

Lk 9:46-50; Monday, October 1, 2018 – St. Therese of the Child Jesus

One of the appealing qualities of the Gospels is the candidness they reveal the flaws of the apostles. They thought of themselves as grown-ups as, indeed, we do also. After all, they were Jesus' chosen companions, called to be leaders in his Church. So, here they are in today's Gospel acting like immature little boys arguing "about which of them was the greatest. Pride, in whatever form it takes, is an ugly and deadly cancer. At this stage of their spiritual development, the apostles didn't seem to be the stuff from which saints and martyrs are made. This should encourage us to face our faults and sins as we depend on God's grace to transform us.

Jesus turns their upside-down thinking right-side up when he gave them a surprising lesson by redefining the terms "greatest" and "least." He's taught: "For the one who is least among all of you is the one who is the greatest. In this way Jesus contrasted the evil of pride with its antidote, humility. The humblest person is the greatest because, aware of his littleness and ineptitude, he relies on God, never himself. God never fails to deliver. After he learned this lesson, Peter taught it to us when her quoted Jesus: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet 5:5; Mt 232:12).

It is fitting that the Church chose this Gospel on the feast of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, who is popularly called the Little Flower. This remarkable young woman entered the Carmelite convent at the age of 15 and died at the age of 24. Because her life uniquely united the virtues of humility and love, she was declared a Doctor of the Church, a title only given to 32 other saints. Her "little way" is something everyone can embrace for it merely consists in doing all the activities of our day with great love. Let's follow her example today?

Mt 18:1-5, 10; Tuesday, October 2, 2018

The ambitious apostles were concerned about *the greatest* in the Kingdom, which revealed their tendency to imbibe the poison of self-importance. Their question was probably provoked by the primacy Jesus gave Peter and the fact that Jesus took Peter, James, and John up the mountain to witness his transfiguration. So, this question indicates an unholy competition among the apostles. They clearly were in a fog about the true nature of the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus patiently gave them another lesson on the importance of *humility* by reversing the definitions of "great" and "small." He overturns their comfortable definitions that flowed from their egos and the values of this world. Therefore, Jesus opposed the delusion of self-reliant adults with the spontaneous trust and helplessness of unspoiled children who are utterly dependent on others.

Jesus' followers must become "little ones," like the child Jesus called to him. He was easily available to others and responded readily to Jesus' call because he was not encumbered with the weighty concerns of self-interest and business. This "little one," like all "little ones," considered that everyone else must be greater than he – if he thought about it at all. We can only imagine the apostle's shock and dismay on hearing Jesus' words: "Unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." In other words, forget about who is the greatest. That's not even on the table of consideration. It's also a shock to us, if we are filled with self-importance. Spiritual children see themselves as needy and helpless. Therefore, they easily free-fall into Jesus' protective arms by the total submission of themselves. So, how do we view ourselves - as helpless "little ones" or as big people in control?

Lk 9:57-62; Wednesday, October 3, 1028

St. Luke tells us “someone” approached Jesus. St. Matthew gives us the startling information that this “someone” was a scribe. Scribes were professional interpreters of the law. They had a scholar’s familiarity with the text of Scripture for they were rigorously trained in a recognized “school of interpretation.” It was only upon graduating after years of arduous study that a scribe had the right to assemble disciples and perhaps sit in the all-important Sanhedrin – the religious supreme court of Israel that judged essential matters of “faith and morals” among the Jews. Yet the scribe in today’s Gospel wished to become Jesus’ disciple although Jesus did not graduate from such a recognized school. His amazing statement was, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Would that we could all be so determined and focused. This scribe becomes the prototype of the faith in Jesus Christ by those who love the Scriptures.

A contemporary example is that of Casey Phillips, the son of a Baptist preacher. Casey’s journey began in a small, rural Baptist church in western Kentucky. He grew up alongside caring, God-fearing people who loved the Lord and wanted nothing more than to serve him. Casey’s active participation in his church bled over into how he acted at school, as he became the “lunchroom preacher” calling his peers to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. In college he became exposed to the multiplicity diverse beliefs of those who call themselves Christians. His search for the truth eventually led him to examine the beliefs of the Catholic Church. He was amazed to learn, for example, that what the Catholic Church taught about the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist was held since the earliest days of Christianity, and that Christ actually established a hierarchical order with Peter and his successors as the head. Casey and his wife followed Jesus all the way into the Catholic Church on February 23, 2014. How ardent are we in discovering and following the truth, or do we passively take our faith for granted?

Lk 10:1-12; Thursday, October 4, 2018 – Feast of St. Francis of Assisi

Today’s Gospel recalls Jesus selecting 72 disciples for a mission. St. Luke alone records this second missionary assignment for he earlier recorded Jesus sending out the Twelve on a similar mission. The idea of a harvest recalls Isaiah’s prophesy about God gathering the scattered remnants of the Hebrew people in the great messianic restoration (Is 27:12-13).

Greetings in the ancient world could be quite elaborate, therefore Jesus tells them, “Greet no one along the way.” The prophet Elisha, who is a type of Jesus, gave a similar instruction of urgency when he sent his servant on a mission (2 Kgs 4:29). Jesus charged the disciples with the daring of faith and hope; for he sends them “like lambs among wolves,” and instructs them not to rely on material means. The apostolate calls for generous self-surrender, detachment and trust in God.

This is a fitting Gospel on the feast day St. Francis of Assisi. It is a reminder that we, too, are called to be missionaries. Very few of us will ever become active in the missions or follow the vocation of St. Francis. But we can capture the ardor of his burning with zeal for souls. This was the natural consequence of his passionate love for God, an intense prayer life, and the determination to perform each little action of his day with love. Francis abandoned the empty high-spirited life typical of a wealthy young man. By the chapel of San Damiano, just outside Assisi, Jesus spoke to him: “Francis, Francis, go and repair my house which, as you can see, is falling into ruins.” The Church is again in need of repair. Will we address its need by daily praying the Rosary as Mary asks of us?

Lk 10:13-16; Friday, October 5, 2018 – Feast of St. Francis Xavier

Today's Gospel ends with Jesus affirming the teaching authority of the leaders in his Church: "Whoever listens to you listens to me." Notice, he says "*listens* to you," not reads you. Some Christians seem to believe that Mary and the holy women ran the printing presses while the apostles and their successors went about the Roman Empire giving non-denominational Bible classes. Hardly! The apostles were primarily preachers and teachers, not writers.

St. Paul wrote to Timothy, "For this gospel I was appointed a *preacher* and an apostle and a *teacher*" (2 Tim 1:11). Then he added, "Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have *heard* from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus, guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within you" (2 Tim 1:13-14). Later in the same letter he wrote, "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have *heard* from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to *teach* others also" (2 Tim 2:1-2). St. Paul instructed the Thessalonians that his oral teaching was *the word of God*: "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the *word of God* which you *heard* from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as *what it really is*, the *word of God*, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thess 2:13). Finally, St. Paul taught that his oral teaching had the same authority as his divinely inspired letters: "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the *traditions* which you were taught by us, either by *word of mouth* or by *letter*" (2 Thess 2:15).

Because Jesus gave his authority to the leaders of his Church, it is critical that we obey them when we are pulled in another direction by the prevailing culture. For Jesus concluded, "Whoever rejects you rejects me. And who ever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

Lk 10:25-37; Monday, October 8, 2018

In today's Gospel a scholar of the law "tests" Jesus in the sense of trying to lay a trap for him: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" In reply, Jesus didn't say, '*Do!*' 'You don't *do* anything, you just accept me as your Lord and savior and your salvation is guaranteed.' Instead, Jesus answered with a question: "What is written in the law?" The scholar quoted Deuteronomy and Leviticus: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus replied, "You have answered correctly; *do* this and you will live."

This scholar of the law began with the motive trapping Jesus, but Jesus' reply softened his heart and diminished his pride. He showed an openness to learn with question: "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus' reply came in the form of the well-loved parable of the Good Samaritan. At the end of the narrative, Jesus asked, "Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim, the shocked scholar couldn't bring himself to say, "the Samaritan," but only "the one who treated him with mercy."

Loving our neighbor, as our self is a difficult standard, especially when everyone becomes our neighbor. During the Last Supper Jesus raised the bar considerably: "I give you a new commandment: love one another, as I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34-35). Loving as Jesus loved is not difficult, it's impossible, that is, impossible apart from grace – but it is his command. Our world would be very different if we Christians lived it!

Lk 10:38-42; Tuesday, October 9, 2018

Today's Gospel focuses on two saintly women whom Jesus loved dearly. Martha and Mary were sisters in the flesh, but also sisters in spirit, because they gave their hearts to Jesus and were his faithful followers. Mary sat quietly at Jesus' feet absorbed with the utmost love, reverence and attentiveness to everything Jesus said and did. Because she made the better choice, she received the greater benefit.

The devoted Martha, in contrast, was anxiously busy preparing a meal for Jesus and the other disciples. She wanted to provide a fitting supper worthy of her treasured guest. Unfortunately, her anxiety created a distraction because she was more focused on the meal preparation than she was on attentiveness to the words of Wisdom. Martha realized that it would be an exercise in futility to draw Mary's attention away from Jesus, so she complained: "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me." Mary made no attempt to defend herself; she left that task to Jesus. The Lord addressed Martha affectionately by repeating her name, adding: "you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her."

Jesus faulted Martha for surrendering to the anxiety that disturbed her spirit and led to her to become critical. This is an important lesson for us, because we, too, are often "anxious and worried about many things," which is always counterproductive. The key to a Christ-centered life is to interiorly keep in touch with the divine presence that dwells in us. Then we can say with St. Paul, "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." The "better part" is abiding in that loving relationship.

Lk 11:1-4; Wednesday, October 10, 2018

The Lord's Prayer is the divine model that teaches us how to pray. The Our Father, along with the Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Sacraments formed the basis of Christian catechesis from early centuries of Christianity. In the early Church converts were instructed in the life of prayer by studying the Lord's Prayer. The Our Father also figures prominently in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Its beautiful commentary should be must reading for every Catholic.

The petition, "your kingdom come" is a request that God reign on earth in *all* hearts, but especially in *our* hearts. May he reign in us! The request, "Give us each day our daily bread" anticipates the Eucharist. The Greek word that is translated as "daily" is *epiousion*, which is a contraction of two words: *epi*, which means, "super" or "above" and *ousios*, which means "substance." Therefore, St. Jerome translated it as the "supersubstantial bread." It is breathtaking to realize that Jesus comes to us under the humble form of bread.

The final petitions highlight two important teachings. Unforgiveness is epidemic in our society. This plague is particularly destructive in families and between spouses. Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we ask God to use our forgiveness as the measure of his forgiveness of our sins. Jesus' commentary on this petition is quite pointed: "For if you forgive men their trespass, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespass, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." The last petition asks God to guard us during the final trial at the end of our life. Similarly, in the Hail Mary we ask our Blessed Mother to pray for us at the two most important times in our lives: *now* – the present moment - *and at the hour of our death*.

Lk 11:5-13; Thursday, October 11, 2018

Today's Gospel focuses our attention on persistency in prayer. Prayer is important because it attests that we are relying on God and not on us. Spiritual self-reliance is always a disaster. Jesus warned us, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). On the flip side, Jesus instructs us in today's Gospel: "ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." The Catechism teaches us: "Nothing is equal to prayer; for what is impossible it makes possible, what is difficult, easy ... For it is impossible, *utterly impossible*, for the man who prays eagerly and invokes God ceaselessly ever to sin." Wow!

Sometimes when life feels out of control, everything seems falling apart and we are powerless, we are inclined to say, "Well, I guess the only thing I can do is pray." Hello! What are we thinking? Prayer is our invincible weapon that never fails. Prayer is where we should start. The *Catechism* instructs us that our prayer is "founded on the prayer of the Spirit in us and of the faithful love of the Father who has given us his only Son." So, "the prayer of Jesus makes Christian prayer an efficacious petition. He is the model, he prays in us and with us. Since the heart of the Son seeks only what pleases the Father, how could the prayer of the children of adoption (you and me) be centered on the gifts rather than the giver?"

Finally, "Jesus also prays for us—in our place and on our behalf. All our petitions were gathered up, once for all, in his cry on the Cross and, in his Resurrection, heard by the Father. This is why he never ceases to intercede for us with the Father. If our prayer is resolutely united with that of Jesus, in trust and boldness as children, we obtain all that we ask in his name, even more than any particular thing - the Holy Spirit himself, who contains all gifts." Wow! Wow!

Lk 11:15-26; Friday, October 12, 2018

Today's Gospel exposes the tragedy of hard hearts. Jesus' enemies remain obstinate despite the evidence of his miracles. Instead, they attribute Jesus' extraordinary power to the devil. Jesus exposes the absurdity of this charge by showing that he drives out demons. Satan is certainly not fighting against his own kingdom. Jesus, then, is the stronger man who conquers that evil strong man. In the words of St. Paul: Jesus "disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them" (Col 2:15). Ultimately, everyone who opposes Jesus will be scattered into the bowls of hell.

Jesus' statement about a divided kingdom also relates to one of the worst evils that plague the Church, disunity among Christians. This fracturing led to 33,820 denominations by one count, which greatly undermines the Christian message. Therefore, we should make Jesus' prayer our own: "That they may be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17:21). Finally, our Lord shows that the devil is relentless in his attempts lay traps that draw us into sin. St. Peter also warned us, "your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith." Scandals in the Church recall the Latin proverb: "the corruption of the best is the worst." St. Peter denounced corrupt Christians, who he compared in a graphic and frightening way to a "dog turning back to his own vomit and a sow being washed and then wallowing in the mire" (2 Pet 2:22). He added, "it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them." Nevertheless, we must pray for all sinners, because God will forgive any sin.

Lk 11:29-32; Monday, October 15, 2018 – St. Theresa of Jesus

Jonah was a very reluctant prophet. God spoke to him: “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness has come up before me.” How did Jonah respond? He went to Joppa and booked fare on a ship headed to Tarshish in the opposite direction “away from the presence of the Lord.” Why did he go in the opposite direction? Jonah despised the people of Nineveh, so he didn’t want to preach to the people who defeated and enslaved God’s chosen people.

Once Jonah was at sea, God caused a mighty storm to assault the ship. Things became so desperate the sailors threw the cargo overboard in an attempt to lighten the boat and save themselves. Meanwhile Jonah was asleep below deck. In desperation the sailors turned to prayer. Assuming that someone on board had offended God, Jonah admitted he was the culprit. As the sea became even more threatening, Jonah told the crew to toss him overboard as the only way to save themselves. When the men gave Jonah the heave ho, God “appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah.” After three days in the belly of the fish, Jonah was vomited out on dry land. Realizing he could not escape God’s mission, Jonah went to Nineveh and delivered this harsh message: “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” Amazingly, the people repented and proclaimed a fast. Even the king of Nineveh put on sackcloth and sat in ashes. As a result, the merciful God spared the city, the very thing Johan feared might happen. For God is “slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.”

Jesus’ point in this Gospel is this; if the Ninevites repented because they took to heart of the abrasive preaching of a prophet who despised them, how much more should Jesus’ generation repent upon hearing the preaching of the Messiah who will sacrifice his life for them? What does this say about our hardheartedness? Will the men of Nineveh rise up in judgment against us?

Lk 11:37-41; Tuesday, October 16, 2018

The façade of religion is easy and the Pharisees were good at it. They were like play actors wearing different masks, but in their life of self-deception that failed to discover their true destiny. They were like men trying to grasp the air. No wonder Jesus said “Woe” to them. In contrast, the interior transformation that true religion requires is a very difficult. No! Let me correct that. It’s not difficult it is humanly impossible, except for God’s grace. God makes the impossible, possible. Examples of the power of God’s grace abound in the lives of the saints.

The saints remind us that God calls each of us to holiness. They show us that becoming a saint is the only worthwhile goal in life. For unless we attain it, our life is a failure. Some of them seemed holy and pure almost from their mother’s womb. Others struggled with doubts and sinful lives. St. Augustine rejected Christianity and embraced a heresy. Once his conversion began, he grappled with the virtue of chastity. “Lord, make me chaste,” he pleaded but added “not yet!” Humm! St. Paul also had a difficult road to surrendering to Jesus. He understood the polar elements that besets each of us. On the one hand, there are the alluring temptations that come from the false values of this world, the inclination to evil we discover within ourselves and the cunning deceptions of the devil. Then on the other hand, we are faced with our pitiable weakness. In his distorted zeal, Paul persecuted the Church and was responsible for the martyrdom of St. Stephen. Nevertheless, after his conversion he could say with confidence, “I can do all things in him who strengthens me.” The first step to becoming a saint is to will it. Let’s make that choice!

Lk 11:42-46; Wednesday, October 17, 2018

The Law of Moses commanded that a tenth, a tithe, of the harvest be given in gratitude to God for the support of the Temple. Insignificant products like mint, rue and garden herbs were not subject to this law. However, the hypocritical, nit-picking Pharisees included them. Jesus condemned the Pharisees because they neglected justice and the love of God. Tithing only has meaning when it is built on the love of God.

Tithing is a subject that I never understood until I attended a lecture on the subject by Steve Woods, a convert and a former Presbyterian minister. Steve focused on the book of Malachi where God says: “Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and thereby *put me to the test* ... if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing” (Mal 3:10). Steve pointed out that our tithing, or the lack thereof, gives us a valid indication of our love for God, his Church and the poor. “Where else,” he said, “does God challenge us: ‘*Put me to the test*.’” I sat there transfixed because I realized I had not made God the Lord of my life in my finances. Forget tithing, I realized I was a cheap tipper! It was one of those terrible yet wonderful moments of truth.

After Steve’s talk I made a commitment to begin tithing. At least 5% would go to my parish church and another 5% would go to the poor and worthwhile charities. The percentages were guidelines not a rigid rule, so sometimes it might be more and sometimes it would be less. But each month when I paid bills, God came first. The vital point was to make God the Lord of my life in all areas. That was almost thirty years ago. Even now, I am amazed how God has blessed us. He has indeed opened up the windows of heaven and poured down overflowing blessings. Tithe! It will change your life in wonderful ways you cannot imagine. God can never be outdone in generosity.

Lk 10:1-9; Thursday, October 18, 2018 – St. Luke

On the feast of St. Luke, the Church recalls the 72 disciples sent by Jesus on their first mission. St. Luke was a Gentile convert and the faithful companion of St. Paul who called him “the beloved physician” (Col 4:14). Luke’s training is reflected in the New Testament books written by him, where we find medical terms and an excellent command of the Greek language. He is the most literary of the four Evangelists. In his letters, St. Paul mentions Luke’s presence on three different occasions. The “we” passages in Acts, which was written by St. Luke, also confirm their journeys together.

Luke’s authorship of the Gospel that bears his name is affirmed historically in the second century by the Muratorian Canon, Tertullian, Origen, and St. Irenaeus. St. Jerome, the greatest biblical scholar in antiquity, and the historian Eusebius made a similar confirmation in the 4th century. The historical reality is that Luke’s authorship is amply affirmed and there is no other claimant. St. Luke’s writings make up about one-quarter of the New Testament. There is historical evidence that St. Luke died in Greece, unmarried, at the age of 84, and “full of the Holy Spirit.” The Emperor Constantius II transferred his relics to Constantinople in A.D. 356-357. He is honored as the patron saint of doctors and also of painters, for it was believed that he painted a picture of the Virgin Mary that is now preserved in the Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome. Luke was a careful historian, “having followed all things closely for some time past,” as he attests in the first chapter of his Gospel. Its theme is *universality*, for Jesus’ message of mercy is for all people, especially the poor and sinners.

Lk 12:1-7; Friday, October 19, 2018

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body *but after that can do no more.*” This command by Jesus is the bone marrow of all the martyrs: from Stephen, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, Agnes, Cecilia, and Anastasia to Edith Stein, Maximilian Kolbe, and the Jesuit Martyrs of El Salvador. They, like all the martyrs, understood that they were more than just a body. Grasping this truth with every fiber of their beings, they enthusiastically embraced the destruction of their bodies because it was the immediate event leading to their eternal indissoluble union with Jesus who was the object of their love. When Jesus commanded us, “Do not be afraid,” he was simultaneously charging us to *rejoice.*

We can discover an ironic twist to martyrdom. All the persecutors down through the centuries foolishly believed that they could eradicate the “pernicious” presence of Jesus by slaughtering the bodies of his disciples. But the reality is always the opposite. When evil men kill Jesus’ faithful followers in their futile attempt to obliterate Jesus from the world, what really happens is the backfiring of their malicious intentions. In reality, they disseminate the animating souls of the martyrs, which can now be more manifest and efficacious than before because they are “poured out” with Christ just as St. Paul anticipated: “I am already on the point of being poured out in sacrifice” (2 Tim 4:6).

However, we should very much be afraid of the just One who “has the power to cast into Gehenna; yes, I tell you, be afraid of that one.” Gehenna, the “Valley of Wailing” became the symbol of the abode of the damned, because it was a place where Jews idolatrously slaughtered their own sons and daughters to the god Moloch. Thus, St. Paul admonishes us: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31).

Lk 12:13-21; Monday, October 22, 2018 – St. John Paul the Great

The man in today’s Gospel approached Jesus because Jesus taught with authority. True, but Jesus preached about redemption. He gave life-altering principles that, if followed, will transform all our actions and lead us to eternal happiness. But the man in today’s Gospel was not interested in all that religion stuff. He was only focused on an inheritance issues with his brother. He becomes an enduring example of those who approach religion to solve their material and social problems, but are not interested in amending their lives and holiness. They want easy solutions to their troubling temporal issues, which all pass away, but they neglect eternity.

St. John Paul the Great gives the opposite example. Listen to how he lived and taught:

“Young people of every continent, do not be afraid to be the saints of the new millennium! Be contemplative, love prayer.”

“Do not let yourselves be dispirited by those who are disillusioned with life and have grown deaf to the deepest and more authentic desires of their heart. You are right to be disappointed with hollow entertainment and passing fads, and with aiming at too little in life.”

“Have the courage to resist the dealers in deception who make capital of your hunger for happiness and who make you pay dearly for a moment of ‘artificial paradise,’ a whiff of smoke, a dose of drinking or drugs. What claims to be a shortcut to happiness leads nowhere.”

“We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures; we are the sum of the Father’s love for us and our real capacity of become the image of his Son.”

“Essential to preparing for marriage is your vacation to chastity.”

Finally, “happiness is achieved through sacrifice.”

Lk 12:35-38; Tuesday, October 23, 2018

Jesus exhorted his followers to be watchful. He did so for several reasons. First, our demonic enemies are always active. Peter warned, “Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Pet 5:8). Secondly, spiritually watchfulness is characteristic of someone in love. In the Song of Songs, which uses romantic marital love to express the love between Jesus and us - his bride, we read: “I slept, but my heart was awake.” Therefore, we must be awake to his knocking at the door of our heart. Third, watchfulness expresses itself in a spirit of prayer. Jesus taught us: “But watch at all times, *praying* that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man” (Lk 21:36). Finally, watchfulness also expresses our determination to be faithful. In this regard, St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Be watchful, *stand firm* in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love” (1 Cor 16:13).

When Jews went out to work, they would hitch up their flowing garments around their waist. Thus, the expression, “Gird your loins,” was formed. The loins encompass the region of the hips, groin, and lower abdomen. So, girding your loins in today’s Gospel expressed getting ready to work diligently in the vineyard of the Lord. We will have ample time to rest in the next life.

Similarly, lighting our lamps also expresses alertness, as we wait for Jesus’ unexpected coming in judgment. Thus, Jesus concluded: “You must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.” Let’s be ready and say, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

Lk 12:39-48; Wednesday, October 24, 2018

Today’s Gospel opens with Jesus giving a short exhortation to vigilance. If we knew when a thief was coming, we would prevent him from breaking into our home. Then Jesus made the application: “You must also be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.” God in his wisdom hides from us the time of our death and the time when this world will come to an end. Immediately after death everyone undergoes the particular judgment, as we read in the book of Hebrews: “Just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb 9:29). The general judgment will take place at the end of the world.

Peter asks a question; “Lord, is the parable meant for us or for everyone?” Jesus’ answer indicates his teaching applies to everyone. Every person will be required to give an account for how he has lived his life. Everyone has a mission to fulfill in this life. We will be judged on what we have produced, be it much or little. The Second Vatican Council gives us this summary:

“Since we know neither the day nor the hour, we should follow the advice of the Lord and watch constantly so that, when the single course of our earthly life is completed, we may merit to enter with him into the marriage feast and be numbered among the blessed and not, like the wicked and slothful servants, be ordered to depart into the eternal fire” (*Lumen gentium*, 48).

Some teach the false doctrine that a Christian cannot lose his salvation. This is utter nonsense that is refuted by more than 77 biblical passages in the New Testament. The constant message of the Bible is that each of us will be judged by what we *do*. James teaches that a man is justified by *works* [our behavior] and not by faith alone. He added; “faith without works is dead.” St. Paul

taught that faith without love is nothing. Finally, Jesus said: “if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” Believers are condemned because they did not do the will of his heavenly Father.

Lk 12:49-53; Thursday, October 25, 2018

The Bible often uses the image of fire to describe God’s burning love. For example, St. Paul wrote: “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for God is a *consuming fire*” (Heb 12:28-29). God is a raging fire of infinite love and holiness, which warms and purifies those who abide in his love. It’s this love that sustains us during the trials of life. It was in this context that St. Peter wrote: “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by *fire*, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:6-7). St. Athanasius, who so bravely defended the divinity of Jesus that he suffered exile five times because of it, wrote it was the fire of God’s love that supported the saints. It certainly supported him. Therefore, the saints did not shrink from trials nor did they become discouraged by them. Instead, the fire of God’s love purified them in the midst of their trials, just as it does to us today. It is said that if the angels could have bodies it would be so they could receive the Blessed Eucharist and suffer for Jesus.

The power of God’s love is witnessed in the behavior of the Apostles after they were filled with the Holy Spirit, the divine Person of Love. Their boldness amazed the Sanhedrin. In the face of their hostility Peter declared: “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” When the Apostles were beaten, they left “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.” We have also received the Holy Spirit, so what are we willing to endure for the name of Jesus?

Lk 12:54-59; Friday, October 26, 2018

Jesus’ listeners knew how to read the physical signs that allowed them to forecast the weather. They were also familiar with the prophetic signs that announced the arrival of the Messiah, namely, Jesus’ authoritative teaching and his miracles. Indeed, everything about Jesus spoke of his extraordinary holiness and the truth of his messages. Yet, most of them did not draw the logical conclusion. Why? Their refusal to repent, their lack of good will and an upright intention clouded their eyes to the light of the Gospel and blocked the grace of God from taking hold in their hearts.

This same kind of hardness of heart that leads to spiritual blindness and death is very widespread in our own country. Pride, our disordered sensual appetites, and our lust to acquire possessions are the root causes that is leading our society into an escalating culture of death. It’s easy to focus on the blood lust that has broken out in the Middle East, while ignoring our own profound ills. In one large mid-western city there was more than five murders for each day of last year. Government waste is at unprecedented levels, the staggering mound of our national debt threatens our entire economic system, fewer of our children are being raised in the security of two parent families, and millions of our babies are murdered – a genocide that is funded by the federal government.

In the face of this tidal wave of evil, there is a tendency to feel helpless. It’s easy to fall into the trap of thinking, “What can I do?” The correct answer is: “We can do a lot, if we follow the cure given to us by the Holy Spirit in the book of Chronicles.” It’s a four-step program we can all do: “If

my people who are called by my name 1) humble themselves, 2) and pray and 3) seek my face [i.e. long for God], 4) and turn from their wicked ways, [the promise] then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chron 7:14).

Lk 13:10-17; Monday, October 29, 2018

While he was teaching in a synagogue on a Sabbath, Jesus noticed a woman who was bent over from a demonic malady that had afflicted her for eighteen years. Her pitiable condition moved the heart of Jesus who cured her by his touch and his words. The woman and the ordinary people were delighted. But the ruler of the synagogue was so angry with Jesus he indirectly criticized Jesus by publicly reprimanding the people: “There are six days when work should be done. Come on those days to be cured, not on the Sabbath day.” Jesus could not allow this distortion to go unchallenged. So, he energetically censured this utterly warped interpretation of the Sabbath rest. The whole meaning of the law was founded on love and an intimate relationship with God. For God said, “I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings” (Hos 6:6). Jesus called him a hypocrite. St. John Chrysostom commented, “He had the face of one who observed the law carefully, but the mind of cunning and envy,” which is the mind of Satan.

Jesus exposed the absurdity of the man’s thinking. He would readily justify leading his ox or his ass to water on the Sabbath, but rejected the healing of a daughter of Abraham who was tormented by Satan! In the words of St. Bede, this synagogue ruler had so twisted the law that he judged that “the healing of human being was of less importance than the care of cattle!” The simple reality is this: there is no more fitting day to heal someone from the influence of Satan than on the Sabbath, because the Sabbath rest looks to our ultimate destiny when we will find rest in God for all eternity. For Christians the Sabbath, now Sunday, is also the most fitting time to renew our family bond with God through Jesus and to strengthen the ties with our human family. These should be our first priorities on Sunday... not football!

Luke 13:18-21; Tuesday, October 30, 2018

Both the mustard seed and yeast in today’s Gospel symbolize the Church, which began with a tiny group of disciples and has spread until it reaches the ends of the earth. The history of the Church amply demonstrates that the Church continues to grow and spread its message of love and forgiveness in spite of persecution from without and the presence of sinful traitors within. St. John Chrysostom reminds us that in “the parable of the mustard seed [our Lord] encouraged them that the gospel preaching will spread in spite of everything. The Lord’s disciples were the weakest of men. But because of Jesus’ great power that was in them, the Gospel has been spread to every part of the world.”

Therefore, in dark times, like today, we should be filled with confidence. God’s grace will keep the Church growing until the end of time. Sure, we even have enemies within the Church. “Fear not, little flock,” Jesus told us, “for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Lk 12:32).

The unexpected blows of a personal crisis come in many forms: a friend lost a son in a drowning accident, a couple had their house burn down with all their belongings, a father lost his job and finds it difficult to support his family, a parent grieves over the loss of a child’s faith, another is betrayed by a person close to them. All of these trials and more can be terribly painful and

unsettling. “Fear not,” Jesus reassures us. This life and its trials will all pass away. Then we can experience the complete victory in Christ. At the end of Matthew’s Gospel, after Jesus gave the great commission to the members of his Church and before he ascended to the Father, he gave us this final guarantee: “And behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20).

Lk 13:22-30; Wednesday, October 31, 2018

Jesus is asked this question: “Lord, will only a few people be saved?” Jesus does not answer that question. So, the question remains, will the greater number be saved, or will most souls be lost because they are living in mortal sin? When preaching to the city of Antiochenes, a city of 100,000 or more, St. John Chrysostom declared, “Scarcely can one hundred be found who will be saved, for among the young people there is wickedness, and among the elders’ sluggishness.” St. Augustine compared the Church to a threshing floor, on which there is more chaff than grain, that is, more reprobate than elect. These are disturbing opinions from two great saints.

What we know with absolute certitude is that God desires the salvation of all men and gives each person the necessary graces to be saved. Therefore, the more relevant question is this: “Lord, will *I* be saved?” While Jesus does not answer that question either, he does lay out the winning strategy that allows each of us to receive an affirmative answer: “Yes, you will be saved.”

Jesus said, “Enter the narrow gate.” The narrow gate is a metaphor of obedience, which is love in action. Just being a believer won’t cut it. Jesus also said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who *does* the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 7:21). The rich young man asked Jesus the vital question: “What good deed must I do, to have eternal life” (Mt 19:16). Jesus answered, “If you would enter life, keep the commandments” (Mt 19:17). This is the necessary “obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5; 16:26) that St. Paul identifies as “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). Let’s encourage one another by word and example to embrace it fully.