing with food, drink, leisure and recreation. We practice fortitude by applying ourselves to hard work. We guard our five senses from self-indulgence. We avoid near occasions of sin. Every moment of our lives is dedicated to God. In this way we offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. The total

consecration of our lives in this way is spiritual worship. God is the center of our life. Everything we do is for Him. Our lives are a living sacrifice for Him. There is nothing left of the selfish self.

St. Paul continues, *“Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind ...”*

“This age” means “this world” (RSV) and “the standards of this world” (*Good News Bible*). St. Paul tells us not to conform ourselves to our contemporary world. This teaching is like that of St. John who tells us “not to love the world or the things of the world ... For all that is in the world [is] sensual lust, enticement for the eyes, and a pretentious life” (1 Jn 2:15-16). St. Paul tells us not to conform ourselves to this world because the world consists of all that is hostile toward God and alienated from Him. In this light we are advised to view the media very critically and take great care lest we be contaminated by its worldly understanding of life which is contrary to the Gospel. Instead, we must be “transformed by the renewal of [our] mind”.

We must acquire Jesus’ outlook on life by looking upon Him with love and taking in His attitude and disposition. We meditate on His life, His words and actions. We learn to conform ourselves to His way of thinking and behaving. Thus we gradually become like Him. We surrender to His Holy Spirit who transforms us into the image of Jesus. Jesus’ great desire was to please His Father and do His will (Jn 8: 29; 4:34). We, too, then begin to center our lives on God and His will. We are inclined to “discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect”.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Epistle: Gospel: Romans 13: 8-10

“Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another” (8).

Why are we always in debt to love? “God is love” (1 Jn 4:16). We are made in His image and likeness. Our very nature as children of God inclines us to love, love God and all other creatures, especially humans. When we live in love, we live in communion with God. That is the highest life possible on earth: The life of love. If we live the life of love, we show that we are united to God. “God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him” (1 Jn 4:16). That is why St. Paul urges us to love. That is what our nature as children of God calls us to do and to be. We are always in debt to love. But it is a happy indebtedness. Love fulfills a deep spiritual need. Our soul, as an image of God, craves to love and be loved. Moreover, as “God so loved the world [of people] he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16) who in turn has given himself utterly in self-sacrifice for us, so we, too, are called to imitate him and do likewise. This debt to love never ceases. But it is our greatest good, our joy and our peace.

How is love expressed? When we love one another, we are careful not to hurt or harm each other. “Love does no evil to the neighbor” (10). We are also solicitous about fulfilling any need we may see in others. We do for them what we would like them to do for us. We do good to them by acts of service. We show signs of affection or concern for their well-being. This will often require self-sacrifice.

St. Paul explains why love for one another is so important: “for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law”. He is speaking here about the Law of Moses. He goes on to quote certain commandments from the second part of the Decalogue to exemplify: “you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not covet”

and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this saying... “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (9). Love avoids violating any of these commandments. Loving others as we love ourselves assures our respect and relating properly to them. We love chastely and respect the life and property of each. Jesus expresses in a similar way the all-importance of love when he says, “The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments” (Mt 22:40): to love God with our whole heart, and neighbor as ourself. Love is the basis for our keeping all of the commandments. That is how, at least implicitly, we express our love for others. St. Paul tells us further, “... love is the fulfillment of the law” (10).

We would not need laws to govern our relationship to people if we truly possessed the virtue of charity in its fullness. For love would inspire and guide all our thoughts, desires and actions to do good to others. We would love and do as we please. For our pleasure would be to please God and love one another. This supposes that we are intimately united to God in an abiding love. We would then have an endless source of love with which to love others. The ability to love others, then, demands that we first love God with our whole heart. Our union with Him connects us to infinite Love Itself. And love would constantly overflow upon our neighbor through us. In this divine embrace, we would be happy to pay our debt of love to all.

EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS Epistle: Philippians 2:6-11

“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”

The people complain against God and Moses in the desert. They are disgusted with the manna. In punishment, the Lord sends among the people serpents, which bite the

people so that many of them die. They then admit their sin and ask Moses to take away the serpents. At God's command, Moses makes a bronze serpent and mounts it on a pole; and whenever anyone who has been bitten looks at the bronze serpent, he recovers (Nun 21:4-9).

Jesus sees the bronze serpent as an image of his own crucifixion and the healing it will bring to a rebellious world. It shows the value of his being raised up on the cross: those who look on him with faith can obtain salvation.

Implied here, is the deadly and destructive nature of sin. The guilt of sin is like the pain of the biting of a fiery serpent; its infectious power is like the diffused venom of the serpent. The devil is the old serpent whose temptations are like fiery darts, which wound the sinner with fiery and deadly bites.

The word "lift up" refers both to being lifted up on the cross and being lifted up into heaven. In Jesus' return to his Father in heaven, the cross is the first step on the ladder of the ascension. Only when Jesus is raised up can the Spirit of which he has spoken to Nicodemus be given. Moses' serpent is an example of salvation coming through being raised up on a cross.

Looking at this in greater detail: In John, being lifted up refers to one continuous action of ascent: Jesus begins his return to his Father as he approaches death (13:1) and completes it only with his ascension (20:17). It is the upward swing of the great pendulum of the Incarnation corresponding to the descent of the Word which became flesh. The first step in the ascent is when Jesus is lifted upon the cross; the second step is when he is raised up from death; the final step is when he is lifted up to heaven. His being lifted up will lead to the gift of eternal life to all who believe in Jesus. The eternal life is the life of the sons of God, the life begotten from above, the life begotten of the Spirit. When Jesus will be lifted up in crucifixion and ascension, his communication of the Spirit will constitute a flowing source of life.

for those who believe in him (7:37-39); (See Fr. Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible*, Doubleday & Co., Inc., Garden City, New York, 1966.)

We see the importance of faith in today's Gospel. The word "believe" is mentioned five times. It is first mentioned in this very first verse, "Everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." Faith connects us to Jesus enabling us to draw divine life from him. Through faith, we attach ourselves to Jesus' person and become involved with him; we enter into communion with him; through faith, we begin to participate in the eternal life of God, which is in Jesus. Faith also accepts as true what God has revealed. Faith is a movement towards the person of Jesus; it is giving oneself to him and accepting him as He has revealed himself, that is, as the only, beloved Son, generated from the Father.

The eternal life given to those who believe is the supreme life of God; it refers to the quality of life we receive in communion with the divine; it is much more than endless human life; it is the divine life of the Trinity personally known and experienced through grace perfected by the gifts of wisdom and understanding. We will enjoy its fullness in heaven, but the clean of heart already have a foretaste of it on earth (Jn 17:3; Mt 5:8).

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life."

It is God's infinite love that prompted him to give and deliver to death his only begotten Son (infinitely loved, coequal with himself) for the salvation of the world. The Greek word used for this kind of love which comes from God is agape: it is the perfect, constant, unconditional love of a Perfect Being who is Love; it is love given even when undeserved; this is the love of God.

The magnitude of God's love is matched by the magnitude of his gift. He has given us his Son in the Incarnation and he has given him over to death in crucifixion. Jesus is the manifestation

of God's love for the world. Thus the breadth of God's love is the world of mankind for whom Christ has died; and the depth of his love is his most precious gift, his only beloved Son, whose life, especially his death, reveals how much God wants to share his own eternal life with mankind. It was an act infinitely costly to God. He did not spare his own Son, but surrendered him for us all (Rom 8:32), echoing the story of Abraham and his son. John stresses the gratuity of God's love, extending even to this extreme.

The prevenient, merciful love of God takes the form of sending his only-begotten Son into the world and of delivering him up to death in expiation for sin. The Son is the most cherished and precious gift that God can bestow upon the world. Sending his Son into the world and giving him over to crucifixion is the profoundest mystery of God's love; his expiatory death is the supreme manifestation of the Father's love.

The world is sinful mankind which has turned away from God. It is the world far from God and yet profoundly longing for him and sensing its need for redemption, that world is the object of God's infinite love and mercy. God has manifested that love in an historical act, the mission of the Son and his delivery to death. The only-begotten is also the uniquely loved. It is this Son, most intimately united to him and supremely loved, his own and only Son, that God has given to the world to snatch it from destruction.

The purpose of God's loving act is the giving of "eternal life", which is supremely important and indeed indispensable since it saves men from "perishing". Destruction already hangs over man, and he can only escape from his catastrophic situation by believing in the Son of God.

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him." Though alienated from God, the world is not evil in itself; it remains the object of divine compassion. The only purpose of the sending of the Son of God into the world is to

save it. God wills the salvation and not the destruction of the world, the well being of all men, and not just that of a privileged few.

"Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

Believing in Jesus or in his name, that is, in his divine Person, unites us to him; thus united to him, we share his divine, eternal life; we, then, are saved from perishing; for he has OVERCOME DEATH. Moreover, his life empowers us to live according to God's will, according to the truth enunciated by God's word; thus living as God's children in loving intimacy and obedience to our Father, we are cherished by God—not condemned.

Willful unbelief is its own condemnation because it rejects the only source of salvation. Jesus is the one mediator between human beings and God. We must be connected to him through faith by which we draw divine life from him. He is the only one who can unite us to God, the Father, and the eternal life. If we refuse to accept Jesus' Person and his words of revelation through faith, we condemn ourselves to perish.

The person who does not believe is not condemned to death by God subsequent to his unbelief; for God has indeed offered him eternal life; he is condemned already in his unbelief. The perishing of the unbeliever is not a punishment for unbelief inflicted by a ruthless God; it is the self-determined end of a person who does not believe.

Jesus has been sent into the world to bring it eternal life; willful unbelief makes him the occasion of condemnation; the unbeliever passes judgment on himself. Just as eternal life already begins in this world for the person who has decided for Christ, so does the unbeliever already stand separated from God and condemned.

Judgment takes place here and now; it is determined by faith or unbelief in Jesus. God for his part has no desire to judge, but only to save. Judgment is only due to the refusal of people to believe in the Son of God. Judgment is only the dark, reverse side of God's act of love and redemption when unbelief draws down judgment upon itself: unbelief becomes self-condemnation. Judgment has taken place by the very act of non-belief. Whether and how long a person remains in the sphere of death and condemnation depends on himself. Perhaps intercessory prayer will give him the light to see and the strength to repent and accept salvation through faith.

The decision taken by the unbeliever will be formally ratified before the eyes of the world, at the last judgment by the Son of Man; or, as Jesus put it, "The word that I spoke ... will condemn him on the last day" (Jn 12:48). The present judgment does not deprive a person's further capacity to make a decision—but it can lead to the "hardening" of his heart.

The last judgment is nothing but the divine acknowledgment of the condition brought about by human decision; it will be the disclosure of an existence long vowed to destruction, already a victim of death. The unbeliever pronounces the final verdict on himself by his present decision.

"And this is the verdict (judgment), that light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil." St. John, then, goes on to explain why people prefer darkness to light: "For everyone who does wicked things hates the light, so that his works might not be exposed." Evil is symbolized by darkness. Jesus, the light, has come into the world. But the darkness will not receive it. This very refusal constitutes judgment.

Jesus' presence in the world provokes men to judge themselves by deciding either for Jesus or against him. Evil-doers are disbelievers. Do-ers who do good works believe: they are drawn to Christ, while evil-doers are repelled. They do not

want their malice to be exposed, nor will they cease their sinning.

Jesus brings out what a man really is and the real nature of his life. Jesus is a penetrating light that provokes judgment by making it apparent what a man is. The one who turns away is not an occasional sinner, but one who "practices wickedness"; it is not that he cannot see the light, but that he hates the light ... it is a question of radical evil.

The judgment takes place wherever people prefer darkness to light and do not believe in the Son of God. They have placed themselves on the side of the "prince of this world" on whom judgment has been passed by the death and victory of Jesus on the cross.

The purpose of this passage is to display the personal responsibility of unbelievers and the horror of their act in its true colors.

The passage explains why Jesus who brings salvation is confronted with so much unbelief; it also calls for the holiness of life without which no one comes to the light. It also explains how in spite of all God's efforts to save, especially through the love of his Son, people could still close their hearts to the light. God, for his part, has done everything to save people from darkness through Jesus' words and works. Their inexplicable "hatred" rises up from the abyss of a heart darkened by sin. It is the consequence of a total perversion and moral corruption.

When Jesus and the light of his revelation fall upon unbelievers, they themselves are unmasked for what they are, and not just their works. Thus their "hatred" has a psychological explanation and is also rooted in a profounder level of their being; it comes from a general attitude for which they are themselves responsible and which is totally corrupted. This is why they do not come to the light, which is John's synonym for "believing".

“But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.”

Those who perform morally good acts according to God’s will are drawn to believe in Jesus. Such living according to the truth is totally opposed to the lie, falsehood and wretchedness, which come from the devil. Those who are loyal to God and strive to do his will have the disposition which also enables them to hear and accept the words of God’s envoy. His words are the truth which comes from God. The truth is present in Jesus, but only those are open to it who are “of the truth” and act accordingly.

Their works are done in God in that they are in accordance with God and his will. These works are true and in conformity with God’s nature. There is a kinship between the children of God and the Son of God sent as revealer and redeemer; there is also an intrinsic relationship between moral behavior and faith. (See Rudolph Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John*, Herder and Herder, 1965.)

Jesus is God’s light sent to the world to show human beings how they may walk in him, “the way, the truth, and the life” in order to reach God. Those who reject him choose to remain in darkness rather than face the challenge of changing their evil ways. By so doing, they pronounce their own judgment and condemnation. Conversely, those who accept Jesus and walk with him or come into the light are not judged. They show by their deeds that they are indeed born of God.

**TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME
Epistle: Philippians 1:20c – 24, 27a**

“Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death”.

St. Paul is totally immersed and given over to Jesus. His whole body-person is directed toward the glorified Christ. Everything about

Paul is to proclaim Christ, to glorify him and to make him known. Paul’s whole being is oriented toward making Jesus and the salvation he has won for us on the cross known to everyone. That is what his life is all about. But even his death for love of Jesus would glorify him. He could witness his great love for Jesus by giving up his life for him, even as Jesus suffered and died for Paul. So, either way, by his life on earth or by his death for Christ, Paul would magnify him. He has received so much from Jesus, who has delivered him from his sinful and misdirected life, that Paul could never finish praising and thanking him, and giving him to others for their salvation.

“For to me life is Christ, and death is gain”.

Paul is so completely and thoroughly united to Christ, he lives Christ. His life has been taken over and assumed by Christ’s glorious life. So the life he lives is Christ’s. That is all Paul knows. He is lost in Christ. He is so delighted with that new and glorious spiritual life, he cannot not stop talking about it. Experiencing and living that glorious life of Christ is the highest and happiest possible life on earth. So Paul is endlessly compelled, to shout it out to everyone he can reach. Should Paul end up being killed for proclaiming Christ, that would mean he could be with Christ forever. He has met the glorious God-man in the blinding light of God on his way to Damascus. He looks forward to be with him in glory. It is a wonder Paul is able to operate on earth after he has experienced Christ in glory. Death would be a definite gain for him because then he could be face to face with his redeeming Lord again—forever.

“If I go on living in the flesh that means fruitful labor for me”.

Paul has received so much from being united to Jesus, who has saved him miraculously from himself, it has been a supreme joy for Paul to proclaim Christ to everyone. He longs to make Jesus known by all means. That is his passion. He feels so indebted to Christ he cannot not stop

talking about him. Despite all the persecutions and trials Paul has experienced, he is compelled to preach Christ. He will not be stopped.

"... and I do not know which I shall choose. I am caught between the two."

Paul feels urged to preach Christ. He just has to make his saving love known. But he is also looking forward to be with Christ, his precious Savior, for all eternity. Martyrdom would be a great reward. So Paul cannot not figure out what he should do.

"I long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better. Yet that I remain in the flesh is more necessary for your benefit."

So even if Paul longs to be with Jesus in heavenly glory, he realizes it would be better for his people if he were to be delivered from prison and martyrdom to remain with them for the sake of their formation.

The Epistle ends with Paul exhorting the Philippians to *"conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the Gospel of Christ."* They must follow his example and live according to the teachings of Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel. Their lives must be in accord with the Gospel. They will then be disposed to be united to Jesus, and enjoy living his glorious life on earth just as St. Paul did.

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME Epistle: Philippians 2:1-11

"If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy (2), complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing."

St. Paul is attempting to encourage and motivate the community at Philippi to unity and love. It would make him very happy if they would be of the same mind, united

in thought and love. And for that to take place, he appeals to the fact of their being united "in Christ"; they also participate in the same Holy Spirit, and the compassion and mercy in their hearts that flow from him. Surely, then, they would be disinclined toward selfishness and tend toward unity and love to console him.

"Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves each looking out not for his own interests, but [also] everyone for those of others" (3-4).

The life that the Philippians have received in Christ is one of outgoing love, which is opposed to selfishness; it is oriented toward the glory of God, rather than toward an empty display of one's self. A sense of their own lowliness prompts them to consider others as more important. They look out for "others" interests as they tend to their own needs.

"Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus" (5).

St. Paul presents Jesus as the model they must imitate. He wants the Philippians to manifest the same humble disposition that Jesus has shown. He goes on to explain what he means by quoting an ancient hymn describing Jesus' attitude.

"... who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped" (6).

"... the form of God" is the equivalent of the external form of God in the Old Testament, which is his "glory". If the word "form" refers to Jesus' possession of that quality (glory) associated with the external manifestation of God in the Old Testament, then it can be said that he was of divine status. (See *Jerome Biblical Commentary*.)

Unlike Adam, who grasped at becoming equal to God (Gen 3:5), Jesus has renounced the glory of his divine status to take the human form of a

servant. St. Paul uses Jesus' humble, incarnate condition as an example for the Philippians to imitate and overcome their pride and selfishness.

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

In becoming a human being, Jesus has given up the glory of the divinity that has been rightfully his. He remains divine, but he renounces the status of glory until he has finished the work of salvation. Then it will be restored again, through his resurrection and ascension. In "coming in human likeness", Jesus has become a real human being, a man like other men, without any special privileges. He is "one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15).

"... He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (8).

Jesus embraces lowliness when he entered the human condition with all its weaknesses. Now he will be reduced to the state of a servant. He has to submit himself to the authority of others. He has to work hard for a living. His divine power is severely restricted by his human limitations. Truly, he has humbled or lowered himself to an extreme degree by his incarnation. His whole life on earth consists of that humble condition, which includes a life of poverty, especially living in those times, conditions and places. That lowly condition of servant reaches its high point when he submits himself to being mistreated and judged by sinful men. This obedience is heroic in that he accepts being treated in such an abusive way. He is unjustly condemned to die the shameful death of a criminal—although he is totally innocent. His death by crucifixion is the deepest point of humiliation, the extreme opposite of his divine status. That is how far his divine love has lowered itself to make up for sins and bring us his saving grace.

"Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name" (9).

Because of Jesus' humbling himself to such an extreme degree, God the Father raises Jesus in the mystery of the resurrection and ascension to a supremely exalted degree in total contrast to his supreme abasement. Now, therefore, the glory he has emptied himself of has been fully restored. In that majestic glory, Jesus will now proceed to raise up all of humanity to holiness through his established community, the church.

"... the name that is above every name" is Lord (Cf v. 11) which is substituted for Yahweh. This name surpasses all other beings, both earthly and celestial. For Jesus now possesses the divine glory even in his human nature in this new exalted state. We recall here Thomas the apostle's astonished statement when he sees Jesus after he has been raised from the dead.

He exclaims "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28). (10). Consequently, St. Paul explains, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (10-11).

Bending the knee is an act of homage expressing reverence for Jesus' Lordship. Isaiah has prophesied, "To me every knee shall bend" (Is 45:23). Applying this religious devotion to Jesus transfers to him as Lord the adoration that Isaiah predicted would be given to Yahweh. It is the adoration offered to God alone.

Does this homage paid to Jesus replace that given to Yahweh, God? St. Paul explains that all of this is *"to the glory of God the Father" (11).*

Jesus' Lordship does not constitute a rivalry to the Father, Yahweh himself. The acknowledgement paid to Jesus by all creation for the glory he receives as a result of his self-emptying actually gives glory to the Father whose plan it is. It is in

obedience to the Father that Jesus' self-emptying and consequent glorification takes place. So the Father is glorified in this whole scenario as much as the Son.

To worship the Son is to worship the Father: the Father and Jesus are one (Jn 10:30) in the Spirit through whom the plan is worked out.

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Epistle: Philippians 4:6-9

St. Paul begins his exhortation with, *"Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God"* (6).

Anxiety is a distress of mind as a result of being overly concerned about someone or something. Anxiety arises because we fail to trust in God and his providential care for us and our loved ones. Our vexation causes us to become disconnected from God. Our being caught up in worry makes us lose touch with God and his divine assistance. On the other hand, when we have a holy concern about others, we maintain our connectedness to God, as we commend the matter to him. He sustains us in his presence and enables us to patiently endure the difficulty. Accepting his will with love, the suffering experienced transforms us into his very image and likeness. In this way, God himself will solve the problem for us. His wisdom and love may allow the difficulty to persist for some time for a greater spiritual good both for us and those we are concerned about.

We make our needs known to God in prayerful communion with him, as we ask him to take care of our concerns. We must not forget to give thanks to him for all the benefits already received. We also anticipate with gratitude that God will answer our prayer. This is how Jesus prays before he raises Lazarus from the dead: "Father", he says, "I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me ..." (Jn 11:41-42).

"Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (7).

When Jesus imparts his peace to his apostles, he explains that his peace is unlike worldly peace (Jn 14:27). Worldly peace is more an external reality such as the absence of war, or some sort of external harmony and concord. Jesus' peace is an internal experience of the presence of God. His presence invades the prayerful heart and guards it from worry. That presence is beyond our understanding because it is a supernatural reality. It is beyond our natural, mental power to understand it. That peace, however, can be experienced through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, particularly wisdom and understanding.

St. Paul explains that this peace is the result of being "in Christ", in our union with the risen Christ dwelling in us, and we in him. The prophet Micah prophesies that the Messiah will "stand firm ... in the majestic name of the Lord, his God; and ... he shall be peace" (Micah 5:3-4). The peace we experience is that which is exuding from the Person of the Messiah present in us.

If peace is described as tranquility of order, it is because our deepest center is united to God and all of our desires are in conformity with his will. We no longer experience division within ourselves, as when we desire something other than our deepest yearning for God.

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (8).

St. Paul counsels his Philippians and us to be wholly taken up with the good and the virtuous. Such thinking will keep us in communion with God, and will crowd out all evil and unworthy thoughts. In this way we will live in the presence of God as his beloved children. We will flee any semblance of evil and choose only the good. That

is why meditating daily on the word of God is so beneficial. We assimilate the very righteousness of God and his power for virtuous living (Rom 1:16-17). There is a close connection between contemplation and holy living.

St. Paul ends by saying, “Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you” (9). St. Paul’s converts know how completely rooted and grounded in Christ St. Paul is. He can truly say, “For to me life is Christ” (Phil 1:21). Christ is his life. He knows nothing else. Jesus has taken over his life. Everything Paul does flows from a heart that has been invaded and surrendered to Christ Jesus. It is not just a question of external imitation. The life of Christ flows from within his heart. That is the simple truth about St. Paul. And the people of Philippi know it. Therefore, it is not a matter of prideful behavior. It is rather a matter of fact about St. Paul’s love for Jesus and his living in continuous communion with him. Paul simply urges his people to do what he is doing. Live your life in communion with Jesus, and you too will be flooded with God’s peace.

**TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME
Epistle: Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20**

“I know indeed how to live in humble circumstances; I know how to live in abundance. In every circumstance and in all things I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need” (12).

St. Paul is a self-sufficient person. As a missionary, he supports himself as a tent maker. He relies on God to provide for his needs. But he also accepts with gratitude the gifts from the Philippians while he is imprisoned. These are the circumstances that prompt Paul to state that he is accustomed to living under impoverished and difficult conditions. His strong love and closeness to Jesus enable him to handle deprivation with poise. The virtues of prudence and temperance

also enable St. Paul to live appropriately with plenty. Jesus is his great passion and fulfills his deepest longings. An abundance of material things does not tempt him to self-indulgence and risk compromising his allegiance to Jesus and spirit life. St. Paul is so devoted to Jesus and so abandoned to his Spirit’s lead, these external matters are very secondary.

His secret to being at peace with “being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need” is Christ. Jesus is his total sufficiency. As he says earlier in this epistle, “For to me life is Christ”(1:21). The superiority of Christ’s life has overtaken his. “I have strength for everything through him who empowers me” (13). This last statement reveals St. Paul’s secret for coping with any and every situation. His continuous communion with Jesus draws divine power for him to exercise any of the virtues he needs to employ. He has fortitude to deal with difficult matters, and temperance to handle the pleasurable. Paul’s advice to “Pray without ceasing” (1Thes 5:17) is a way of life for him: he lives in communion with the risen Christ. That is what his prayer life has become. Nevertheless, St. Paul can say to the Philippians,

“Still, it was kind of you to share in my distress” (14).

St. Paul is grateful to the people of Philippi for remembering him in his imprisonment. He does not depend on such material aid but he accepts it with gratitude. They provide assistance for Paul on more than one occasion (4:16).

He tells them, *“My God will fully supply whatever you need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (19).*

St. Paul is certain that God will provide everything that the Philippians need, just as he moves them to supply superabundantly for his needs. This is especially true on a spiritual level. They will be blessed for their charity toward the imprisoned apostle.

St. Paul ends with a prayer of praise, *“To our God and Father, glory forever and ever. Amen”* (20).

This act of praise from St. Paul helps us to see how he is constantly in touch with God and understands fully that all the good he receives comes from him, his Father, who deserves constant praise and thanks.

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b

“Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace” (1).

Silvanus (also called Silas: Acts 15:22; 16:19-25) and Timothy are St. Paul’s two chief assistants on his second missionary journey. He is writing to the Church that is, the assembly of Christians gathered at Thessalonica. The number of members at this time is probably small enough to fit into a single meeting room.

This is the first written document of the whole New Testament. St. Paul has converted some Jews and many Gentiles in Thessalonica (Northern Greece) in the summer of 50 A.D. during his second missionary journey. Paul’s decision to write to this young Christian community that he has founded only a few months before is crucial in Church history. It has led eventually to the formation of the small library of writings that would later be gathered together as the sacred writings of the new covenant—the New Testament. Paul now makes writing an extension of his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

St. Paul addresses his people as being *“in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

This is a fact full of wonder for all of us who are united to God and Jesus by sanctifying grace. Baptism immerses us in God who is one with the risen Jesus. *“The Father and I are one”*, Jesus says

(Jn 10:30). St. Paul’s statement puts Jesus on the same divine level as the Father. The more our union with God and Jesus becomes continuous interpersonal communion, the more we will savor and rejoice in it: The wonder of our being in God. The more our will becomes one with God’s will and the greater purity of heart we attain in this way, the more the gifts of wisdom and understanding will enable us to perceive and experience the joy of being *“in God and the Lord Jesus”*. That is what Jesus means when he says, *“Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God”* (Mt 5:8). And there is an overflowing joy and happiness that accompanies such an intuition of our being *“in God ... and the Lord Jesus”*. *“In him we live and move and have our being”* (Acts 17:28).

In his address, St. Paul proceeds to impart, as God’s representative, *“grace and peace”*. He blesses them with grace, God’s favor. When communicated, this grace, or favor, is a gift of God freely given. It gives us a participation in God’s own life. It enables us to live in his presence and relate personally to him. It creates us into his children. What a privileged state we enjoy! St. Paul’s blessing also imparts *“peace”*. That implies union and friendship with God through the forgiveness of sins. We are at one with ourselves. Our desire for God coincides with our deepest yearning for God. We desire nothing other than conformity with God’s will. Whereas sinful desires would cause us to be divided within ourselves and at war against our heart’s deepest yearning for God.

After the greeting, St. Paul begins his letter with, *“we give thanks to God always for all of you, unceasingly (3) calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father Jesus Christ, (4) knowing, brothers loved by God, how you were chosen”*.

St. Paul’s first thought is towards God to whom he gives thanks. He is not caught up in pride in his own work in forming the Thessalonians.

Rather, he is caught up in thanksgiving to God, giving him the glory for his success. This shows us St. Paul's close union with God and how he lives in continuous communion with him. He unceasingly calls to mind their work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope in Jesus' coming. This statement regarding faith, hope, and love is the earliest mention of the three theological virtues in Christian literature.

Their belief in God and Jesus as Lord prompts the Philippians to assist Paul in his ministry and in his imprisonment. Theirs is a living faith that moves them to act upon it by works of love. Their faith unites them to the divine Persons which energizes them to act supernaturally. They go beyond the limitations of human nature and live on a spiritual level. They express this by a labor of love in providing for Paul's needs.

The Philippians' hope in Jesus' return to reward the good and punish the evil enables them to patiently endure hardship and persecution. Their expectation of the Lord's coming inspires constancy in trial. Their expectant hope connects them to God from whom they draw supernatural power for long-suffering—an example for us.

All of this tested virtue takes place "before our God and Father". In other words, these first Christians live in God's presence, even as Abraham was told to walk in God's presence (Gen 17:1). They, as we, have free access to God through faith (Rom 5:2) so that we have the privilege of living in his presence continuously. Our faculties may be attentive to the activities we are dutifully engaged in, but our heart keeps vigil (Sg 5:2).

St. Paul reminds his people how they are loved by God (4). It is because of his love for them that they are chosen. The salvation given them in Christ is a free gift—totally unmerited. This reminds us of St. Paul's other words on the subject: "God ... chose us in [Christ], before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:4-5). How blessed

and privileged they and we are! This realization urges us to live up to our calling "to be holy and without blemish before him".

This epistle concludes with, "*For our gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and [with] much conviction*" (5).

Jesus has promised the apostles, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses ..." (Acts 1:8) St. Paul experiences that power. He tells the Corinthians, "The signs of an apostle were performed among you with all endurance, signs and wonders, and mighty deeds" (2 Cor 12:2). That power seems to be expressed principally through his person as he speaks the word of God. St. Paul explains, "my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive [words of] Wisdom, but with a demonstration of spirit and power, so that your faith might rest not in human wisdom but on the power of God" (1 Cor 2:4). St. Paul is supercharged with the Spirit of God which comes from his intense union with Jesus. Therefore he speaks with the authoritative power of Jesus himself. This power flows from his experiential knowledge of being "in Christ". This divine force impacts the hearts of his listeners. They are thoroughly convinced because they experience this divine power within their own hearts as they hear Paul speak (1 Jn 5:10). All doubt is swept away.

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10

St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians: "*You know what sort of people we were among you for your sake*" (5c).

Paul and his companions suffer for their faith while they are in Thessalonica for preaching the gospel. They are driven from

the city (Acts 17:5, 10, 13-14). But nothing can stop them from proclaiming the salvation that comes with knowing Jesus the Christ. They brush off the harassment and keep on going.

The supreme importance of making the gospel known moves the apostles to trample under foot such persecutions. The intensity with which they experience the glorious presence of the risen Christ empowers the apostles with super human strength. This surely will impress the Thessalonians to no end.

In this letter he says: *“And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in great affliction, with joy from the Holy Spirit (7), so that you became a model for all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.”*

These converts from Thessalonica meet with opposition and suffer at the hands of the Jewish Community. But they gladly accept their and his companion’s sufferings in imitation of St. Paul and of Jesus who have suffered and died for them. We too must exercise boldness in living our faith despite opposition. Perhaps the expression of our lived faith is so weak that it goes by unnoticed and merits no persecution.

The Thessalonians receive the word of God in great affliction. The Christian faith is costly. Their dauntless living of the faith challenges us to discipline ourselves to consume the word of God more avidly so we can live and proclaim it more ardently and boldly.

To suffer with joy for the faith is definitely a work of the Holy Spirit. Holy joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. It is a result of perfected virtue and living according to the spirit (Gal 5:16, 22). Persecution and holy discipline spiritualize us and unite us to God on a deeper level. In this way, contrary to all natural expectation, we experience the joy of God even if we are suffering pain on a physical level.

Their example of patient and joyful endurance catches the attention of the people in the surrounding area in Greece and Albania. These people can then see the impressive value and power of the Christian faith. They can see that it connects believers to God himself who lifts them to a new, supernatural level of existence. This attracts new believers.

St. Paul tells his people, *“For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth not only in Macedonia and [in] Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything” (8).*

What an impact the faith-life of the Thessalonians has on the surrounding region! See what power the grace of God can have upon those who associate with us—if only we are faithful and live according to God’s will in purity of heart. We image God by our very persons and effect people in a positive way.

We exude the peace and joy of God. Then people begin to say, “I want what they’ve got.” That is why so many people begin to join the early Christian Church. “Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (Act 2:47).

If we are charged with the intense life of the Spirit, and have learned to talk about our Catholic Christian faith from our *Come, Lord Jesus!* meetings, St. Paul could say of us too, “in every place your faith in God has gone forth”.

St. Paul continues to praise the Thessalonians: *“For they themselves openly declare about us what sort of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (9).*

St. Paul continues to rave about the Thessalonians. Others notice how well they receive him. They welcome him as he reveals to them the existence of the living and true God. They are relieved to be freed from the false gods they have been

worshipping before Paul comes to them. They then convert themselves wholeheartedly to God. What a contrast that must have been! To make the transition from idols, which is no God at all, or even demons (1 Cor 10:20), to the true and living God must have made a tremendous impact upon them. For, through faith they actually have come into contact with God himself. Their wholehearted devotion to him disposes them to enter into his presence. Without this total devotion to God, if it has only been half-hearted and lukewarm, they would not have been able to experience so completely the living God. Is this not why we so often lack the fervor and zeal demonstrated by these Thessalonians? We need a thorough conversion for us to experience God and proclaim him the way they have done.

St. Paul ends this passage by telling his people “to await his Son from heaven, whom he raised from [the] dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the coming wrath” (10).

As the bride of Christ, the Church longs to be united to her great Lover. We eagerly await Jesus’ return in glory. St. Paul, who has experienced Jesus’ glorious presence has this urgent longing for which he commends to his people. Jesus, the Son of God will come to his people from heaven. He has come to us in weakness and poverty at his first coming. But his second coming will be in power and glory. That same Jesus who has been crucified and died has been glorified by the Father and endowed with omnipotence. He will raise us up in glory to his own level. We will escape the punishment that will be experienced by evil-doers. Those who are transformed in the image of God through love will experience his presence as blissful. Those who remain in the flesh due to self-indulgence and self-centeredness will not be able to bear Jesus’ presence. It will be too painful for them. They will be repelled and separated from him forever. For their very being will be totally incompatible with his glorious, loving presence (Rev 6:16-17).

ALL SOULS

Epistle: Romans 6: 3-9

Our epistle begins with, “Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (3).

The sacrament of baptism plunges us into Christ. We are united to Jesus in such a way that we begin to live in him and he in us (Jn 14:20). We must be aware of this intimate union so that it can become a continuous interpersonal communion of love and knowledge between us and our risen Lord.

Baptism also connects us to the death of Jesus. The sacrament unites us to the moment of Jesus’ dying to sin. Jesus dies in obedience to his Father’s will. His death is not because he has sinned but because of his total opposition to sin and in order to overcome sin. Thus united to Jesus through baptism we also can overcome it. Our union with Jesus in baptism empowers us to die to sin, that is, to repel and avoid it. Like Jesus we are made capable of living in conformity with the Father’s will and dead to sin—in the measure and depth of our union with Jesus. The grace of baptism gives us the ability to deny or resist the sinful inclinations in our wounded human nature. The enjoyment of the life of the risen Jesus moves us to put far away from us the desire to sin.

The epistle continues, “We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life” (4).

Baptism by immersion symbolizes our being buried with Christ in the tomb. That indicates that we have died with Christ. And a person who has died can sin no more. The grace of baptism makes us children of God. This grace makes us want to please God and avoid sin. It is in this sense that baptism makes us die with Christ, that is, die to old sinful habits.

At the same time, through our union with Christ, the baptismal grace makes us participate in the moment of Jesus' resurrection. The glorious power of God raises us up to a new level of existence. We share in the resurrected life of Jesus. We live in communion with our risen Lord. The virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit enable us to live on the level of spirit, where God lives (Jn 4:24). The senses and their tantalizing objects no longer weigh us down, or hinder us from living the life of the children of God. We live in the presence of God and experience a foretaste of the life of heaven.

The epistle continues, *"For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection"* (5).

How do we grow in union with him through a death like his? We die to our sinful tendencies. We abstain from sinful desires and cause them to die by starvation. Such abstention demands spirit dominance. Increasingly living on such a spiritual level causes our union with Christ to grow stronger. St. Paul explicitly tells us that we are being transformed into his very image from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18). This transformation gives us an initial foretaste of the resurrection as we await the final resurrection of the body.

St. Paul explains further, *"We know that our old self was crucified with him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin"* (6).

The old sinful self is crucified and dies with Christ at the moment of baptism. For, we are united to Christ and given the grace to strive against our sinful desires. It is in this way that we participate in the crucifixion of Jesus and die to ourselves. This crucifixion requires an on-going struggle. It demands a constant battle against the sinful inclinations of the body. By habitually resisting the insistent wayward demands of the body, we become liberated from the slavery to sin. We can then enjoy the divine life of the spirit, free from the harassments of the sinfully inclined unredeemed body.

St. Paul continues, *"For a dead person has been absolved from sin"* (7).

A dead person is no longer capable of sinning. There is nothing left for him to be accused. He is free. The saints, who have brought their baptismal grace to its full maturity, experience this freedom from deliberate sin.

Furthermore St. Paul says, *"If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him"* (8).

Christ has suffered and died on the cross in obedience to the Father. As a result, the Father has raised Jesus to the glorious life of the resurrection. If we suffer and die to our sinful desires empowered as we are through our union with Christ, we will be disposed to share his resurrected life. This participation in the life of glory begins now and will be brought to full fruition in heaven.

Our epistle ends with, *"We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him"* (9).

Jesus, the Christ, has been anointed with the glorious Spirit of God in the mystery of the resurrection. Even his flesh has been thoroughly glorified by the divine Spirit so that Jesus enjoys the supreme life of the divinity. He is immortal and incorruptible. He lives the very life of God. He has attained this life for us. He wants us to live in union with him so we too can enjoy this marvelous new life. This grace, given to us at baptism, when it is brought to full maturity, can enable us to die to sin with Christ and live for God.

DEDICATION OF THE LATERAN BASILICA

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 3:9c-11, 16-17

“We are God’s building” (9c).

St. Paul compares the Christian community to a building which requires construction. Paul and others who have come after him have worked together by their preaching and teaching to build the Corinthian community.

St. Paul writes, *“According to the grace of God given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it” (10).*

St. Paul is very much aware that it is by God’s favor, His grace, that he has been called to be an apostle. He has laid the foundation for building this community by His evangelization. Without a good, solid foundation the building will fall.

Proper instruction is important. For example, the virtue of humility is the foundation of the spiritual life. Without this virtue, we would not be able to withstand the storms of life. If we realize that we have come from nothing, are worthy of hell because of our sins, that we are aware of our lowliness and deserve to be slighted, we are more likely to bear wrongs patiently and persevere in the faith when we are persecuted.

St. Paul is followed by other evangelizers who cooperated with him in building the Christian community. He is concerned that those who succeed him preach solid doctrine.

He writes, “But each one must be careful how he builds upon it, for no one can lay a foundation other than the one that is there, namely, Jesus Christ” (11).

To build upon Christ, the foundation of the Corinthian Church, is to preach and teach the truth—for Jesus is “the Truth” (Jn 14:6). That means that those who follow Paul as teachers must teach solid virtue to keep the Corinthians firmly connected to Christ. Only a virtuous life will enable them to remain united to Christ. They

must understand, for example, the purifying and strengthening value of suffering to endure persecution and remain faithful. Without this understanding of the truth, their union with Christ on whom the Church of Corinth has been built will disintegrate.

St. Paul goes on to explain, *“Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (16).*

Jesus has promised that He and the Father and the Holy Spirit will come to dwell in those who faithfully keep His word (Jn 14: 15-17, 23). St. Paul has experienced this indwelling (Gal 2:20) and he wants the Corinthians to realize that they too enjoy this unmerited privilege: they are temples of God. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have made the community and each individual in it their dwelling place. They have become His temple. They have been set aside for this holy purpose. They are consecrated to God. They have free access to Him by faith (Eph 2: 18; 3: 12). They must be attentive to His presence and respectful of who they are. To put it in the words of St. Peter, they are to “sanctify Christ as Lord in [their] hearts” (1 Pet 3:15). Thus, the Old Testament temple of stone has been replaced by the living body of Christ to whom they have been joined at baptism. They are the new temple of God.

Since this is so, St. Paul says, *“If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God, which you are, is holy” (17).*

St. Paul is warning those who cause divisions (1 Cor 12:18) and damage the unity of the Church. Those who are immoral, likewise, are desecrating the temple of God (1 Cor 6:13-18). These are serious offenses, and those who commit them are sinning against God’s dwelling place and will be punished by God Himself.

**THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME
Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6**

St. Paul writes, *“Concerning times and seasons, brothers and sisters, you have no need for anything to be written to you”* (1).

The Thessalonians are interested in knowing more details about the second coming, the Parousia. But St. Paul has no more information to give them. Instead he exhorts them to vigilance. The only thing he can tell them is to get ready for his coming at any time.

He writes, *“For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night”* (2).

The “day of the Lord” is the day of judgment proclaimed by the prophets (Am 5:18; Jl 2:1). But here it is applied to Jesus’ return at the general judgment.

There is no telling when it will occur. It will happen as when a thief comes to rob a house in the night. That means it is unpredictable, suddenly, without warning and when least expected.

St. Paul continues, *“When people are saying, ‘Peace and security’ then sudden disaster comes upon them, like labor pains upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape”* (3).

People may feel secure in their world, unthreatened by external dangers and enemies. But then “sudden disaster” will occur. “People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Lk 21: 26). The labor pains of a pregnant woman are used by the prophets to express sudden pain and the distress experienced by people in the end times (Is 26: 16-17). It also expresses the inevitability of the coming of the day of the Lord from which there is no escape.

St. Paul consoles his people with these words, *“But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness, for that day to overtake you like a thief”* (4).

The beloved Thessalonians are not in the darkness of the ignorance and sinfulness of paganism.

Moreover, he explains, *“For all of you are children of the light and children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness”* (5).

Through baptism his people have been joined to Christ who is the light of the world. And Jesus promises that “whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn 8: 12). St. John further explains of Jesus, “... in him was life, and the life was the light of all people” (Jn 1: 4) NRSV. St. Paul clarifies how we are affected by Jesus, the light, when he says, “For God...has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the faces of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). The presence of the glorified Jesus in us illuminates our inner person and leads us to holy living. We clearly see the sinful life-style of those who belong to this world and have an aversion for it. We are guided by Jesus’ light to do the will of God in our lives. We always try to please him in all things. We live in the daylight of God’s presence.

The impending judgment comes as a threat to those who live in the darkness of sin. But the children of light who live in the presence of their Lord in expectation of his coming are undisturbed by his unannounced appearance as supreme judge. They are his friends who find delight in doing his will. It will be their joy to see him and receive the reward of a good and holy life.

St. Paul concludes, *“Therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay alert and sober”* (6).

Those who sleep are oblivious to the need for obeying God and doing his will. But we, who are united to the Lord and live in his light, are very much aware of his indwelling presence and his will. We are vigilant and alert to his coming in grace.

We remain sober and do not get drunk on the pleasures of life. Instead of living for self-satisfaction and pleasure as worldlings do, our lives are centered on God and his will. We practice temperance and moderation through self-mastery and self-discipline. We live for God and His will rather than for the next available pleasure. We live according to the spirit and keep the blinding desires that separate us from God under control. Thus we live in continuous communion with God and enjoy his company as we await his coming.

FEAST OF CHRIST THE KING

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

Christ has submitted himself to death in obedience to his Father for our redemption. But he has destroyed death by his glorification (20).

He is the firstfruits of those who have died. The firstfruits are that portion of the harvest offered in thanksgiving to God. It implies the consecration of the entire harvest to come. Christ died and rose from the dead for our sake. His resurrected body assures us that the entire harvest of believers will be raised just as he was.

All of humanity is connected so that we are all affected by Adam and Christ (21).

Death comes to us through Adam, our first parent who sinned. Similarly, resurrection from the dead comes to us through Christ who rose from the dead in a human body like ours.

Because we are one with Adam as members of the human race we must also die (22).

We like Adam have also sinned. Since we have also been joined to Christ through faith and baptism we are affected by his resurrection. We too will rise from the dead. We are enlivened by the Spirit of the resurrected Christ.

This will occur in proper order. Christ's own resurrection must precede ours.

It is from him that we receive power and life to overcome death (23).

When he returns in glory, we who belong to him through grace and love, will come alive and participate in his glorious new life (Jn 5: 25).

All of this will take place at the end of the world (24).

Jesus will hand over redeemed humanity to his Father. He will have destroyed the power of evil, all the demonic spirits who are God's enemies and have tried to impede the coming of the Kingdom. They have induced man to sin and rebelled against God.

After his resurrection and ascension, Christ Jesus takes his place at the Father's right hand. There he rules with his Father and gradually subdues all his enemies (25).

He will show his triumph over them by symbolically putting them under his feet (Ps 110:1). He will stand above all creation and rule over it (Ps 8:6-7). He will fulfill all that man has been called to be.

Then he will destroy death itself (26).

In the end everything will be subjected to the Son. Then the Incarnate Son himself will be subjected to the Father. He, and the people of God with him, will honor God the Father who is the source of all being. All of the redeemed humanity will give him praise and thanks. And creation itself "awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God": There is that hope "that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8:19, 21).

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbott, Walter M., S.J. *The Documents of Vatican II in a New and Definitive Translation*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1966.
- The Anchor Bible, The Epistles of James 1, Peter and Jude Volume 37*, by Bo Reicke, tr., 1964.
- Aquinas, St. Thomas. *The Summa of St. Thomas Aquinas. Three Volumes*. 1947.
- Argyle, A. W. *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible. The Epistles*. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1963.
- Augustine, St. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1951.
- Barclay, William. *The Daily Bible Series. The Epistles, Revised Ed.* Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977.
- Broderick, Robert C. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1976.
- A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*. New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1953.
- Cerfaux, Lucien. *Christ in the Theology of St. Paul*. New York: Herder & Herder, 1959.
- Decoux, Alain. *Paul, Heart of the Apostle*, Boston: Pauline Books, n.d.
- Dunn, James D. G. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998.
- Durrwell, F.X., C.S.S.R. *In the Redeeming Christ. Toward a Theology of Spirituality*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963.
- Durrwell, F. X., C.S.S.R. *The Resurrection. A Biblical Study*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960.
- Guardini, Romano. *The Lord*. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1954.
- Hahn, Scott and Curtis Mitch. *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible. The Gospel of Matthew. The Epistles*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003.
- Harrington, Wilfrid, O.P. *New Testament Message. Mark*. Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1979.
- Hartman, Louis F., C.S.S.R. *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible. A Translation and Adaptation of of A. van der Born's BIJBELS WOODENBOEK. 2nd Revised Ed.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963.
- Henry, Matthew. *New One Volume Edition Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971.
- Hernandez, Francis. *In Conversation with God. Volumes 1-6*. London: Scepter, 1994.
- Hunter, A. M. *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible. The Epistles*. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1965.
- Laymon, Charles M., ed. *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible. Introduction and Commentary for Each Book of the Bible Including the Apocrypha*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1971.

BIBLIOGRAPHY — 2

Leon-Dufour, Xavier. *Dictionary of Biblical Theology New Revised Edition*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1983.

Maertens, Thierry and Jean Frisque. *Guide for the Christian Assembly*. Notre Dame: Fides Publishers Inc., 1973.

Mantague, George T. S.M. *The Living Thought of St. Paul*. Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1966.

Martini, Cardinal Carlo Maria, S.J. *The Gospel According to St. Paul*. The Word Among Us Press, Ijamsville, Maryland, 2008.

Nevins, Albert J., M.M. *The Maryknoll Catholic Dictionary*. New York: Dimension Books-Grosset and Dunlap, 1965.

A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture. New Jersey: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1969.

New Testament Reading Guide. Volumes 1-14. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1965.

Quay, Paul M., S.J. *The Mystery Hidden for Ages in God*. New York: Peter Lang, 1955.