

# **Love God and Love Others**

Reflections by  
Father Roy Gomez

Edited by  
Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias

Extraordinary Catholics Press

© 2020 by Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias

All rights reserved  
including the right of reproduction  
in whole or in part in any form.

Extraordinary Catholics Press  
P.O. Box 2386  
Austin, Texas 78768

Cover art by Luis Armando Ordaz Gutiérrez

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 979-8-57-520104-5

## Table of Contents

|                                         |    |
|-----------------------------------------|----|
| Introduction                            | 1  |
| <b>Advent &amp; Christmas</b>           |    |
| First Sunday of Advent (Year A, 2020)   | 2  |
| Second Sunday of Advent (Year A, 2020)  | 3  |
| Third Sunday of Advent (Year C, 2016)   | 4  |
| Fourth Sunday of Advent (Year B, 2015)  | 6  |
| Nativity of the Lord (2017)             | 7  |
| Feast of the Holy Family (Year A, 2020) | 8  |
| Feast of the Holy Family (Year C, 2016) | 10 |
| Baptism of the Lord (Year A, 2020)      | 11 |
| Baptism of the Lord (Year C, 2019)      | 12 |
| <b>Lent &amp; Easter</b>                |    |
| First Sunday of Lent (Year C, 2019)     | 13 |
| Third Sunday of Lent (Year B, 2018)     | 14 |
| Fourth Sunday of Lent (Year A, 2020)    | 15 |
| Fourth Sunday of Lent (Year C, 2016)    | 16 |
| Fifth Sunday of Lent (Year C, 2019)     | 17 |
| Palm Sunday (Year A, 2020)              | 18 |
| Palm Sunday (Year C, 2016)              | 19 |
| Holy Thursday (2015)                    | 20 |
| Good Friday (2020)                      | 21 |
| The Resurrection of the Lord (2018)     | 22 |
| Second Sunday of Easter (Year A, 2020)  | 23 |
| Second Sunday of Easter (Year C, 2016)  | 24 |
| Fourth Sunday of Easter (Year A, 2020)  | 26 |
| Fourth Sunday of Easter (Year B, 2018)  | 27 |
| Fourth Sunday of Easter (Year C, 2019)  | 29 |

|                                                        |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Fifth Sunday of Easter (Year A, 2014)                  | 30 |
| Fifth Sunday of Easter (Year C, 2019)                  | 32 |
| Sixth Sunday of Easter (Year A, 2020)                  | 33 |
| Sixth Sunday of Easter (Year B, 2018)                  | 34 |
| Ascension of the Lord (Year A, 2020)                   | 34 |
| Pentecost (Year A, 2020)                               | 35 |
| Pentecost (Year C, 2019)                               | 37 |
| Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity (Year A, 2014)      | 38 |
| Solemnity of the Body & Blood of Christ (Year A, 2020) | 39 |
| Solemnity of the Body & Blood of Christ (Year C, 2019) | 40 |

## **Ordinary Time**

|                                                    |    |
|----------------------------------------------------|----|
| Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A, 2020)      | 41 |
| Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B, 2015)      | 42 |
| Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C, 2019)       | 43 |
| Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C, 2019)      | 45 |
| Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C, 2019)       | 46 |
| Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A, 2014)       | 47 |
| Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B, 2015)       | 49 |
| Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C, 2019)     | 50 |
| Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C, 2019)      | 51 |
| Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B, 2015)     | 53 |
| Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B, 2018)  | 54 |
| Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A, 2020)  | 55 |
| Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B, 2018)  | 56 |
| Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C, 2019)   | 58 |
| Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A, 2020)   | 59 |
| Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A, 2014) | 60 |
| Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B, 2015) | 61 |

|                                                             |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A, 2020)           | 62 |
| Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C, 2019)           | 63 |
| Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B, 2018)           | 65 |
| Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C, 2019)           | 66 |
| Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A, 2020)            | 67 |
| Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B, 2018)            | 68 |
| Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A, 2020)         | 69 |
| Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B, 2018)         | 70 |
| Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A, 2020)        | 71 |
| Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B, 2018)        | 72 |
| Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C, 2019)        | 73 |
| Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A, 2014)         | 75 |
| Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B, 2015)         | 76 |
| Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C, 2019)         | 77 |
| Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A, 2020)       | 79 |
| Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B, 2018)       | 80 |
| Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C, 2019)       | 81 |
| Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A, 2020)        | 82 |
| Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C, 2019)        | 83 |
| Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B, 2015)         | 85 |
| Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C, 2019)         | 86 |
| Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C, 2019)         | 87 |
| Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A, 2020)        | 88 |
| Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C, 2019)        | 89 |
| Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A, 2014)         | 90 |
| Solemnity of Christ the King of the Universe (Year A, 2020) | 92 |
| Solemnity of Christ the King of the Universe (Year B, 2015) | 93 |



## Introduction

Father Roy Gomez

I never imagined that I would serve God's people as a priest. In fact, 30 years ago, I never imagined myself serving the Church!

Born and raised in East Austin, the son of immigrants from San Luis Potosí and Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas, Mexico, I focused on my work and my family. My life changed in 1992 when a Franciscan friar, Brother Kerry Guillory, invited me to be part of our parish's Saint Francis of Assisi Joy Group, a ministry to senior adults, the homebound and the bereaved. The next twenty years were a journey of increasing involvement in the Church.

Life hasn't always been easy. After losing my daughter, Michelle, to domestic violence in 1994, I committed myself to helping others who suffer abuse. I've walked with people through very dark valleys. That's what ministry is all about: reaching out to and helping others through the challenges of life!

I'm thankful that God brought me to Independent Catholicism, allowing me to serve God's people and to freely share with them the sacraments of the Church—first as a deacon, then as a priest for the past five years.

As I now prepare to retire from active ministry, I look forward to beginning a new chapter in my life. I'm left with so many fulfilling memories of so many tremendous people! It has been a joy to serve all of you, and I pray that you will continue to live Jesus' law of love for God and others, serving those in need.

This collection of scriptural reflections from my years of ministry at Holy Family Catholic Church is a small token of my love and gratitude for you. Let us continue to pray for one another—and I will look forward to seeing where God continues to lead us all in our earthy journey!

## First Sunday of Advent

Year A, 2020

Isaiah 2:1-5 | Psalm 122:1-9 | Romans 13:11-14 | Matthew 24:36-44

“Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!” In today’s gospel, we see what happens to those who walk in the darkness: “One will be taken away, and one will be left.” For this reason, the scriptures tell us, “Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!” Those who live in darkness will be swept away. If we live in righteousness, though, that’s our way to the Promised Land, to heaven.

In today’s first reading, we hear of the building of the temple, where people were instructed in God’s precepts and ways, and where they were enlightened by God’s Word. We, too, pray that we might be led from darkness to light, enlightened by the Lord.

In today’s gospel, people are drinking, marrying—everything but preparing themselves for the coming of the Lord. We have to be ready, because we don’t know the day or the hour when the Son of Man will come for us. We have to walk in the light of the Lord!

Advent means “coming.” Our Lord Jesus Christ is coming! How are you preparing for his coming? Christmas has been commercialized, so it’s easy to lose sight of the meaning of Christmas: that Christ our Savior is coming!

We can’t be so occupied with all the details of Christmas—the shopping and gift-giving. We need to think about the coming of the Lord and prepare a place within us!

Saint Paul tells us the hour is now, and that the Lord is coming. We need to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Savior of the world! We don’t know when the Lord is coming for us, so we need to be prepared. If we knew when the thief were coming, we’d prevent him

*We can’t be so occupied with  
all the details of Christmas –  
the shopping and gift-giving.*

*We need to think about  
the coming of the Lord and  
prepare a place within us!*

from entering our house. We would be prepared. We know the Lord is coming: We have to prepare ourselves. It’s that simple!

Walking in the light of the Lord is difficult. There are so many temptations. Christmas has been

entirely commercialized, such that many people don't even know what Christmas is about. I was speaking with our altar server before Mass. He's 12 years old. He said, "I know the story of the Easter Bunny isn't true, and I know there's no Santa Claus." That's what we're taught: that Christmas is about Santa Claus. Really, though, Christmas is all about...Christ! It's about Christ our Savior. It's not about the gifts we receive. It's about making a place in our hearts to receive the Light of the world.

As we prepare for Christmas, let us be children of the light, following and receiving the light of Christ our Savior!

## Second Sunday of Advent

Year A, 2020

Isaiah 11:1-10 | Psalm 72:1-13 | Romans 15:4-9 | Matthew 3:1-12

Today is the second Sunday of Advent, the Sunday of hope! In today's first reading, Isaiah talks about hope: a king who will rule with wisdom and understanding. Several rulers lacked wisdom and understanding, so the people lived with the hope of one day seeing a king filled with wisdom and inspiring people with hope.

Today we also celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. We place our hope and trust in her, that she will intercede for us.

When I lost my daughter, I put my hope and trust in the Blessed Mother, asking her to help me raise my two granddaughters. The Blessed Mother helped me, and she helped my family.

Saint John the Baptist was also a source of hope for all who came to be baptized by him. He told them, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!" Those who were baptized by him had the hope of salvation.

We also hope for the forgiveness of our sins. Perhaps you remember the Act of Contrition: "O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you, and I detest all my sins because of your just punishments, but most of all

*When I lost my daughter,  
I put my hope and trust  
in the Blessed Mother,  
asking her to help me raise  
my two granddaughters.  
The Blessed Mother helped me,  
and she helped my family.*

because they offend you, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of your grace to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen.”

Those who were going to the Jordan River to be baptized by John were amending their lives, too. They came to be baptized and to change their lives – to make straight their lives and to prepare the way of the Lord!

During this Advent season, we prepare the Lord’s way. We make straight God’s path, that God might come straight to us and find a place within us – so that God might live in us, and us in God.

Isaiah had the vision of God bringing justice to the needy, cutting down the wicked like a fruitless tree.

Saint Paul encourages us to live in harmony – like Isaiah’s vision of the wolf living with the lamb, or the leopard lying down with the goat, or the calf with the lion.

May we welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us, to the glory of God the Father!

## **Third Sunday of Advent**

Year C, 2016

Zephaniah 3:14-18a | Isaiah 12:2-6 | Philippians 4:4-7 | Luke 3:10-18

John the Baptist tells us today that we don’t have to change who we are; we just have to change the way we act! He told the people: If you have an extra coat or some extra food, share it with your neighbor! He told the tax collectors: Don’t collect more than what is right and just! He told the soldiers: Be satisfied with your wages, and don’t extort the people or falsely accuse them of things they didn’t do!

People were asking John the Baptist how to act, because they thought he was the Messiah. But John the Baptist was quick to tell them: “I baptize with water, but one mightier than me is coming, and he will baptize with the Holy Spirit!” He also said, “I’m not worthy to untie his sandals.” John the Baptist knew that he had to decrease, so that Christ could increase.

During this joyful season of Advent, we're challenged to focus on the coming of our Savior. Instead, we often find ourselves thinking about other things. Earlier this week, one of my managers asked me for four days of vacation on his next paycheck, so that he can do some Christmas shopping. For many of us, that's where our minds are: We focus more on gift-giving, than on the nativity of Christ.

During this season, we recall the kindness of Saint Nicholas. The story is told of the gentleman who had three daughters, but he couldn't afford their dowry, and he didn't want them to go into prostitution. One night, Saint Nicholas threw bags of gold in his window. That's the kindness we're called to during this season!

Instead of writing letters to Santa Claus, asking for all the things we want him to give us, maybe we should write letters to Jesus, inviting him into our hearts and homes.

The prophet Zephaniah says, "Rejoice! Fear not! Don't be discouraged! The Lord is in your midst!" And he is.

Saint Paul tells us that our bodies are temples for our Lord. During this Eucharist, we are filled with Christ. We welcome Christ into our hearts. He lives in us, and we live in him.

During these weeks of Advent, may we remember to rejoice – and may we remember we have a choice: We can be the wheat, or the chaff that will be burned. Let's be the wheat. Let's give to those in need. Let's show goodness in our families. In this way, people will know that we are Christians by our love and our kindness!

*Instead of writing letters  
to Santa Claus, asking for all  
the things we want him to give us,  
maybe we should write letters to Jesus,  
inviting him into our hearts & homes.*

## Fourth Sunday of Advent

Year B, 2015

2Samuel 7:1-16 | Psalm 89:2-5, 27-29 | Romans 16:25-27 | Luke 1:26-38

In today's gospel, we hear the story of the Annunciation, when the Archangel Gabriel told Mary, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you. You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and his name will be Jesus." The Gospel of Matthew also says, "A virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and his name will be Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" It also says, "She will bear a son, and his name will be Jesus, because he will come for the forgiveness of his people's sins." There's also an ancient prayer, the *Angelus*, which speaks of the incarnation of our Lord:

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord."

"May it be done unto me according to your word."

"The Word was made flesh and dwelled among us."

Mary said "yes" to God's invitation to be the mother of the Lord. Her "yes" is referred to as the *fiat*. She then praised the Lord for what God had done for her. She said, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior!"

In the second book of Samuel, the people wanted to make a dwelling place for God, and God wondered why they wanted to confine God to a certain place—when God is all around. God is everywhere and doesn't want to be confined. And, because God is love, where God wants to be most of all is in our hearts!

This Advent season, as we prepare ourselves for the coming of our Savior, let's think about the dwelling place that we need to prepare for God—not just during Advent, but all the days of our lives, that we might say with Saint Paul: "To Jesus Christ be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

*Because God is love,  
where God wants  
to be most of all  
is in our hearts!*

## Nativity of the Lord

2017

Isaiah 62:11-12 | Psalm 97:1-12 | Titus 3:4-7 | Luke 2:15-20

In today's scriptures, we hear about the coming of our Savior. In the first reading, Isaiah says, "O daughter Zion, your Savior comes!" The Israelites had been exiled, captured by the Babylonians, and now they were set free and were coming back to rebuild Jerusalem. They recognized how God came to save them! They recognized that they were God's holy and chosen people, and they believed that God would bless them with all the resources they needed to rebuild.

The gospel speaks of the message heard by the shepherds. The angel told them, "Today, in the city of David, a Savior is born for you, who is the messiah and Lord." That "city of David" was Bethlehem, which means, "house of bread." In the gospel of John, Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life; whoever comes to me will not hunger, and whoever believes in me will not thirst." When we visited the Holy Land several years ago, we visited the House of Bread in Bethlehem.

My family and I celebrate Christmas the first week of December. We gather with more than 300 people who are victims of violent crimes. Together, we decorate the "Tree of Angels" — a Christmas tree decorated with ornaments from our homes. As we place our ornaments on the tree, we share our stories. This year, a woman shared a story about her daughter, Jennifer, who was murdered in a wooded area. For many years after that, the mother couldn't celebrate Christmas, because the pain was so bad. This year, though, she was finally able to share her story with us. Jesus Christ is a sign of hope, love and joy. That helped her cope with the loss of her only daughter.

It reminded me of the story of three fathers in a waiting room. The nurse came out and told the first father, "You have twins!" He rejoiced. He worked for Twin Liquors. After a little while, the nurse came out again and told the next father, "You have triplets!" He rejoiced. He worked for 3M. At that point, the third father left. He worked for 7-11.

In today's second reading, the letter to Titus talks about us not being worthy to receive the gift of Christ our Savior, whose name

means “God saves.” We can be worthy of the gift of God if, during this Christmas season, we open our hearts to each other. If we share our gifts with each other.

*We can be worthy of the gift of God if, during this Christmas season, we open our hearts to each other.*

If we share our joy with one another. And if we give each other the hope we need to be better Christians, better individuals, and better servants of God.

This Christmas season, let’s open our hearts and let Christ Jesus dwell in our hearts!

## Feast of the Holy Family

Year A, 2020

Sirach 3:3-7, 14-17 | Psalm 128:1-5 | Colossians 3:12-21 | Matthew 2:13-23

Today’s gospel speaks of the Holy Family: Mary, who intercedes for us, Jesus, our Lord and Savior, and Saint Joseph, the patron saint of a happy death. But the Holy Family wasn’t a perfect family. Joseph was a righteous man who found favor with God. Mary was chosen to be the mother of Jesus, whose very name means “God saves.” That’s why Jesus came: to atone for our sins and bring us salvation.

The life of the Holy Family was not perfect, as you might think. They had to flee to Egypt because Herod was killing all the children in the land. Like Joseph and Mary, some of our parents and grandparents were immigrants and came from other places. My family came from Mexico, to Mendoza, near Lockhart, where my parents grew up. They suffered persecution and injustices. They couldn’t find service in just any restaurant; they had to wait in lines for “Colored” people. They had to sit in the back of buses; the front seats were reserved for Anglos, for Whites. They suffered discrimination and other issues.

*Like Joseph and Mary,  
some of our parents  
& grandparents  
were immigrants  
and came from other places....  
They suffered persecution  
and injustices.*

The Holy Family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus suffered similar discrimination at the hands of King Herod, who killed all the children in that region. An angel appeared to Joseph one night, telling him to take his family to Egypt, to avoid the massacre. After King Herod passed away, the angel told Joseph it was safe to return. They settled in Nazareth, in Galilee, where Joseph and Jesus practiced carpentry.

All families pass through hardships.

I remember when we used to pick cotton. The gentleman collected social security taxes for my dad, but he never turned them in. My father didn't want any problems, so he paid his social security to the man. If you ask your parents, they probably suffered certain injustices, too. Despite such challenges, they held us together.

Sirach tells us to honor our parents—the fourth commandment—that we might be blessed with life and children. We are called to be obedient to our parents, who love us to death.

The letter to the Colossians tells us that every deed should be done in Jesus' name and in love. Family is all about love and unity. Here in our parish, the Limon family is an example of that love: When someone in the family is ill, they host a fundraiser. They help each other and look out for one another. It's important that we be united with one another and work together in love.

As we celebrate the Holy Family, we recall the prayers we received from the Holy Family. Jesus gave us the Our Father. We pray to Mary using the prayers of the Hail Mary. And Saint Joseph is the patron saint of a happy death. His prayer says,

O Saint Joseph, whose protection is so great, so strong, so prompt before the throne of God, I place in you all my interests and desires. O Saint Joseph, do assist me by your powerful intercession and obtain for me from your divine Son all spiritual blessings, through Jesus Christ our Lord, so that, having engaged here below your heavenly power, I may offer my thanksgiving and homage to the most loving of fathers. O Saint Joseph, may I never weary of contemplating you, and Jesus asleep in your arms. I dare not approach while he reposes near your heart. Press him in my name and kiss his fine head for me, and ask him to return the kiss when I draw my dying breath. Saint Joseph, patron of departing souls, pray for us. Amen.

## Feast of the Holy Family

Year C, 2016

Sirach 3:3-7, 14-17 | Psalm 128:1-5 | Colossians 3:12-21 | Matthew 2:13-23

Sirach tells us: “God sets parents in honor over their children, confirming their authority” and “reverence your parents, and you will be gladdened with children, and, when you pray, your prayers will be heard.” Similarly, Saint Paul tells us to look after our parents when they get up in age.

In my own ministry, I see the struggles of families: Parents get up in age, their children and grandchildren work, and it’s a struggle to provide and care for them. They don’t want to live in a nursing home. They want to remain in the homes where they lived most of their lives. It’s often a struggle for families to organize themselves and take turns caring for their parents—in the way that Rita takes care of her mom, and Irene takes care of her mom. It’s a struggle. When my mother got up in age, fortunately there were ten of us, and we all took a different day.

Those can be lonely nights and days for our parents, when they hardly see their children and grandchildren. The author of the letter to the Colossians urges us to take care of our parents, because our families are the source of our livelihood. Whenever we’re in desperate need, who do we go to? Our families.

Somebody asked me about the Holy Family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus. Joseph wanted to divorce Mary, but an angel spoke to him, and he cared for Mary. He was a carpenter, a provider. Mary, too, was obedient to God, saying, “May it be done unto me according to your

*Joseph wanted to divorce Mary,  
but an angel spoke to him,  
and he cared for Mary.*

*He was a carpenter, a provider.  
Mary, too, was obedient to God,  
saying, “May it be done unto me  
according to your word.*

*I will be the mother of your son.”*

word. I will be the mother of your son.” Jesus, too, grew up to be obedient, saying, “Let your will be done” and giving his life for our sins. He was obedient to his Father.

In today’s gospel, the angels announced the good news of Jesus’ birth to the shepherds,

who were marginalized. They found Jesus in the manger, and Mary kept all the things that she experienced in her heart.

The author of the letter to the Colossians tells us to live the life of God's holy and beloved ones, practicing the virtues of kindness, compassion, gentleness, humility and patience. Most of all, we must forgive others, as God forgives them. He concludes: Let the peace of Christ control your hearts and dwell in you and your families, and, whatever you do in word and deed, do it in the name of Jesus Christ, who is Lord forever and ever. Amen.

## Baptism of the Lord

Year A, 2020

Isaiah 42:1-7 | Psalm 29:1-10 | Acts 10:34-38 | Matthew 3:13-17

Today we celebrate the baptism of the Lord, the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus was baptized with water, a symbol that we use every time we enter the church. In the book of Genesis, the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters. In the book of Exodus, Moses, who was saved when he was placed in a basket in the Nile River, separated the waters of the Red Sea, and the Israelites escaped to freedom. Through water, Naaman was cleansed of leprosy. Jesus' first miracle was to transform water to wine at the wedding at Cana. Water has a rich symbolism in the Church!

At Jesus' baptism, the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove, and God spoke from heaven: "This is my son with whom I am well pleased." Filled with the Spirit, Jesus healed those who were sick and oppressed, showing that he was God's son with whom God was well pleased.

All of us are baptized in Christ, called to live in righteousness and to be a light to the nations. In baptism, Christ takes us by the hand and doesn't let go during our earthly journey. As the light for all the nations, he loves and guides us, and, as children of God, we, too, are called to be a light to the nations. We were all baptized in Christ. May we live as children of the light!

*All of us are baptized in Christ,  
called to live in righteousness  
and to be a light to the nations.*

## Baptism of the Lord

Year C, 2019

Isaiah 42:1-7 | Psalm 29:1-10 | Acts 10:34-38 | Matthew 3:13-17

As we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord, we recall when we brought our children and grandchildren to be baptized. I was recently asking a friend what the baptism of his children meant to him. He replied, “We’re going to go eat at my favorite restaurant!”

Why do we baptize our children and grandchildren? In baptism, we’re washed clean of original sin. Jesus didn’t have to be baptized. He was born without the blemish of sin.

When we baptize our children and anoint them with the oil of salvation, we bring them into the community of the Church. Jesus, too, was anointed the Son of God – then he began his public ministry. In the old days, we would have said that Jesus appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show! A voice from heaven proclaimed, “You are my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” God the Father recognized him as his Son – and as our messiah. For this reason, we say the baptism of the Lord was Jesus’ manifestation as the Son of God, in fulfillment of God’s plan.

Through their baptism, Jesus opens to our children and grandchildren the door to salvation, cleansing them of sin. As a sign of their baptismal purity – of being cleansed of original sin – we clothe them in white garments. We also light a candle as a symbol of sharing with them the Light of Christ. And we promise to raise them in the faith of the Church.

Isaiah tells us: If you are my servant, you will be a light to all nations. We need to be a light to all people!

The Acts of the Apostles tells us to be inclusive. Because we are all children of God, we can’t show partiality toward anyone. As children of God, we’re all equal.

*The Acts of the Apostles  
tells us to be inclusive.*

*Because we are all children of God,  
we can’t show partiality toward anyone.*

*As children of God, we’re all equal.*

May we all live according  
to our baptismal promises,  
so that God might bless us  
with God’s peace.

## First Sunday of Lent

Year C, 2019

Deuteronomy 26:4-10 | Psalm 91:1-15 | Romans 10:8-13 | Luke 4:1-13

In today's gospel, Jesus is tempted — much like we're all tempted. I have a friend who's always tempted toward spending: She says she builds up her savings, and then she blows it! Perhaps our temptation is "keeping up with the Joneses." The devil in today's gospel tempts Jesus to turn a rock into bread. Jesus replies, "We don't live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." The tempter then offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. Jesus replies, "We can only worship and serve God!" Then the devil took Jesus to the top of the temple.

The scene reminds me of one of the few jokes that I know. An Aggie and a Longhorn were both at the top of the UT tower one night, and the Longhorn shined his flashlight down onto the ground below. He said to the Aggie, "I bet you can't slide down this beam!" The Aggie turned to him and said, "Do you think I'm dumb? You'll probably turn off the flashlight when I'm halfway down!"

In today's first reading, the people are bringing their first fruits to the temple. Moses points out that the least we can do is to bring the first fruits of our harvest to the Lord, who brought us out of the oppression of slavery, to a land flowing with milk and honey.

We are challenged to do the same. God gives us all that we have. Without God, we wouldn't have what we have, or do what we do. So we share what we have with the Church and with others.

Saint Paul says that the Word of God belongs to everyone — not just to the Jews. He says the Word of God is in our mouths and in our hearts. He says, "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." Like Jesus, we, too, will be raised from the dead, and we pray with the psalmist, "Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble!"

*God gives us all that we have.  
Without God, we wouldn't  
have what we have,  
or do what we do.*

## Third Sunday of Lent

Year B, 2018

Exodus 20:1-17 | Psalm 19:8-11 | 1Corinthians 1:22-25 | John 2:13-25

The Ten Commandments in today's first reading challenge us to be Christlike. They challenge us to recognize that we have only one God. We remember what happened in Jerusalem when the people started having other gods: The temple was destroyed, and the Israelites were taken captive by the Babylonians!

The Ten Commandments aren't rules, so much as they are a demonstration of God's love for us.

"Honor your father and your mother." I was recently talking to a friend who said, "Pray for me: My children won't talk to me anymore. They want me to hand over my house to them – and I'm not dead yet!"

"Thou shall not kill." "Thou shall not commit adultery." These are rules we can live by, to have a better society.

Or we can follow the two commandments that Jesus laid out: Love God, and love one another.

In today's gospel, Jesus shows his anger when he goes into the temple and sees that it's been turned into a marketplace. People are taking advantage of the Jewish religion, selling oxen and all kinds of animals for temple sacrifices. Jesus tells the people that the temple is a house of prayer, not a marketplace or a *pulga* (flea market). Upset, Jesus turns over the tables and runs everybody out of there. We, too, reverence our sanctuaries as places of worship.

Saint Paul tells us that the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and that the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. God is beyond all our understanding, beyond all our understanding. With God, all things are possible. That's why we have the words of the psalm: "Lord, your words are everlasting life!"

*The Ten Commandments  
aren't rules, so much as  
they are a demonstration  
of God's love for us.*

## Fourth Sunday of Lent

Year B, 2018

2Chronicles 36:14-23 | Psalm 137:1-6 | Ephesians 2:4-10 | John 3:14-21

In today's readings, we see a perfect example of what happens when we don't keep God's commandments. In the second book of Chronicles, we hear that the people preferred darkness to light. They practiced infidelity upon infidelity. As a result, Jerusalem was seized and burned, and all who didn't die by the sword were taken captive for over 60 years. Then they saw God's infinite mercy when God touched the heart of King Cyrus of Persia, allowing the Israelites to go free and to return to Jerusalem.

In today's gospel, we hear of God's infinite mercy for all of us. Jesus tells Nicodemus about the bronze serpent that Moses lifted up as he led the people from Mount Horeb to the Promised Land. The people grew impatient with God and Moses, so God sent serpents that bit them, and many of them died. The people repented, and God told Moses to place a bronze serpent on a pole, and all who saw it—even though they had been bitten—lived. Jesus was telling Nicodemus about God's mercy: "God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that all who believe in him might not perish, but might have eternal life." That's one of the most famous passages in the New Testament, in John 3:16, followed by 3:17: "God did not send his son to condemn the world, but that we might all be saved through him."

Today's gospel also talks about light and darkness: Those who do wicked things don't like the light, because it exposes their works. I was reading about how batteries are sent from the U.S. to Mexico, where the people there are exposed to the lead. Things like this happen in our world. That's why we have the Equal Justice Center and the Worker's Defense Project here in Austin, advocating for the rights of those who aren't justly paid for work—especially those who place their lives at risk in construction sites. Evil exists in our society.

Saint Paul says that we are saved by grace. We are not saved by the things we do.

During this Lenten journey, it's important to remember that Jesus is the light of the world. During this Lent, may we find the love of Christ—and his mercy for each of us!

## Fourth Sunday of Lent

Year C, 2016

Joshua 5:9-12 | Psalm 34:2-7 | 2Corinthians 5:17-21 | Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

In today's first reading, the Israelites are celebrating the Passover. They're celebrating their freedom! After forty years of traveling in the wilderness and eating manna, God had liberated them, and they were now able to eat what they produced. That's how merciful God is: God set them free!

Homeowners remember the feeling of buying a new home. That's how the Israelites felt: They were now "home"!

In today's second reading, Saint Paul talks about reconciliation: how God has reconciled us to God's self through Christ, who suffered for the sins of all, that we might enjoy eternal life. Saint Paul tells us that, through reconciliation, we become a new creation. Our "old self" goes away, and we're clothed with a "new self."

Today's gospel reminds me of the story of a man who was upset that his father mortgaged the family's home to get his brother out of prison. He said, "That's not fair." That's the same sentiment in today's gospel: The older brother was upset that his father welcomed home his brother, even spending his inheritance to do so. It turns out that his brother was in prison because he murdered another person—but that didn't keep his father from loving him.

In today's gospel, the father saw his son from a distance and ran to meet him. He covered his son in kisses, gave him the finest clothes, and they had a celebration. He said, "My son was dead and has come back to life!"

Perhaps you've heard the song *Eran cien ovejas* [There Were 100 Sheep]: The shepherd went out to look for the one lost sheep—and he found it! That's what today's gospel is all about! Imagine the joy that God has when one of God's lost children comes home!

Let us pray today that God might reconcile us, that we might become new and change the face of the earth!

*Imagine the joy  
that God has  
when one of God's  
lost children comes home!*

## Fifth Sunday of Lent

Year C, 2019

Isaiah 43:16-21 | Psalm 126:1-6 | Philippians 3:8-14 | John 8:1-11

Before you judge someone else, stop and think about the way God has forgiven you. Sometimes we're quick to judge others. Over 1,500 people have been executed in this country – but 168 people have been exonerated through DNA testing. Imagine the innocent people who have been executed because others have been quick to condemn them!

In today's gospel, the scribes and Pharisees bring to Jesus a woman who committed adultery – and they want to stone her, as law of Moses suggested! Jesus tells them to first look in the mirror.

Last Sunday, we heard the story of the prodigal son, who turned his back on his father – and his father forgave him! God forgives us as well.

*We're called to see ourselves  
as God sees us, and  
we're called to see others  
as God sees them.*

We're called to see ourselves as God sees us, and we're called to see others as God sees them. Jesus said to the Pharisees: "If you're without sin, you can cast the first stone." And the Pharisees all walked away.

Jesus told the woman that he didn't condemn her either. Rather than condemn her, he said, "Go and sin no more."

In today's first reading, God speaks through the prophet about the exiles in Babylon: Because they turned their back on God, they went into captivity for over 60 years! Fortunately, God, who is infinitely merciful, freed them and gave them life. God wiped away their past and made all things new! God liberated them, just as God liberated the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, leading them through the sea and into the Promised Land. God told them, "Forget the past!" Even though the people had sinned, God freed them from their captivity, leading them to even better lives than they had before.

In today's second reading, Saint Paul talks about how he used to persecute Christians. After finding Christ, he said, "Everything that I did before, I consider as rubbish." He was now alive in Christ Jesus – and what God did for Paul, God can do for us, too!

Let's leave our past behind and commit ourselves to Christ Jesus, asking that God might make all things new and that we might sing with the psalmist: "The Lord has done good things for us; we are filled with joy!"

## **Palm Sunday**

Year A, 2020

Isaiah 50:4-7 | Psalm 22:8-24 | Philippians 2:6-11 | Matthew 26:14 – 27:66

In today's first gospel, Jesus received a great welcome. It was a "red carpet" experience for Jesus! The people threw their cloaks on the road, so that Jesus' feet wouldn't touch the dirt. They cheered, and they waved branches and palms as he entered Jerusalem – but Jesus' great welcome soon turned into a nightmare, as he was condemned to death in today's second gospel.

Every year, we embark on a Lenten journey of 40 days of prayer, fasting and acts of charity. We pray that we might grow in our faith in Christ and not "throw him under the bus" as Judas did for 30 pieces of silver – or deny him, as Peter did. If we were honest, we all "throw Jesus under the bus" from time to time, choosing to do other things rather than spend time with him in prayer. We deny Jesus when we pause to look around in public places before deciding whether we'll pray before eating. We pray that we might be faithful to Christ and not abandon him, as his disciples did.

We practice fasting during our Lenten journey, to learn how to sacrifice and do without. By sacrificing, we learn to suffer a little bit and to share in the sufferings of Jesus. We try to overcome our selfishness and be more self-giving, like Jesus, learning to tend to the needs of others, especially those most in need.

During our Lenten journey, we also practice charity, trying to be more and more like Jesus Christ, who gave his life for us. When we practice charity, we help Jesus carry the cross – just as Simon of Cyrene did.

These Lenten practices help us grow in our trust in Jesus Christ, so that we can be more like Mary Magdalene, who followed Jesus from

the beginning of his ministry, to the end of his journey on the cross. Many of us follow Jesus for a time—then we forget. Lent is an opportunity for us to try again, to better ourselves, and to grow in our trust in Christ.

As today's second reading says: Though in the form of God, Jesus became one like us and was obedient, even to death on the cross. May we be obedient to our Lord Jesus Christ, following him from the beginning to the end. If we do this, we will truly be able to say, "We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you because, by your holy cross, you have saved the world!"

*Many of us follow Jesus for a time –  
then we forget. Lent is an opportunity  
for us to try again, to better ourselves,  
and to grow in our trust in Christ.*

## Palm Sunday

Year C, 2016

Isaiah 50:4-7 | Psalm 22:8-24 | Philippians 2:6-11 | Luke 22:14–23:56

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, there was a great celebration. Everybody welcomed him as a king, throwing their cloaks on the road before him, and waving palms, a symbol of peace. They proclaimed, "Hosanna in the highest!" Within days, they took him before Pilate and accused him of treason and blasphemy. Sometimes we're like those people, glorifying God as long as everything is going well, but asking ourselves where God is during times of tragedy. In good times, we're like Simon of Cyrene, volunteering to help carry the cross, but, when we feel its weight, we complain!

It reminds me of the story of the man who was carrying his cross. He cried out that his cross was too heavy—and he cut a piece from the bottom of his cross. He went on a little further and began to complain again that his cross was too heavy—and he cut off more from his cross. Before too long, he arrived at a

*We're all human, all too quick  
to accuse God of not being there for us  
during the difficult moments of life.*

ravine that he was unable to cross—because his cross was too short! We're all human, all too quick to accuse God of not being there for us during the difficult moments of life.

In today's second reading, Saint Paul encourages us to be patient and Christlike—to be like Christ who was obedient even unto death on the cross. He was obedient to God's command to love God and others. He was also forgiving—which is why, when the criminal in today's gospel asked him for forgiveness, he replied, "This very day, you will be with me in paradise." Jesus made the same promise to that criminal that he makes to us: the promise of paradise, the promise of eternal life!

Palm Sunday is the beginning of Holy Week. We'll celebrate the Lord's supper on Thursday, the Lord's passion on Friday, and the Lord's resurrection on Saturday night. During this Holy Week, may we be obedient to God and to each other, that we, too, might enjoy paradise with our risen Lord!

## Holy Thursday

2015

Exodus 12:1-14 | Psalm 116:12-18 | 1Corinthians 11:23-26 | John 13:1-15

Moses told the people to prepare for a pilgrimage by procuring a lamb and slaughtering it at twilight, putting its blood on their doorposts so that God's judgment would pass over them and not destroy their firstborn. Moses told them how to eat the lamb, too: with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, standing up, as if "on the run," with their sandals on and with staffs in hand. After years in slavery, their pilgrimage to the land of milk and honey was about to begin!

In tonight's second reading, Saint Paul talks about the Last Supper: how Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it and said, "This is my body for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same manner, he took a cup of wine and said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood. As often as you drink it, do this in remembrance of me."

In the gospel, Jesus gives us an example of service: He takes off his garment, ties a towel around his waist, and starts to wash and dry the

feet of his disciples. But when he comes to Simon Peter, Simon Peter doesn't want Jesus to wash his feet. He says, "You can't do that to me!" Jesus tells him, "Unless I wash your feet, you won't have any part of my inheritance." So Simon Peter says, "You can wash not only my feet, but also my head!"

We have a similar experience when our parents are ready to leave this earth: They give us instructions. They tell us to love one another and to stay united!

## Good Friday

2020

Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 | Psalm 31:2-25 | Hebrews 4:14-15, 5:7-9 | John 18:1-19:42

Jesus, the Son of God, has been unjustly condemned to death. He was crucified on a cross because of our sins and transgressions and the darkness in our lives. Jesus was obedient to God, accomplishing God's will for him, being the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, suffering and dying for our sake. He suffered. He carried the cross. He was beaten. He was spat upon. He was humiliated. He was made fun of. He was deserted by all his disciples. He was denied. In all this, Jesus was faithful and obedient to God, enduring all this for our sake.

Jesus was be stripped of his clothes, and the soldiers rolled dice for their share of his garments. Jesus was nailed to the cross. And Jesus died for each one of us. He died for our sins, that we might have a new life, a new beginning. That's what the passion is all about: that we might remember the pain and suffering Jesus Christ endured for each one of us and for our sake.

After his death, he was placed in a tomb, where we wait for the resurrection of our Lord and Savior.

This is Good Friday. We commemorate Jesus' passion, and we wait in silence for Jesus' resurrection. Let us wait in silence for the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

## The Resurrection of the Lord

2018

Acts 10:34-43 | Psalm 118:16-23 | Colossians 3:1-4 | John 20:1-9

He is risen!

Today we celebrate the resurrection. What does the resurrection mean for us? It means that we have a new beginning. Jesus died for our sins, so that we can start anew. That doesn't mean that we won't endure the trials of life. It does mean that Christ has given us the opportunity to have a new heart.

Just as the stone was rolled away from the opening of the tomb, a "stone" has been rolled away from our hearts, allowing us to have hearts of love, understanding and forgiveness.

*A "stone" has been  
rolled away from our hearts,  
allowing us to have hearts of love,  
understanding and forgiveness.*

We'll encounter the trials of life, but with a new, clean heart, we'll be able to more easily endure the trials of life.

During our Lenten journey, we practiced prayer, fasting and almsgiving. This year, my son, Michael, started reading daily scriptures—and asking me questions about them. One day, he said, "I'm at peace." It's a peaceful journey when we understand that God is love. If we love God, we'll still undergo trials, but James tells us, "Consider it joy when you encounter the trials of life."

Mary of Magdala was the first to arrive at the tomb. She saw that the Lord had risen, and she ran to tell Peter and the other disciples. It's fitting that Mary of Magdala was the first to discover the resurrection of the Lord, since women were part of Jesus' ministry from the beginning. They financed the ministry of Jesus, supporting him morally and financially. It's the same here at Holy Family, where so many women support our ministry. Our Environment Committee is comprised largely of women. Our biggest financial contributors are women. Father Libardo likes to say that he came to Holy Family because we're an inclusive community and women are part of the ministry. We have Deacon Angelita and Reverend Patrice who are part of our clergy.

In today's first reading, Peter speaks with Cornelius, a centurion, who had a vision: The angel of God told him to summon Peter. Simon Peter also had a vision: not to judge what is clean or unclean. The centurion invited several friends over to listen to Peter, who told them, "It is not lawful for Jews and Gentiles to mingle, but I have learned it's not for me to judge what is clean or unclean, since all that God created is clean." Peter told them that Jesus was given power over unclean spirits and performed many wonders, but then that he was hung on a tree and brought back to life on the third day. That's what we celebrate today.

In today's second reading, Saint Paul speaks of seeking the things of heaven, not the things of earth. May we do just that, so that we, too, might be glorified in the presence of God with Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and one day say in the kingdom of God, "This is the day the Lord has made: Let us be glad and rejoice!"

## Second Sunday of Easter

Year A, 2020

Acts 2:42-47 | Psalm 118:2-24 | 1Peter 1:3-9 | John 20:19-31

"You have come to believe because you have seen me." The risen Christ directed these words at Thomas, who said he would not believe that Christ rose, until he saw and put his fingers in Christ's wounds. Each of us is asked, "Do *you* believe?"

Last week, we reflected on that question during our bible study. We reflected on what made us believers. For some, it was an event. For others, a certain teaching. Of course, we had different answers.

My grandmother's teachings helped me to be a believer. My parents' teachings helped me to be a believer. Our family traditions helped me to be a believer. A miracle helped me to be a believer in Christ's resurrection.

We might compare Christ's resurrection to those who've had near-death experiences. Many such people speak of an indescribable peace they felt. One gentleman, who was dead for 12 minutes, later asked his wife, "Why did you bring me back? I was at such peace!"

What gift did the risen Lord give to his apostles? Peace! He greeted them and said, “Peace be with you! Receive the Holy Spirit!”

Imagine if we all lived in peace! Imagine what a wonderful world this would be if we all lived in peace!

The resurrection transformed the lives of the apostles. It can transform our lives as well. It can give us new hope, a new beginning.

That new hope is the inheritance that Peter talks about in today’s second reading: the imperishable, undefiled, unfailing inheritance that waits for us in heaven and is granted by the power of God.

The risen Lord guaranteed that inheritance by being the Lamb of God and dying for our sins. Our inheritance — our salvation and our eternal life — doesn’t come easy. During our earthly journey, we must face trials and tests, like this pandemic that we’re experiencing now. We all pass through many trials and many tests, but we believe what Peter shares in today’s second reading: Even though we do not know him, we love him, and, even though we have not seen him, we believe in him, because, as the psalmist says, “The Lord is good, and his love is everlasting!”

*Imagine if we all lived in peace!  
Imagine what a wonderful world this  
would be if we all lived in peace!*

## Second Sunday of Easter

Year C, 2016

Acts 5:12-16 | Psalm 118:2-24 | Revelation 1:9-19 | John 20:19-31

Do you believe because you have seen, or do you have enough faith to believe, even though you haven’t seen the wonders of the Lord? As a community, we have seen the wonders of the Lord! We saw how Leonard was healed of cancer!

Today’s gospel speaks of Thomas, who doubted. He would not believe until he saw and put his finger into Christ’s wounds. In that way, he was convinced of the presence of the risen Lord!

We often call Thomas “the Doubter,” but it was Thomas who encouraged the disciples to go with Jesus to visit Lazarus in Bethany,

which was close to Jerusalem, where the people wanted to kill Jesus. It was also Thomas who, during the Last Supper, said to Jesus, "Master, we don't know where you're going. How can we know the way?" And Jesus said, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life."

During the consecration of the bread and wine at Mass, we twice say the words of Thomas: "My Lord and my God!" Thomas believed!

In today's first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, the people believed. They believed so much that they brought the sick out in cots and lined the streets, so that Peter's shadow might heal them.

In today's second reading, John was banished to the island of Patmos because he believed in and proclaimed the Word.

We do well to ask ourselves: Do we believe because we see with our eyes, or is our faith strong enough simply to believe?

*Do we believe because  
we see with our eyes,  
or is our faith strong enough  
simply to believe?*

In my ministry, I visit the elderly. One day, there were eight ladies who gathered together at one of their houses, and one of them developed cancer, so the day before her surgery, the priest celebrated Mass with them, and her friends came to pray with her. And, after the surgery, she said that, when the doctors opened her up, there was no cancer. It was gone! Stories like that cause our faith to increase. When a family member or friend is healed, our faith increases.

After Jesus' death, the apostles locked themselves behind closed doors, out of fear. We see a similar fear in the first reading: The people got close to the apostles but wouldn't join them — out of fear.

We, too, live in fear.

When we pray funeral rosaries with the Joy Group, ministers from other churches sometimes join us. At first, I didn't feel comfortable, because they pray differently than we do, saying, "Alleluia! Alleluia!" But I eventually grew more comfortable praying in their presence, and I would even invite them to share some words or a prayer during our rosary.

Like the people in today's first reading, we pray that the Lord might come to us and touch us, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega. I hold the keys to the nether world, and all who believe will have eternal life!"

## Fourth Sunday of Easter

Year A, 2020

Acts 2:36-41 | Psalm 23:1-6 | 1Peter 2:20-25 | John 10:1-10

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, we hear about the Good Shepherd and the sheep. Today's responsorial psalm was written by David, a shepherd, who was called to shepherd God's people as king. He imagined God as the Good Shepherd. He said,

"The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. In green pastures, he leads me." The Good Shepherd knows what we need. We sometimes yearn for "greener pastures," but God doesn't always give us what we want; God gives us what we need, and he gives us peace—as we saw in the words of the risen Christ two weeks ago.

*We sometimes yearn  
for "greener pastures,"  
but God doesn't always  
give us what we want;  
God gives us what we need.*

"Besides restful waters, he leads me. He refreshes my soul." The waters may not always be restful or still, but the Lord is always at our side, refreshing our soul.

"He leads me in the right path for his name's sake." God leads us in the way of righteousness, that we might be more like God. At the end of our journey, he is the gate, welcoming us home to heaven.

"Even though I walk in the dark valley, I fear no evil, for you are at my side." David was hounded by King Saul, who wanted to kill him. But David knew that God was the Good Shepherd at his side, guiding him!

"Your rod and your staff give me courage." It was Moses' staff that opened the sea and allowed the Israelites to escape to freedom. It was his staff that quenched the thirst of the Israelites in the desert. Shepherds use staffs to fight off the wolves.

"You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes." With the Good Shepherd at our side, evil will never win in our lives.

"You anoint my head with oil, and my cup overflows." When David was anointed with oil by Samuel, he became the chosen one. In baptism, we, too, are anointed with oil, and we receive the Holy Spirit. David was anointed king, and we, too, are anointed priests, prophets

and kings—and our “cup” overflows with all the graces we receive from God.

In today’s gospel, Jesus tells us, “I have come that you might have life to the full.” He challenges us to see ourselves as shepherds, too. What kind of shepherd will *you* be? How are *you* shepherding your family and others? How are *you* shepherding those who are marginalized and experiencing need during this pandemic?

May we become good shepherds and enter through the gate that Jesus speaks of in today’s gospel, so that we might say with King David, the shepherd: “Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come!”

## Fourth Sunday of Easter

Year B, 2018

Acts 4:8-12 | Psalm 118:8-9, 21-29 | 1John 3:1-2 | John 10:11-18

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, laid down his life for his sheep—for us, that we might enjoy the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life.

In today’s gospel, Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me.” When children hear their parents’ voices, they feel their presence. That’s the example that John gives us in today’s gospel. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He knows us, and we know and follow him. Jesus laid down his life for his sheep.

Business owners take care of their businesses much better than hired hands. Before retiring, I supervised four fast-food restaurants. I had to always look out for the owners’ interests. One time, I pass by a restaurant, where the lights were off at 9:00 p.m. I called the supervisor to tell him—and it turned out that he closed the restaurant early every night and sent everyone home, and then he came back at midnight to clock everyone out!

Jesus tells us that the hired hands will abandon the sheep when the wolves come, and the sheep will be scattered. Jesus doesn’t abandon his sheep—not like his friends abandoned him during his crucifixion.

All of his disciples ran! The only people at the foot of the cross were his mom and his beloved disciple.

Sometimes people come and convince us to try other religions. They tell us that “the grass is greener on the other side.” Jesus wants to gather everyone into his fold—not just the Jews, the “chosen people,” but everyone! The Jews thought they were the chosen people—but then they came to discover that the Gentiles were part of God’s kingdom, too. That greatly expanded the ministry of Jesus’ disciples.

The caretakers of our world are modern-day “shepherds.” Others depend on them. I look after my son, a double-amputee. He asks me to take him places, and, of course, I say yes. I want to be with him. When he wants to go eat, we go. All caretakers assume the role of Jesus.

Think of the role of mothers: I have a four-month-old great grandchild, and, when he hears his mother coming, he knows it. He knows that he’ll soon be fed!

In today’s first reading, Peter and John heal a crippled man. The Sanhedrin—the elders and the Pharisees—call them to court for this. Peter and John tell them, “In the name of Jesus Christ, this man, who was crippled from birth, was healed!” The Sanhedrin was silent. In the end, they gave Peter and John a stern warning and let them go.

Peter told them that Jesus was the “cornerstone” that they, the “builders,” rejected when they crucified Jesus. Our salvation is based on that fact: that Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith, our beliefs and our salvation.

In today’s second reading, John tells us that we are all children of God. That’s what Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans. He says that we are children of God, co-heirs with Christ and co-heirs of heaven. John tells us that we are children of God because of the love that God has for us.

As parents, we have a tremendous amount of love for our children. That’s how God is with all God’s children. In my ministry to victims of domestic violence, I often encounter people with

low self-esteem who’ve been abused and battered. The first thing I tell them is that they are children of God and that they are no less than

*As parents, we have a  
tremendous amount of love  
for our children.  
That’s how God is  
with all God’s children.*

anyone else. That's difficult for them to understand: that they are worthy of God's love, and that they are God's children. John tells us of the love that God has for God's children, and that the world doesn't always recognize us as children of God—just as many didn't recognize Christ.

In today's second reading, John shares the hope that we'll one day see the God that we long for and want to be with. There is no greater joy than this for us, as children of God, than to see God our Father!

## **Fourth Sunday of Easter**

Year C, 2019

Acts 5:27-32, 40-41 | Psalm 30:2-13 | Revelation 5:11-14 | John 21:1-19

It's Good Shepherd Sunday, and we celebrate the fact that God is our shepherd. We hear and follow God's voice. That's what Paul and Barnabas did in today's first reading: They followed God's teachings and, even though they were rejected by the Jews, the Gentiles received the good news. Rejected, they shook the dust from their feet. That's what Jesus told them to do when he sent them out with no bag, but only with sandals, a single tunic and a walking stick—trusting that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, would lead them to eternal life in God's kingdom. All we have to do is follow Jesus' words: Love God and love one another. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world—and those who follow him will not perish. The souls of the just are in the hands of God, and no torment will touch them.

In today's second reading, John shares a vision. Last Sunday, he saw the Lamb that was slain, when the powers in the heavens proclaimed, "Worthy are you to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing!"

Today, John gives us a vision of hope. Exiled to an island, because Christians were being persecuted by Emperor Domitian—you had to worship the emperor or you lost your life! John shared a vision of hope for all who were being persecuted: Those who survived the persecution would have their sins wiped clean through the blood of the Lamb, and they would be fed and led to springs of lifegiving

water. The people would see a new heaven and a new earth as a result of the sacrificial Lamb.

Today we celebrate Mother's Day, and we might compare the Good Shepherd to our moms. "They hear my voice, and they follow me." Have you ever seen an infant hear the sound of its mother's voice? If we follow the teachings of our moms, we stand a good chance of eternal life. Our mothers are protective, not allowing us to perish and protecting us throughout our lives. Our moms are good shepherds, seemingly with unlimited energy and wisdom. They're

*We might compare  
the Good Shepherd  
to our moms....*

*Our mothers are protective,  
not allowing us to perish  
and protecting us  
throughout our lives.*

the first to get up and the last to go to bed. They sacrifice to get us the gift we didn't think they could afford. They work a second job for the sake of a child preparing to celebrate a *quinceañera*. They help us realize our dreams, providing us opportunities and putting our welfare before their own. We call them "soccer moms" and "baseball moms." Really, they're good shepherds!

When I think about my mom, I'm amazed at what she accomplished. She became a U.S. citizen in her 60s. She had a tremendous amount of drive and a tremendous amount of dedication for her children.

We wish a happy Mother's Day to all the "good shepherds" in our lives—all those motherly figures who provide us direction in life, helping us to become the people we need to become, serving God and each other!

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter**

Year A, 2013

Acts 6:1-7 | Psalm 33:1-19 | 1Peter 2:4-9 | John 14:1-12

In today's gospel, Jesus tells his disciples, "I am going to prepare a place for you, so that where I am, you also may be. Where I am going, you know the way." Thomas replies, "We don't know the way. We

don't know where you're going!" Many times, we find ourselves in Thomas' place, asking, "Lord, I don't know what to do. What should I do?" Thomas was just being honest, saying that he didn't know the way. Sometimes we reflect on scripture and don't fully understand it—like Thomas.

Jesus told his friends, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one goes to the Father except through me. Now you have seen the Father because you know me." His friends replied, "Show us the Father, and everything will be cool."

Jesus said, "All this time I've been with you. Do you not know that the Father is in me, and I in the Father?" Jesus is the hands and the voice of God, doing works in the name of his Father!

In the same way, Jesus asks us to be his hands and his voice: visiting the sick, helping the needy, welcoming the stranger—like our hospitality ministers who are the hands of Christ when they welcome others every Sunday!

*Jesus asks us to be  
his hands and his voice:  
visiting the sick,  
helping the needy,  
welcoming the stranger.*

Our first reading speaks of the needs of the community. That's how Holy Family came to be: through the needs of the community. In the same way that the early community appointed deacons and laid hands on them, we have Father Jayme, Deacon Cleofas and myself who minister to the needs of our community. It takes all of us working together to serve the needs of the community!

In today's second reading, we hear of the precious and chosen cornerstone that God gave us in Jesus, who said, "Have faith in me, and have faith in God." If we have faith in that precious cornerstone, we will never be put to shame!

## Fifth Sunday of Easter

Year C, 2019

Acts 14:21-27 | Psalm 145:8-13 | Revelation 21:1-5 | John 13:31-35

“Love one another as I have loved you.” We all remember Mother Teresa with her Sisters of Charity. She served the poorest of the poor. She believed that the greatest illness in our world was not AIDS or cancer, but not caring for the unwanted and unloved. She served them and is now one of the great saints of the Church. Mother Teresa was also criticized by those who said that she took advantage of her ministry to the poor, to build up her own “kingdom,” her own ministry. Even though you do good for others, you will be criticized! Mother Teresa did good—and she also experienced the “dark night of the soul.” She questioned her faith.

In today’s first reading, Paul and Barnabas tell the people, “It is necessary for us to undergo hardships in order to gain the kingdom of God.” That’s what Mother Teresa went through: She was criticized, and she experienced some “dark nights.” Have you ever had doubts about your faith? Have you ever questioned God’s existence or why some things happen?

We know that there’s good and there’s evil. We have a choice: We can do good, or we can do evil. Today’s gospel tells us that we have a choice: We can be like Mother Teresa, or we can be like *El Chapo*. We have a choice. We can choose to love others, like God loves us.

The book of Revelation tells us that God will wipe every tear from our eyes, and there will be no more death, no more grief or pain. God will make everything new! If we follow Jesus’ example, loving God and others, we have the opportunity of eternal life in God’s kingdom, where we will be God’s people!

Jesus tells his disciples that if we love one another, they will know that we are Christian. How? By our love!

Let’s do good things for others. Let’s love one another and forgive those who’ve wronged us. Usually, the people who’ve “wronged” us simply suffer from misunderstanding. A guy once told me

*Jesus tells his disciples  
that if we love one another,  
they will know  
that we are Christian.  
How? By our love!*

of his sister and mother, who didn't speak with one another for 40 years. When they finally got together and talked, they discovered that their estrangement was the result of a misunderstanding!

Let's love and forgive one another!

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

Year A, 2020

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17 | Psalm 66:1-7 | 1Peter 3:15-18 | John 14:15-21

Our readings today talk about three things: love, the commandments, and the Advocate.

Love is the greatest gift of all, and Jesus realized that the disciples could not build the Church without unity and love. Jesus so loved the world that he died, so that we might have life. God is love, and Jesus taught us to love God and love one another, so that we can be in unity. Love brings people together in matrimony, and they promise to be true to one another in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. God, too, is with us in good times and in bad, in sickness – during this pandemic – and in good health. The ring is a symbol of the love and fidelity that people have for each other.

How might we be faithful to God? Through the commandments! By obeying the commandments, we show our love and fidelity. "I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange gods before me. Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day."

Peter instructs us to "sanctify Christ the Lord in your heart."

Jesus talks about the Advocate that he will ask his Father to send, an Advocate who will be with us always, even after Jesus ascends to the Father. The Advocate – the Holy Spirit – is a helper who guides us and remind us of all the teachings that Jesus gave us, so that we can be faithful to God.

Jesus promises us that, even after he ascends into heaven, he will be present, dwelling in us through the Spirit of Truth, if only we love him and keep his commandments! As Father Jayme suggested last week, in his homily with the magic rings, Christ remains in us, and we remain in Christ!

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

Year B, 2018

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48 | Psalm 98:1-4 | 1John 4:7-10 | John 15:9-17

Today's readings all talk about love. Our second reading tells us that God is love. In our gospel, Jesus says, "Love one another as I have loved you."

It's easy to love those who are like us—that's like hugging your own sister. It's more difficult to love the needy and those we don't know! It's a challenge to love the marginalized and those who are different from us. Sometimes during the Our Father, we don't want to hold the hands of the people beside us.

Our challenge is to find ways to keep reaching out to others and share with them God's love!

*It's easy to love those  
who are like us –  
that's like hugging  
your own sister.  
It's more difficult to  
love the needy and  
those we don't know!*

## Ascension of the Lord

Year A, 2020

Acts 1:1-11 | Psalm 47: 2-9 | Ephesians 1:17-23 | Matthew 28:16-20

Today we celebrate the solemnity of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. What does that mean? That Jesus rose to God his Father!

This event took place at Bethany, the same town that Jesus set out from when he entered into Jerusalem.

In today's first reading, two men dressed in white appear to Jesus' disciples. This brings to mind Luke's gospel, when women who took oil and perfume to anoint Jesus' body encountered two men dressed in white in Jesus' tomb.

Jesus was with his disciples for three years, teaching them and working miracles, and now he was leaving them and going to his Father. After his ascension, it was now up to Jesus' disciples to continue his work. Perhaps you've had a similar experience: We train for a position, then our trainer leaves us to do what we do. That's what Jesus did with his disciples! When I managed restaurants, I had supervisors quit from time to time, so I had to teach others what to do.

*We train for a position,  
then our trainer leaves us  
to do what we do.  
That's what Jesus did  
with his disciples!*

Jesus left his disciples, but he was still in their midst — and he is still among us! Like the disciples, we're left to do Jesus' work: to teach and to encourage others to love and forgive. That's what the ascension is about: We, who are left behind, are called to do Jesus' works and to be his eyes and hands and heart in the world!

In today's second reading, in the letter to the Ephesians, the author says: May the God of the Lord Jesus Christ give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation and knowledge of him — that we may know that Jesus conquered sin and death and is the head of the church, that he rose on the third day and was raised by God, and that he ascended into heaven, where he reigns with God the Father.

This gives us hope that we, too, will one day ascend to God the Father. In the meantime, we pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ will give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that we might have knowledge of him who ascended to our God and conquered death and sin!

## **Pentecost**

Year A, 2020

Acts 2:1-11 | Psalm 104:29-34 | 1Corinthians 12:3-13 | John 20:19-23

Today, we celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles. The Acts of the Apostles tells us that the Spirit arrived in a strong wind. The Gospel of John paints a

different picture: Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, "Peace be with you. Receive the Holy Spirit."

The Holy Spirit comes with many gifts. You might ask: What is the Holy Spirit? This glass of milk represents us, and this chocolate syrup represents the Holy Spirit. When I pour the chocolate into the milk, does it change the milk? No, we have to stir it up!

We have to stir up the Spirit's gifts of wisdom and love. We have to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength.

We have to stir up the Spirit's gift of understanding, that we might comprehend the divine mystery and seek heavenly things.

We have to stir up the Spirit's gift of counsel, so that we might choose what is best for our spiritual advancement and discover the tricks and snares of the tempter.

We have to stir up the Spirit's gift of fortitude, that we might overcome the assaults of Satan and the bad things of the world that keep us from eternal salvation.

We have to stir up the Spirit's gift of knowledge, so that we might know what things are from God and walk the righteous path to our salvation.

We have to stir up the Spirit's gift of piety, that we might love and serve the Lord with compassion and with greater passion, following God with greater confidence and observing the divine precepts with greater fidelity. Remember: Jesus said, "If you love me, you will follow my commandments."

We have to stir up the Spirit's gift of fear of the Lord—respect for the Lord, which keeps us from falling back into sin.

Those are the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, and that's what Saint Paul is talking about in his letter to the Corinthians: There are many gifts, but one Spirit! There are many acts of service, but one God! We are all baptized into one spirit and one body, the Body of Christ!

May the Holy Spirit come upon us, just as it came upon the apostles, that we might renew the face of the earth!

*There are many gifts,  
but one Spirit!  
There are many  
acts of service,  
but one God!*

## Pentecost

Year C, 2019

Acts 2:1-11 | Psalm 104:29-34 | Romans 8:8-17 | John 14:15-16, 23-26

Today's responsorial psalm says, "Lord, send out your spirit and renew the face of the earth!" That's what we celebrate today in Pentecost: that God sent the Holy Spirit on the apostles, giving them courage to go out and proclaim the glories of God.

We, too, ask the Holy Spirit to transform our lives, that we might change the face of the earth as well. We pray, "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love!"

We sometimes offend people. The Church has sometimes alienated people by the words and actions of its ministers and people. We pray that the Spirit might give us the courage to reach out to those whom we've offended and to help the victims of social injustice. Many people who work aren't justly compensated. They don't receive overtime. The Holy Spirit gives us the courage to intervene for them, that they might be treated justly.

*We sometimes offend people.  
The Church has alienated people  
by the words and actions  
of its ministers & people.  
We pray that the Spirit  
might give us the courage  
to reach out to those  
whom we've offended.*

The Holy Spirit helps us to reach out to those in pain, to warm those who are cold, to share with those in need. I recently had lunch with my great grandkids, and one of them shared his sandwich with a friend. We all need the Spirit's help to share what God has given us. The Holy Spirit empowers us to be God's hands in our world!

In today's second reading, Saint Paul tells us that there are many gifts and talents that come from the one Spirit. We are many parts, but we all form one body in Christ.

In today's gospel, Jesus tells us he will send another Advocate. He's talking about the Holy Spirit! Jesus was the first advocate, sending the Holy Spirit to renew us.

Saint Paul says that the Spirit will guide us to do God's works. We follow the Holy Spirit, bearing witness that we are all children of God.

Saint Paul tells us that if we have suffered with him, we will be glorified with him.

Let us ask the Holy Spirit today to come upon us and transform our lives, that we might share with others the gifts of the Holy Spirit!

## Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

Year A, 2014

Exodus 34:4-9 | Daniel 3:52-55 | 2Corinthians 13:11-13 | John 3:16-18

We celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, and we celebrate God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

God the Father is our creator, sending us the Son, so that, in the words of today's gospel, "whoever believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life." And the Holy Spirit is our advocate.

We are all baptized in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. At Jesus' baptism, we hear how God the Father sent the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove and said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." We sometimes see doves at funerals, as a symbol of the Spirit.

We profess our faith in the Holy Trinity, and we now come full-circle, from Jesus' birth to the descent of the Holy Spirit last week.

Every time our Joy Group prays the rosary, we pray that the grieving family might experience healing and comfort in their time of need. That's how I imagine the Spirit: providing us healing and comfort!

I leave with you the prayer of Saint Paul in today's second reading: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you!

*That's how I imagine the Spirit:  
providing us healing and comfort!*

## Solemnity of the Body & Blood of Christ

Year A, 2020

Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16 | Psalm 147:12-20 | 1Cor. 10:16-17 | John 6:51-58

In today's gospel, Jesus says, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever, and the bread I give is my flesh for the life of the world."

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, and, because of this pandemic, many of our parishioners have been without the Eucharist for more than 90 days. We're like the Israelites, wandering in the desert: They became hungry! God gave them manna to satisfy their hunger.

In today's gospel, Jesus tells us that he is the new manna, the new bread from heaven. In our eucharistic celebrations, the priest says, "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation. Through your goodness, we have this bread we offer. Fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the Bread of Life." Then the priest says, "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation. Through your goodness, we have received this wine we offer. Fruit of the vine and work of human hands, it will become for us our spiritual drink."

My first ministry was to share the Eucharist with the sick and the homebound. I quickly learned what the bread – the Body of Christ – meant to those who were sick and homebound. You could see the joy that they experienced upon receiving the Body of Christ. Some would even weep when they received the Body of Christ! They understood what the Body of Christ is: that Jesus is the living bread from heaven! They knew that the Body of Christ provided them eternal life, and that God would raise them up on the last day!

In today's first reading, God fed the Israelites with manna and satisfied their hunger. Our hunger is satisfied by the Body and Blood of Christ!

In today's second reading, Saint Paul notes that we all partake of one loaf and one cup and are challenged to become more like Christ. As we become more Christlike, we begin to

*We all partake of  
one loaf & one cup  
and are challenged  
to become more like Christ.  
As we become more Christlike,  
we begin to see  
the face of Christ in others.*

see the face of Christ in others. We embrace the leper and the marginalized, as Saint Francis did. We reach out to the widow, who has no one to check on her. We assist the hungry and thirsty. We welcome and embrace the immigrant. That's what our participation in the Body and Blood of Christ challenges us to do!

Energized by the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, may we go out and be more Christlike with our brothers and sisters!

## Solemnity of the Body & Blood of Christ

Year C, 2019

Genesis 14:18-20 | Psalm 110:1-4 | 1Corinthians 11:23-26 | Luke 9:11-17

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ—we celebrate the Eucharist, where we take bread and wine that is transformed by God at the moment of consecration, through transubstantiation, into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Eucharist means thanksgiving. We come together in thanksgiving, giving thanks to the Lord for all we have, as individuals and as a community. We celebrate the Word of God and the Eucharist, and, through the Body and Blood of Christ, he lives in us and nourishes us.

*We come together in  
thanksgiving,  
giving thanks to the Lord  
for all we have,  
as individuals & as a community.*

During the week, Deacon John and I visit people who are not able to come to the Eucharist, but who long for the Body of Christ. Many of them are homebound or disabled, or find themselves in hospitals and nursing homes. We share with them the Body of Christ.

In today's first reading, Melchizedek shared bread and wine in thanksgiving for conquering his enemies.

In today's gospel, Jesus proclaimed God's word, then fed the people with bread. The gospel tells us that 5,000 men—plus women and children—were fed with five loaves and two fish.

Every time we gather for the Eucharist, Jesus nourishes us with his Word and with his Body and Blood, so that we might have nourishment on our earthly journey.

In today's second reading, Saint Paul speaks of the Last Supper, when Jesus shared bread and wine with his disciples. He said, "Eat this bread and drink this blood in remembrance of me."

Today we give thanks to God for being able to come here and be part of this Eucharistic celebration!

## Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A, 2020

Isaiah 49:3-6 | Psalm 40:2-10 | 1Corinthians 1:1-3 | John 1:29-34

In today's gospel, John the Baptist testifies that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He testifies that Jesus is greater than he and that Jesus existed before he did. He also testifies that the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, would come to rest on the Son of God.

I recently went to the movies for the first time in a while. I saw "Mercy," where a lawyer ministers to those who are condemned to death, on death row. He picked up the cost of those who couldn't afford his services, inspired by the story of an innocent inmate who was once sentenced to death. In his ministry, he had to find people to testify about the innocence of his clients. The movie was set in Alabama, where it was the sheriff's word against yours, and many people ended up on death row. The lawyer freed people one at a time. He had some success, but he also had a lot of bad luck. He ran into a lot of roadblocks — like John the Baptist, who came to testify that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, bringing salvation to the ends of the earth.

In today's second reading, Sosthenes takes Paul to the tribunal, trying to condemn him for "false teachings." The governor exonerated Paul, who continued to refer to Sosthenes as his brother. Through Jesus Christ, we come to know one another as brothers and sisters.

The lawyer in that movie became “a light to the nations” — a light for all the inmates he served, who had no recourse or freedom. Because of him, it came to light that one of every nine inmates on death row was innocent. He couldn’t save those who had already died on death row, but he made it his mission to save the innocent who were condemned to death.

Today’s responsorial psalm says, “Here am I, Lord. I come to do your will.” That’s what that lawyer did. He saw that as his calling.

What is *your* calling? To what ministry might God be calling *you*? How is God calling *you* to be a light to the nations, a light to the world, bringing salvation to all our brothers and sisters?

Through the Eucharist, may Christ live in us, and us in him, so that we can be a light to the world!

*Because of him, it came to light  
that one of every nine inmates  
on death row was innocent.  
He couldn’t save those who  
had already died on death row,  
but he made it his mission  
to save the innocent  
who were condemned to death.*

## Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B, 2015

1Samuel 3:3-10 | Psalm 40:2-10 | 1Corinthians 6:13-20 | John 1:35-42

In today’s gospel, John the Baptist says, “Behold the Lamb of God!” and two of his disciples followed Jesus.

I remember being in a meeting once, where people were reflecting on John’s call in today’s gospel. I shared that the person who showed Jesus to me was Brother Kerry Guillory, who invited me to join the Joy Group, a ministry to senior adults. We held social and spiritual functions, and we had a ministry of bereavement to ensure that their lives ended with dignity. We visited the elderly, the homebound and the ill who can’t come to church.

Another invitation came when Father Jayme invited me to be a deacon. I thought about it. They say the Spirit is always willing, but

the body is weak. I thank God that the Spirit moved me in the right direction, and it's has been a joy to serve God and God's people!

*I thank God that the Spirit  
moved me in the right direction,  
and it's has been a joy to  
serve God and God's people!*

In today's first reading, Samuel is called by the Lord—but he doesn't understand the Lord's call right away. The Lord has to call him three times! That happens in our lives, too: Someone invites us to share in ministry, and we reply, "I'm not ready," or "Could you ask somebody else?" We are all children of God, and we know that none of us is perfect. But when God calls, we should listen.

Today's second reading talks about our bodies as the temple of the Holy Spirit. It challenges us to ask how we share ourselves with God. When we receive the Eucharist, God lives in us, and we live in God.

Before we are invited to communion, the priest holds up the Body and Blood of Christ and says the words of John in today's gospel: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Happy are those who are called to this supper." We respond, "Lord Jesus Christ, by your death and resurrection, you have made us worthy to share in your body and blood, and, by your love, we have been healed." When we hear those words today, let's call to mind Samuel's "yes" and say "yes" to the invitation to share the Bread of Life!

### **Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Year C, 2019

Nehemiah 8:2-10 | Psalm 19:8-15 | 1Corinthians 12:12-30 | Luke 4:14-21

In the first reading today, Ezra, the Persian priest, is bringing the Word of God to the Israelites, who were recently released from the Babylonian captivity. The Persians had liberated the Israelites from the Babylonian captivity, and Ezra, who had studied the law that God had given to Moses, was now telling the Israelites to live in the light, and not in the darkness. After sixty years in captivity, the Israelites

were free! They now needed direction, and Ezra was teaching them about God's law.

As the psalmist says today: God's law gives us spirit and life.

Today's readings tell us that the spirit is willing, but the body is weak. The Spirit drives us to accomplish the works of God, despite the weakness of our bodies.

In today's gospel, Jesus is talking to his disciples, and some of them decide to leave him when he tells them that his body is true food and his blood is true drink. They don't understand that. They don't understand that his words are spirit and life.

In the gospel, Jesus says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. God has anointed me to bring glad tidings—the good news of the Lord—to the poor, to bring sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed, and to announce a year of favor to the Lord." That's what Jesus was anointed to do.

We can sometimes be blind in our spiritual lives, not able to open our eyes to issues of social justice in our world, and to proclaim a word of love and forgiveness.

The psalmist tell us, "The law of the Lord is perfect. The ordinances of the Lord are true." The Word of God is the most important thing that we need in our earthly journey.

Saint Paul talks about one baptism: that we're all baptized into one body, and that, through baptism, we're all one. We shouldn't be envious because people are gifted with different gifts. Here at Holy Family, we are blessed with many, many different gifts. We have teachers, we have lawyers, we have contractors—many talents, but we're all one community.

During our hymn of gathering, we sang, "We cannot live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." May our prayer today be: "Lord, may every word that comes from my mouth and every thought that comes from my heart give glory to you, Lord, because you are the light of the world!"

*We can sometimes be blind  
in our spiritual lives,  
not able to open our eyes  
to issues of social justice in our world,  
and to proclaim a word  
of love and forgiveness.*

## Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C, 2019

Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19 | Psalm 71:1-17 | 1Cor. 12:31 – 13:13 | Luke 4:21-30

In today's first reading, Jeremiah is thrown into a cistern. He came to proclaim the good news of the Lord and how to live according to the Word, the will, and the wisdom of God, but his message fell on deaf ears, and the people beat him and they threw him into a cistern.

Even in the cistern, Jeremiah relied on God to be his rock and his refuge. We, too, rely on God to be our rock and refuge. We rely on God for stability, especially during the most trying times of our earthly journey—when we lose our children and loved ones, and when we overcome sickness.

Today's gospel talks about widows. God is the rock and refuge of widows, too, as they raise their children on their own.

God is our rock and refuge. Perhaps you've heard the saying, "If God brings you to it, God will see you through it." God is our rock and refuge, never giving us more than we can handle.

*"If God brings you to it,  
God will see you through it."*

In last Sunday's gospel, we heard that Jesus was anointed to bring good news and to bring light to the darkness of our lives. The people of Nazareth expected Jesus to perform miracles only in Nazareth—but Jesus' ministry was not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. That angered the people. In response, Jesus pointed out that Elisha had healed Naaman the Syrian. Jesus' ministry was for *all* people, not just for the people of Nazareth, and not just for the people of Israel. In Nazareth, they were hearing about all the miracles he performed in Capernaum—and they were angry. In fact, they were going to throw him off a cliff on Mount Precipice.

Jeremiah brought the good news of the Lord, and so did Jesus, and the people tried to kill both of them. They threw Jeremiah into a cistern, and they try to hurl Jesus off a cliff.

Saint Paul talks about three gifts: of faith, hope and love. The greatest gift is love. God is love. If we don't have God in our lives, and

if we don't live in love, the amount of faith or knowledge we have doesn't matter. We need to love God and neighbor. That's why Saint Paul says the greatest gift is love. May we live in love, that we might say with the psalmist: "I will sing of your salvation!"

## **Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Year C, 2019

Isaiah 6:1-8 | Psalm 138:1-8 | 1Corinthians 15:1-11 | Luke 5:1-11

Today's gospel talks about fishermen, and how Jesus invited them to be "fishers of men and women."

Do you remember how you were brought into the ministry of the Church? Perhaps someone invited you to proclaim the Word of God or to be part of a ministry of the Church.

Jesus invites us to a ministry of sharing the good news with God's people through the corporal works of mercy: to visit the homebound, to feed the hungry, to visit the sick and the imprisoned. Ministry is not something that we should keep for ourselves. It's something to be shared with all our brothers and sisters!

Sometimes, when we're invited into ministry, we feel a certain peer pressure. People say, "He thinks he's God almighty up there, serving on the altar!" They judge us, and we feel unworthy to serve in ministry life when we realize that we're doing God's work!

In today's first reading, Isaiah had a vision that he was in the presence of the Lord, and he felt that he was unworthy because he had unclean lips. In today's second reading, Paul thought he was an unworthy apostle for the Lord to have appeared to him. In today's gospel, Jesus told his friends to cast their nets. They caught a great number of fish, and Peter fell on his knees and said, "Depart from me! I am a sinful person!"

We, too, can sometimes feel unworthy, and that feeling can be an obstacle in our ministries. We need to look at the good we do in ministry—despite the criticisms of people. To feed the hungry or to visit the homebound or the incarcerated is a good thing. That's ministry!

*We need to look at the good  
we do in ministry—  
despite the criticisms of people.  
To feed the hungry or  
to visit the homebound  
or the incarcerated is a good thing.  
That's ministry!*

Jesus wants to draw us in, so that we can do good—and so that, as we multiply our efforts, our community will grow. The good expands and expands!

Isaiah felt he had unclean lips. Paul felt unworthy to be in the presence of the risen Lord. Peter, because of his sinfulness, didn't think he was worthy to be in the presence of the Lord.

Paul tells us: Christ died for our sins, that we might be reconciled with God—just as, in the first reading, the seraphim purified Isaiah's lips with a flaming coal. Jesus died for our sins—he died for our salvation!

Even though we might feel unworthy of God's call, we need to remember that Jesus called simple people. He called fishermen to be his disciples. They were the simplest of simple people!

May we recognize that sinful people like us can serve the Lord, and that all of us can say with Isaiah, "Here I am, Lord. Send *me!*"

## **Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Year A, 2014

Sirach 15:16-21 | Psalm 119:1-5, 17-18 | 1 Cor. 2:6-10 | Matthew 5:17-37

In today's gospel, Jesus tells us that we can either be the least in the kingdom of heaven, or we can be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

In today's first reading, we're told that we have a choice: We can choose fire or water.

In the gospel of Luke, we find the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man dressed very elegantly and enjoyed wonderful meals. Lazarus sat outside his door and waited for the leftovers. When their earthly journeys came to an end, Lazarus was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham, and the rich man was buried. The rich man pleaded to Abraham, "Please send Lazarus to wet his finger and quench my thirst." Abraham replied, "There's a wide abyss that separates you and Lazarus." The rich man chose fire, and Lazarus chose water!

We might do well to talk about forgiveness. At the beginning of Mass, we always ask God to forgive us for what we've done and what we've failed to do. We ask forgiveness from God—but do we ever ask forgiveness from one another? I feel I need to ask your forgiveness: Sometimes people ask me things, and I forget the moment I walk away. Last Sunday, they asked, "Why didn't you come to the kitchen and fix the stove?" I forgot! Today's gospel talks about coming to the table of the Lord forgiven. It's important that we ask one another for forgiveness—and that makes us the greatest in the kingdom of heaven!

We might also talk about love, the greatest gift that God gives us. If we treated our family members and friends—and even strangers—with the same love that God shares with us, not only would we create a better world; we would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven!

Our second reading today talks about wisdom. We're funny about wisdom: When we're young, we think we know everything and that our elders don't know a thing! Only later do we realize how right those adults were! My experience in working with senior adults is that everything that comes from their mouths is wisdom! My friend Andrés says, "If only we could bottle the wisdom of our parents and open it whenever we need it!"

That's wisdom. If the people had possessed wisdom, they wouldn't have crucified Jesus, whose name, in Hebrew, means, "God saves." They crucified our Savior!

So, how might we become the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? We do that by loving

*If we treated our  
family members and friends –  
and even strangers –  
with the same love that  
God shares with us,  
not only would we create a better world;  
we would be the greatest  
in the kingdom of heaven!*

God with all our mind, all our heart, all our soul, all our strength—and by loving each other with the same love that God has for each of us!

## Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B, 2015

Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46 | Psalm 32:1-11 | 1Cor. 10:31 – 11:1 | Mark 1:40-45

Today's first reading speaks of how the priests inspected lepers, to determine whether the lesions or blotches on their skin were leprosy. If it was leprosy, the leper had to shave his head and beard, tear his clothes, and proclaim, "Unclean!" He had to publicize it. Lepers could not be part of the community; they had to live apart, quarantined and in a separate place.

In today's gospel, the leper says to Jesus, "Make me clean—so that I can be part of the community again!" And Jesus cleansed him. Most importantly, Jesus touched him, an unclean leper. In preparing for ministry, we're told that if we're not going to touch people, we shouldn't visit them. When we don't touch them, we treat them like lepers and outcasts!

Jesus tells the leper to go and see the priest, so that he can be admitted back into the community. The leper, being a person, didn't like *chisme* [gossip]—but he went off and told everyone, making it difficult for Jesus to be out in the open and forcing him to exercise his ministry in deserted places.

I once heard the testimony of a brother who anointed a patient in a coma—then the patient moved! He told me his phone rang off the hook with other people wanting him to touch them—like Jesus after word spread of what happened when he touched the leper!

Today's readings challenge us to think about the "lepers" in our society: the immigrants, that neighbor who asks you not to park in front of his house, or the person begging on the corner who smells bad and hasn't changed clothes in days. When I was in school, the "lepers" were those we never chose to be on our team and those we

chose not to dance with. Looking back, we realize how our actions likely made them feel like lepers.

Twenty years ago, I dated an immigrant. You can imagine the advice I got! “You better watch out: She’ll steal everything you own!” That wasn’t true. In fact, many immigrants are wonderful people.

Let’s challenge ourselves to embrace the “leper” in our lives. Let’s follow Saint Paul’s advice: “Everything you do, do it for the glory of God. Be imitators of Christ and share the good news and the love of Jesus Christ with everyone!”

*Today’s readings challenge us to think about the “lepers” in our society: the immigrants, that neighbor who asks you not to park in front of his house, or the person begging on the corner.*

## Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C, 2019

1Samuel 26:7-23 | Psalm 103:1-13 | 1Corinthians 15:45-49 | Luke 6:27-38

“The cup with which you measure is the cup by which you will be measured.” Today, Jesus talks about forgiveness and how we are to forgive those who mistreat us and hate us: “Do unto others as you would have done unto you. If they take your cloak, give them your tunic. Lend without expecting anything in return.”

Why did Jesus preach forgiveness? Because if we’re able to forgive and forget, we can move on.

We’ve all heard stories of family members who were mad with one another for 30 years or more. One says, “Well, I thought she said this.”

*For 30 years, they never  
spoke to each other –  
because of a misunderstanding!  
...We have to learn to  
forgive and to forget!*

And the other says, “And I thought she said that.” For 30 years, they never spoke to each other – because of a misunderstanding! How many times have you heard stories like that? We have to learn to forgive and to forget!

In today's first reading, we have the story of King Saul, who wanted to kill David. If Saul would have befriended David and had him as his ally, he would never have been defeated. Instead, David allied himself with the Philistines, who crushed Saul's kingdom.

Imagine what would happen if we learned to forgive and befriend those people we think offended us. We're better off having friends instead of enemies!

Saul would have benefited from such advice. Instead, because of his jealousy of David, his army was crushed. After David killed Goliath, people admired him, and they talked about how great he was. Sometimes we, too, envy others.

We need to learn to forgive others. We all make mistakes. Do you remember when John Paul II went to the prison to forgive the gentleman who shot him – so that he could move on with his life? Do you remember the Los Angeles riots, when Rodney King was almost beaten to death? He forgave them, so that he could move on with his life. He didn't hold on to the hatred against those who almost killed him.

In today's second reading, Saint Paul talks about the earthly Adam and the heavenly Adam. The earthly Adam was disobedient. We, too, can be like the earthly Adam. Our challenge is to be more and more like Jesus, the "heavenly Adam," whom God sent for the forgiveness of our sins.

God is kind and merciful. That's what today's responsorial psalm tell us: "The Lord is kind of merciful!" May we, too, be kind and merciful, forgiving others and continuing forward on our earthly journey!

## **Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Year C, 2019

Sirach 27:5-8 | Psalm 92:2-16 | 1Corinthians 15:54-58 | Luke 6:39-45

"The tree is known by its fruit." All of us are known by the fruit we bear. "A good tree does not bear bad fruit, just as a bad tree doesn't bear good fruit." As we approach Lent, we're called to reflect on our

lives: Are we bearing good fruit? Are we bearing any fruit? How will we prepare ourselves for our Lenten journey, so that we can bear better fruit than we do today?

*We should look at our own lives first –  
at the fruit we're bearing –  
before telling our neighbors,  
"You're not bearing good fruit!"*

Last Sunday's gospel told us not to judge, that we might not be judged—and not to condemn, that we might not be condemned. In today's gospel, Jesus tells us to take the beam out of our own eye before we look at the specks in others' eyes. We should look at our own lives first—at the fruit we're bearing—before telling our neighbors, "You're not bearing good fruit!"

What's obstructing your vision? It's easy to judge others and store evil in our hearts. It's more difficult to be good and to store good in our hearts. What's in people hearts comes out of their mouths!

In today's gospel, Luke tells us how the Pharisees used to purify their vessels and how they washed their hands up to their elbows. Jesus asks, "What good is it to be clean on the outside, if your heart isn't clean—if you store evil and envy in your heart?" The Pharisees cleaned their vessels and washed their hands up to their elbows, but their hearts weren't clean!

In today's first reading, Sirach warns us not to praise others until we hear them speak, because their words will tell us what's in their hearts. In moments of crisis, we often hear what's really in people's hearts. Our challenge is to continually cultivate ourselves to do good works and bear good fruit.

In today's second reading, Saint Paul tells us to be firm, steadfast, and faithful to the works of God. When we do this, we clothe ourselves in immortality and incorruptibility. We reap the rewards that await us through Jesus Christ who conquered death for our sake!

Before focusing on the splinters in others' eyes, let's take the beams out of our own eyes. Let's remember that, if we don't want to be judged, neither should we judge. If we don't want to be condemned, neither should we condemn others. Let's store only goodness and kindness in our hearts, so that, when we speak, our words will reflect what's really in our hearts—and people will know us by the good fruit we cultivate in our lives!

## Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B, 2015

Job 38:8-11 | Psalm 107:23-31 | 2Corinthians 5:14-17 | Mark 4:35-41

In today's first reading, Job endures a storm, and his faith is tested. He lost all his possessions, including his seven sons and three daughters. He asked, "Why?"

It's the same question that we ask ourselves when we endure the storms of life: When we lose a loved one, when we face surgery or suffer a medical condition, we ask, "Why?"

I recently received an email from a religious sister. It contained a cartoon of a man who was carrying a cross. It was too heavy, so he cut off a piece of the cross. He continued on, but the cross was still too heavy, so he cut off another piece. He finally came to a ravine where he was unable to use his cross to get across the ravine!

When the storms of life come upon us, we sometimes lose sight of the fact that God will get us through those storms. God never gives us more than we can handle.

Today's gospel also speaks of a storm. In the midst of that storm, Jesus invited his disciples to have faith—and he calmed the storm. Despite all the miracles they had seen, they didn't have faith that he would take care of them.

In today's second reading, Saint Paul talks about a new creation—of how we've all died in Christ and risen again to a new life. He says: "All of us who are baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. By baptism into his death, we were buried together with him, so just, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we, too, might have new life." Our "old self" is buried with Christ, and we enjoy a new life!

We must decide how we'll live that "new life." Will we live a life of deeper faith? Will we be more alive? Will we be better Christians? Will we love others, as God loves us?

*When the storms of life  
come upon us,  
we sometimes lose sight  
of the fact that God will  
get us through those storms.  
God never gives us  
more than we can handle.*

We will all experience “storms” in life. We’ll even experience storms as a community. They may be financial storms. They might be storms caused by people who judge us.

When the storms arise in life, may we remember Jesus’ words in the gospel of John: “You have faith in God; have faith also in me.” In that way, we’ll weather the storms of life!

## Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B, 2018

Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24 | Psalm 30:2-13 | 2Cor. 8:7-15 | Mark 5:21-43

When I was at another church, we used to have pilgrimages to the Basilica of San Juan del Valle, where they host healing services on the fourth Saturday of the month. Before the service, they would have the testimonials of people who had been healed. They would then have six or seven priests who laid hands on the people. At one of those services, a priest once said that the healing begins at such services, and that healing is a process that begins with faith.

In today’s gospel, Jesus heals Jairus’ daughter, and he says that she was healed as a result of their faith. Jairus had faith. He believed that, if Jesus just laid hands on his daughter, she would be raised to life! The other woman in today’s gospel, the woman who suffered with a hemorrhage for 12 years, believed that, if she just touched Jesus’ cloak, she would be healed. And she was!

At that time, women were second-class citizens, but Jesus restored the woman and the girl to life! He didn’t have any boundaries when it came to helping people in need.

*Women were second-class citizens,  
but Jesus restored the woman  
and the girl to life!  
He didn’t have any boundaries  
when it came to helping people in need.*

Today’s first reading talks about the obstacles in our spiritual lives. We all go through obstacles in life. The challenge is not letting them diminish us, not losing faith as God restore us to life and health.

In today's second reading, Saint Paul tells us to share with those in need. He asks the people in Corinth to share with the community in Jerusalem, so that they can be more equal economically.

Here in Texas, our public school system came up with "Robin Hood," so that all schools throughout the state could be more equal. That was Saint Paul's message: that we might share with others, so that *all* can share in the goodness of the Lord.

Sometimes we don't have enough faith to allow the Lord to work in us. Our first reading today tells us that God made us to be imperishable. God created us for everlasting life!

May we grow in our faith in God, so as to sing with the psalmist: "I will praise you God, for you have rescued me!"

## Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A, 2020

Zechariah 9:9-10 | Psalm 145:1-14 | Romans 8:9-13 | Matthew 11:25-30

In today's gospel, Jesus says, "Come to me all who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon your shoulders, and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart. And you will find rest for yourself, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

What are the burdens that you carry in life? What are the burdens that bring you down?

This pandemic has certainly been a burden for many. It's hard enough to keep up with family; we now worry about their safety and whether they've been tested.

We burden ourselves with worries that shouldn't occupy our thoughts. We worry about our health and our looks: After being stuck at home for 90 days, we're all gaining weight and not getting the exercise we should. Those burdens weigh us down.

In today's gospel, Jesus talks about the wise and the learned, versus the little ones who rely on the wisdom of God the Father. The little ones are like little children, who always ask for things. "Give me this" or "give me that!" Sometimes we think we're wise and learned, and

we don't seek God's wisdom or help. The little ones, though, daily put their trust in God and others.

Sometimes as we grow older, we think that we can't ask God for things. It's difficult for us to ask God and others for help. And so the burdens of life can be heavy!

Zechariah says, "See, your king comes to you: a just and meek savior, riding on a donkey! He will banish the chariot of war and the warrior's bow, proclaiming peace to all the nations."

God sent us his only son, and we rejected him. We crucified him! That was God's wisdom: God sent Jesus so that we could have peace, and so that we could love God and love one another. Those were the simple rules of Jesus Christ!

Saint Paul tells us to live in the Spirit of God who raised Christ from the dead, so that we might enjoy eternal life. That's why Jesus says, "Come to me all who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest!"

*God sent Jesus so that  
we could have peace,  
and so that we could  
love God and love one another.  
Those were the simple rules  
of Jesus Christ!*

## **Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Year B, 2018

Ezekiel 2:2-5 | Psalm 123:1-4 | 2Corinthians 12:7-10 | Mark 6:1-6

Have you ever gone to a baseball game? We're all familiar with baseball. The game has rules, which provide order. The game has fans who question the umpires and their calls. Even from high in the stadium, they yell at the umpire, saying, "You missed that call" — as if they can see better than the guy who's close to the action!

That's what happens with Jesus in today's gospel: The people from Jesus' hometown may as well have been high in the stadium — because they didn't recognize Jesus! They didn't accept him. They judged him, saying, "Isn't he a carpenter?" They were astounded by his words, but they didn't have faith in him. It reminds me of a song:

*Es hijo del carpintero, profeta no puede ser.* He's the son of a carpenter; he can't be a prophet! He can't bring God's message to us!

When I became a priest, people judged me. My parents were immigrants. I came from the *barrio*, from the 'hood. I worked in the restaurant business, and people said, "He should have stayed in the hamburger business!" I supervised 80 people in four restaurants. The company profited over a million dollars each year. I flipped burgers with the employees, and, by flipping burgers with them, I learned of their needs.

Jesus was among his family, in his hometown—and the people didn't understand him. Ezekiel had a similar experience: He warned the people of the coming exile. He invited them to conversion. God sent Ezekiel as God's messenger, and they didn't listen to him! Before the exile, he preached a message of conversion, and, after the exile, he preached a message of hope: that their kingdom would be restored. And it was!

In today's second reading, Saint Paul speaks of the "thorn" that he received. He was content with the trials, persecutions and trials of life. He knew that he was learning perseverance through suffering. Last week, Father Jayme preached on the song, "You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains. You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas. I am strong, when I am on your shoulders: You raise me up to more than I can be!" That's what Saint Paul is telling us: not to be too proud to recognize the work of the Lord. We learn perseverance from our suffering.

Last week, Father Jayme gave us a piece of paper to write the people who've made a difference in our lives. I wrote Father Jayme's name on that paper. He has the gift of youth, and I have the gift of wisdom! Despite our weaknesses, God calls us to serve others. We accept our weaknesses as part of the journey. Saint Paul writes, "Consider it a joy when you encounter the many trials of life, for these are a test of your faith and endurance." The trials we face make us stronger.

Marie, one of our parishioners, was recently telling me that one of the most difficult moments of her life was losing her son. We expect our children to outlive us, so one of the most difficult things in life is to lose a child. It's difficult. But in our weakness,

*We learn perseverance  
from our suffering.*

God makes us stronger. The psalmist recognized this, praying, “Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for God’s mercy!”

## Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C, 2019

Deuteronomy 30:10-14 | Ps. 69:30-37 | Colossians 1:15-20 | Luke 10:25-37

In today’s gospel, a scholar of the Law asks Jesus which is the most important command, and Jesus replies, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.” Moses shared this law with the Israelites: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, and keep God’s commandments.”

Jesus continued: “Love your neighbor as yourself.

The scholars asked, “Who is my neighbor?”

Jesus told him: *You* are the neighbor. *We* are the neighbor!

Jesus shared the parable of the Good Samaritan: how the Levite and the priest walked to the opposite side of the road and didn’t help a man who had been robbed and beaten and left for dead. The Levite and the priest believed that they would be defiled by touching blood. The Samaritan had something else on his mind: the law of love! He had compassion on the one who had been robbed and left on the side of the road.

When ministering to victims of domestic abuse, I often use this parable. The victims of domestic violence suffer: Their co-workers see their black eye and don’t ask. They pretend not to notice. They don’t engage. Good Samaritans notice such outer wounds—and they address the inner wounds. We see the suffering on the outside, but we don’t see their internal sufferings. The *comadre* who sees something and says something is the good neighbor.

*Jesus wouldn’t leave anyone  
on the side of the road –  
and neither should we!*

The Good Samaritan had compassion and wasn't constrained by the Law. He cared for the victim. He got involved. He turned the Law upside-down!

Saint Paul tells us that with God all things are possible.

Jesus wouldn't leave anyone on the side of the road – and neither should we!

## Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A, 2020

Wisdom 12:13-19 | Psalm 86:5-16 | Romans 8:26-27 | Matthew 13:24-43

In today's gospel, Jesus talks about the weeds that grow among the wheat. Those weeds choked the wheat. There are many "weeds" in our daily lives that "choke" us, too!

We often "choke" others by judging them. We used to provide haircuts for elementary school children around Christmas time. They would come with lots of hair, and they knew exactly the type of haircut – perhaps a flattop or fade – that they wanted. We learn from a young age that people judge us by how we look!

We also "choke" others through jealousy. In working with victims of domestic violence, I learned that jealousy was often behind many instances of domestic violence: The man didn't want his wife to go to the supermarket dressed in certain ways; instead, he tried to control where she went and how she dressed.

We also "choke" others through our lack of trust. I once knew a couple: He would come home every Friday, change his clothes, and go out for the night. She decided to do the same. She ironed her dress, they went their own ways, and it "choked" their relationship.

In today's first reading, the author of the book of Wisdom says we need to be more like God: lenient and judging with clemency.

The psalm says that God is good and forgiving.

May we learn to recognize the "weeds" in our lives that prevent us from being Christlike.

In today's second reading, Saint Paul tells us to pray to the Holy Spirit, who will intercede for us and help us to do God's works.

This week, may we eliminate the "weeds" in our lives that are "choking" us and keeping us from being good Christians!

*May we eliminate the  
"weeds" in our lives  
that are "choking" us  
and keeping us from  
being good Christians!*

## Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A, 2014

1Kings 3:7-12 | Psalm 119:127-130 | Romans 8:28-30 | Matthew 13:44-52

In today's first reading, God offered to grant King Solomon anything he asked, and King Solomon asked for an understanding heart, to better fulfill his duties as a just king.

If you could have one wish, what would yours be? Mine would be to win the lottery!

I'm reminded of the story of the gentleman who prayed for over 20 years, asking God to answer three questions—and God granted his wish! He asked God, "Is it true that a moment in heaven is like a million years on earth?" God replied, "Yes!" The man continued, "Then is it true that a penny in heaven is like a million dollars on earth?" And God said, "Yes!" So the man asked his third question: "Lord, can I have a penny?" And God answered, "Yes! In a moment..."

Today's gospel speaks to us about treasures. At our bible study this week, Andrés shared that, for him, our parish community is a treasure. We began our Masses with a handful of people at Father Jayme's home, our old rectory, on Willow Street. After Masses, Father Jayme and I pulled money out of our own pockets to pay the *mariachi*. We moved from there to Lava Hill Road. We didn't realize at that time what a treasure Holy Family would be for so many people. We never imagined in our wildest dreams that it would be the beginning of Holy Family Catholic Church—a real hidden treasure, an inclusive

Catholic community! All are welcome as part of our family. We're like the early community of the apostles: We pray together, we break bread together, we look after each other.

*All are welcome  
as part of our family.  
We're like the early community  
of the apostles: We pray together,  
we break bread together,  
we look after each other.*

I recall the story of sad, frustrated people sitting at a table filled with food: They had three-foot utensils, so there was no way that they could feed themselves. Once they recognized that they were called to feed each other, they had the time of their lives!

When we moved from Willow Street, Mr. and Mrs. Loredó provided us our home here on Lava Hill Road, and due to the generosity of all of you, we provide our pastor a rectory and he no longer needs to couch-surf!

Today's second reading speaks of how we're called to be justified and gloried, so that we might share in God's kingdom!

## Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B, 2015

2Kings 4:42-44 | Psalm 145:10-18 | Ephesians 4:1-6 | John 6:1-15

It's as if there's a contest between today's first reading and gospel. In the second book of Kings, Elisha feeds 100 people with 20 small loaves of bread. It's as if Jesus says, "I can do better than that!" He feeds 5,000 men with five loaves and two fish! If there were 5,000 men, there were likely at least 5,000 other people, too, counting the women and children—and the women likely were prepared and brought something to eat. That's one explanation by scripture scholars of how this miracle might have happened: Jesus invited the people to share what they had brought!

Here at Holy Family, we sometimes see a similar "multiplication" of food during our weekly parish breakfast: Sometimes our breakfast groups say, "We don't know if we have enough food!" And we usually do!

Even more than physical food, the people in today's gospel needed spiritual "food." They needed to be nourished with the Word of God! As our hymn of gathering suggested, we don't live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from God!

Nourished by God's Word, we are called to serve others. Priests consecrate the Eucharist, anoint the ill, and celebrate confessions. They also celebrate funerals. I'm reminded of the story of the man whose dog died. He wanted a Mass for his dog, but his priest said, "We don't say Masses for dogs." The man said, "That's too bad. I wanted to donate \$1,000 to the church" — to which the priest replied, "Oh, you didn't tell me your dog was Catholic!"

All of us have a special ministry in the Church—even lay people, who are called to bring the light of Christ to others and to be a leaven in our society.

In today's second reading, Saint Paul tells us to be worthy of our call. May we be nourished by the Word of God, that we might be worthy of our call, sharing love and peace with one another!

*Lay people...  
are called to bring  
the light of Christ  
to others and to be  
a leaven in our society.*

## **Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Year A, 2020

Isaiah 55:1-3 | Psalm 145:8-18 | Romans 8:35-39 | Matthew 14:13-21

Today Saint Paul asks: "What will separate us from the love of Christ? Anguish or distress, persecution or famine, peril or nakedness?" No, none of these will separate us from the love of Christ—not even death or life or angels or principalities—because of the love that Christ had for us, and because he was pierced for our sins and crushed for our iniquities. Christ endured all that for our sake, so that we might enjoy peace.

Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord says, "Come to me, all who are thirsty or hungry, and eat. Come at no cost, drink milk and wine"—just as Jesus fed the 5,000, not counting women or children.

Jesus invites us to the Eucharistic banquet. He doesn't ask if you have money. He doesn't ask if you're married by the church. He

doesn't ask if you're gay. He doesn't ask if you're marginalized. He simply says, "Come to me, all who are thirsty!" He invites *everybody* to the Eucharistic celebration!

In this Eucharistic celebration, we all come together to give thanks to God for all the blessings we received. Through the prophet Isaiah, God says, "Pay attention to me, and listen to me, that you may live."

Sometimes people don't come to the Eucharistic celebration because they feel that they're not worthy, that they are sinners. We are *all* sinners. When he fed the crowd, Jesus didn't ask, "Are you a sinner?" We don't ask either. We invite *everyone* to come to the table of the Lord!

All are invited to come to the table of the Lord, to give thanks for all that we have—so that when others ask us, "What will separate you from the love of Christ?", we can say, "Nothing! Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ our Lord!"

*When he fed the crowd,  
Jesus didn't ask,  
"Are you a sinner?"  
We don't ask either.  
We invite everyone  
to come to the  
table of the Lord!*

## **Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Year C, 2019

Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23 | Psalm 90:3-17 | Colossians 3:1-11 | Luke 12:13-21

Today's readings talk about the virtue of understanding the value of seeking heavenly things, and not earthly things. I was recently reading that Steve Jobs was worth seven billion dollars when he passed away—but that he didn't feel complete, being consumed by the empire he had built.

Today's first reading tells us that all things are like our breath, which quickly disappears. Will you concentrate on the things of this earth that quickly disappear, or will you concentrate on those things that last forever?

The story is told of a gentleman who was giving away his land. He said to a friend, "I'll give you all the land you can walk on in a day." His friend walked a few miles, then a few more. By noon, he had

traveled 30 miles. He didn't stop to eat; he just kept walking, hoping to amass as much land as possible. The story is told that he died, exhausted, at the end of the day! His greed drove him—like the rich man in today's gospel. He had an abundant crop, so he tore down his barns to build larger ones—and God called him home that night. Instead of sharing his wealth with his workers or with his community, he chose to be greedy, storing it up for himself.

Our readings today challenge us to concentrate on heavenly things, not on earthly things.

Another story is told of a rich man who went to his doctor, and his doctor told him he didn't have long to live. The doctor suggested that he get his affairs in order. The man called his wife and asked that she put all his money in his casket after

he died. She agreed. He passed away, and, after the funeral, his wife was sharing the story of her husband's dying wish. Her friend asked, "Did you really bury him with all that money?" She replied, "Yes, ...but I wrote him a check!"

Greed sometimes takes over our lives, keeping us from sharing with our sisters and brothers.

In today's second reading, Saint Paul talks about divisions in the Body of Christ. The people were focused on dividing themselves: those who were circumcised and those who weren't. Saint Paul challenged them to consider other things, like how greedy they were.

May we examine how greedy we're being, and how we seek the things of this earth. Let's take to heart the words of the psalmist: "If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts!"

*Will you concentrate  
on the things of this earth  
that quickly disappear,  
or will you concentrate  
on those things that last forever?*

## Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B, 2018

1Kings 19:4-8 | Psalm 34:2-9 | Ephesians 4:30—5:2 | John 6:41-51

In today's first reading, Elijah lays down underneath a tree and wants to die. He's had enough. But the angel of the Lord comes to him and brings him a hearth cake for nourishment, saying, "Get up and nourish yourself: You have a journey ahead!" Nourished by that hearth cake, Elijah walked forty days and forty nights to Mount Horeb, where he met the Lord! That's where he met God—not in the earthquake or the fire, but in a soft, whispering wind.

Elijah had given up because Queen Jezebel had asked for his head. She wanted to kill all of God's prophets—and they thought that Elijah was the last of God's prophets.

Elijah had a contest with the priests of Baal, to see whose God would send fire from heaven. The 450 priests of Baal gathered and prayed—and the fire never came down. Then Elijah asked God to send down fire—and God did! And Elijah, according to the story, killed all 450 priests of Baal! The queen was not happy. She sought to kill him.

You can imagine how discouraged Elijah must have felt. He probably felt he was soon going to die anyway. Then the Lord gave him water and bread—symbols of life! When we enter the church, we sign ourselves with water, reminding us of the life-giving waters of baptism. Bread is also a symbol of life—or, in the case of the Eucharist, a symbol of eternal life!

Saint Paul talks about living together in unity, loving and forgiving one another. He tells us to be imitators of God, walking in love.

Nourished by the Bread of Life, we are called to be imitators of God. We're called to be the Bread of Life ourselves, nourishing others! Let's be imitators of God, caring for those in need, nourishing those around us, and helping them, in the words of today's psalm, to "taste and see the goodness of the Lord!"

*Saint Paul talks about  
living together in unity,  
loving and forgiving one another.  
He tells us to be imitators of God,  
walking in love.*

## Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C, 2019

Wisdom 18:6-9 | Psalm 33:18-22 | Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19 | Luke 12:32-48

Today's readings reflect on faith. What is faith? Faith is not hoping that God *can*; faith is knowing that God *will*!

There's a story about a gentleman who was involved in an automobile accident. He was thrown from his car, over a cliff, but—luckily!—he clung to a tree branch. He prayed to God: "Is anybody up there? Help!" A voice came from heaven: "Let go of the branch!" The man replied, "Is there anyone else up there?"

We're called to have faith. During the Passover, the Jews had faith that God would liberate and save them. They believed that God would lead them to the Promised Land.

In today's second reading, Saint Paul says, "Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen." Saint Paul was talking about Abraham, who had no idea where God was leading him—but he followed in faith. God told Abraham his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the grains of sand on the seashore. Because of his faith, he had a child—even in old age! Abraham trusted in God.

In today's gospel, Jesus shares the parable of the master who went off to a wedding feast. His servants were challenged to be vigilant and watchful. In the same way, we must be vigilant and prepared for the second coming of Christ.

In the gospel of John, Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places, and I will go and prepare a place for you so that where I am, you also may be."

We must be vigilant. We must be ready. We don't know the day or the hour when the Lord will come. We pray with the psalmist: "We wait and hope in the Lord, who is our help and our shield. In God our hearts rejoice, for we trust in God's holy name. May your unfailing love be with us, O Lord, as we place our hope in you!"

*We must be vigilant  
and prepared for  
the second coming of Christ.*

## Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A, 2020

Isaiah 56:6-7 | Psalm 67:2-8 | Romans 11:13-15, 29-32 | Matthew 15:21-28

In today's gospel, a woman comes and begs Jesus to heal her tormented daughter. Jesus doesn't answer her. Instead, he ignores her because she is a Canaanite—and the Canaanites and the Jews never mingled. It was like the story of the Samaritan woman at the well: The Samaritans and Jews didn't see eye-to-eye, so they wouldn't even associate with one another. So this woman who came to Jesus was a Canaanite, a Gentile, not part of the "chosen people" of Israel. She was an "outsider," asking Jesus for a miracle.

Jesus replies: "I was sent for the lost sheep of the house of Israel." He continued, "It's not right to throw the food for the children to the dogs."

But she was persistent. She was going to fight for her daughter. She replied, "Even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters' tables."

Moved by the woman's faith, Jesus healed her tormented daughter.

What do we do with the food that is given to us by the Lord? Do we reconcile our differences with our brothers and sisters who are outside our "circle"? Do we accept the marginalized? Do we reach out to those in need?

Today's first reading speaks of foreigners who joined themselves to the Lord and ministered to God, becoming God's servants and following God's covenant. They will be called to God's holy mountain and joyfully enter God's temple!

Saint Paul tells us that God's call and invitation are irrevocable. God's salvation is not only for the "chosen." God's salvation is for *all* God's children!

*Do we reconcile our differences  
with our brothers & sisters  
who are outside our "circle"?*

*Do we accept the marginalized?  
Do we reach out to those in need?*

## Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B, 2018

Proverbs 9:1-6 | Psalm 34:2-7 | Ephesians 5:15-20 | John 6:51-58

Today the book of Proverbs talks about the virtue of wisdom, which instructs us to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength, so that we may achieve the kingdom of God.

Jesus says, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood will have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day." When we celebrate the Eucharistic liturgy, the priest takes bread and says, "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, through your goodness, we have received this bread we offer. Fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life." Then the priest takes the cup and says, "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, through your goodness, we have this wine to offer. Fruit of the vine and work of human hands, it will become for us the drink of salvation."

In today's gospel, Jesus tells us, "If you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you will have eternal life. Whoever eats my flesh and drink my blood is in me, and I in them." Whoever receives the Eucharist, receives the Lord!

Today's first reading says that the simple will be called to the banquet of the Lord. Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

We come here to partake of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus.

Saint Paul talks about foolishness. Don't be foolish; be wise! We are called to be wise and to forsake foolishness. We are called to live in the virtue of understanding, to seek the things of heaven and not of the world!

*We are called to be wise  
and to forsake foolishness.*

*We are called to live in  
the virtue of understanding,  
to seek the things of heaven  
and not of the world!*

## Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A, 2020

Ezekiel 33:7-9 | Psalm 95:1-9 | Romans 13:8-10 | Matthew 18:15-20

Today's readings tell us we are responsible for our brothers and sisters who sin. Jesus' great commandment to love God and love one another makes us responsible for our brothers and sisters!

In today's first reading, God holds Ezekiel responsible for those who have strayed from the path of the righteous. God tells Ezekiel, "If you don't warn them and they die, you'll be responsible for their deaths, but if you warn them to change their ways and they don't listen, you won't be responsible for their deaths."

In today's second reading, Saint Paul talks about how the law is fulfilled by loving neighbor. That is God's commandment: You shall not steal, you

*The law is fulfilled  
by loving neighbor.*

shall not covet, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, you shall not covet your neighbor's goods. When we break those commandments, we sin against our brother or sister.

The corporal works of mercy are centered on love of neighbor: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, visit the sick. Those corporal works of mercy focus us on our brothers and sisters.

Jesus tells us to look after our brothers and sisters, so that they might be reconciled. He says, "Whatever you reconcile on earth will be reconciled in heaven, but whatever you don't reconcile on earth will not be reconciled in heaven."

In the ancient world, people felt a duty to preserve the unity of the community by correcting those who strayed and did wrong. That duty to our brothers and sisters continues today. We have a duty to bring our brothers and sister to the path of the righteous. The psalmist says, "If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts." Let's not harden our hearts to our brothers and sisters—because the second-greatest commandment is to love...others!

## Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B, 2018

Isaiah 35:4-7 | Psalm 146:6-10 | James 2:1-5 | Mark 7:31-37

In today's gospel, Jesus heals the deaf and the mute. Jesus is accomplishing two things: He's healing people who are different, and he's embracing the marginalized! When I was in school, we had a dance class, and I remember that, as boys, we didn't want to dance with certain girls. We excluded them. That's not how Jesus is. He challenges us to love *all* people—not just those who are like us. Jesus embraced all kinds of people, including the blind and the crippled.

In some churches, when it's time for the Our Father, there are people who won't hold the hands of the people beside them. They exclude them. Other churches exclude people who aren't dressed "properly." Jesus challenges us to embrace the marginalized just as much as we would our family and friends.

In today's first reading, God says, "Do not be afraid." God comes for those whose hearts are frightened, saying, "Be strong! Do not be afraid!" Isaiah was writing during the exile, when the people were in captivity among people with other gods. Isaiah had a vision: that God would give sight to the blind! God would make the lame walk! God would cause the mute to sing! Pools of water would fill the desert, and rivers would fill the grasslands!

In our second reading, James talks about how we give preference to those who are well-dressed, sitting them at the head of the table, but we tell the poor to stand over there, in the corner. How sad that we judge people by the way they look and the way they dress! James tells us that God chose the poor to inherit the kingdom of God.

We need to be careful not to judge people by their appearances. We need to see the presence of Christ in each person! We need to open our

*We need to be careful  
not to judge people  
by their appearances.*

*We need to see the presence  
of Christ in each person!*

*We need to open our minds & hearts  
to embrace all people...*

*We need to be inclusive,  
not exclusive!*

minds and hearts to embrace all people, regardless of who they are or where they come from! We need to be inclusive, not exclusive!

When we open our hearts and minds to *all* people, embracing them and loving them with an inclusive love, we're following Jesus' command to love God and love our neighbor!

## Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A, 2020

Sirach 27:30 – 28:7 | Psalm 103:1-12 | Romans 14:7-9 | Matthew 18:21-35

In today's gospel, Peter asks Jesus, "How many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Seven times?" And Jesus says, "Not seven times, but 77 times." 77 is a symbolic number, meaning without limit. We must forgive our brothers and sisters without limit.

Jesus gave us two great commandments: love God, and love your neighbor. He went further, telling us to love our neighbor as ourselves. So we must completely forgive those who sin against us — yes, up to 77 times!

In today's first reading, Sirach says, "Wrath and anger are hateful things." They're hateful because we harbor them within us. We don't forget the painful things that are said to us or done to us. Sirach also talks about vengeance. We all think about how we're going to "get 'em back."

We need to be like children: They fight one moment, but in 15 minutes, they're playing with one another again. They forgive and forget!

Jesus says, "Love your enemies. Do good for those who hate you. Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who hurt you."

It's human nature to hold grudges. My friend tells the story of his mom and sister who didn't talk for 30 years — and neither one

*We need to be like children:  
They'll fight one moment,  
but in 15 minutes,  
they're playing  
with one another again.  
They forgive and forget!*

remembered why. When they finally got together, one asked the other, “Did you really say this about me?” One thought that the other had said something about her – so they didn’t speak for 30 years!

People will always commit injustices against others. Perhaps we will commit injustices against others, too. The key is not to harbor hatred toward anyone and to follow the Golden Commandment of Jesus—love God and love neighbor—forgiving them without limit, even 77 times!

Jesus says that if we don’t judge, we won’t be judged. If we don’t condemn, we won’t be condemned. The cup we measure with will be measured back to us!

Our responsorial psalm says, “The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger and rich in compassion.” May we be kind and merciful toward our neighbor, forgiving others as Christ forgives us.

In today’s gospel, the master forgave his debtor, who turned around and persecuted one who owed him a much smaller amount. God has forgiven us. Let’s follow Jesus’ instructions and forgive our neighbor from the heart! Let’s “forgive and forget”!

## **Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Year B, 2018

Isaiah 50:4-9 | Psalm 116:1-9 | James 2:14-18 | Mark 8:27-35

In today’s gospel, Jesus asked his friends, “Who do *you* say that I am?” Peter replied, “You are the Christ!” Peter thought that Jesus was going to be a king, a ruler who restored the kingdom of Israel. Instead, Jesus told Peter that he would suffer greatly and be rejected by the chief priests and the scribes. This disturbed Peter, who took Jesus aside and rebuked Jesus for saying that he would be rejected and killed. Jesus rebuked Peter in return, saying that he was thinking like a human and not like God.

Jesus gathered his disciples and said, “If you wish to come after me, you must deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.” We all carry crosses in life, and sometimes they get heavy! Have you ever wondered if God could just take a little bit of the weight off? I have.

At times, I've wanted God to take off a bit of the weight, so that it wouldn't be so heavy—but then I think of the story of the man who was carrying his cross. He decided to cut off a bit of his cross. Farther down the road, he cut off a little more. In the end, he came to an abyss—and he wasn't able to put down his cross and get to the other side!

In today's second reading, James tells us, "Faith without works is dead." We have to love God and love our brothers and sisters. We have to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, and visit the prisoner. Those are the corporal works of mercy.

When you feel that your cross is heavy, and when you're tempted to pray that God might take away some of the weight, remember that Jesus bore the cross for our sake, without cutting off any of its weight, so that we could have eternal salvation.

As the psalmist says, let us walk with the Lord in the land of the living, loving one another the way God loves us!

*Jesus bore the cross for our sake,  
without cutting off any of its weight,  
so that we could have  
eternal salvation.*

## Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C, 2019

Amos 8:4-7 | Psalm 113:1-8 | 1Timothy 2:1-8 | Luke 16:1-13

Today Jesus shares the parable of the lost sheep—and the significance that *one* has over 99! The good shepherd leaves the 99 sheep—to seek out the one lost sheep!

I once knew a couple whose daughter had run away, so I helped them look for her. We spent the night going from house to house, visiting the places where they thought she might be. We didn't find her.

Jesus talks about that disappointment of not finding what we're looking for—of not finding the "lost sheep." Jesus says there will be

more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over 99 righteous people who have no need for repentance.

Have you ever turned your back on God? In today's first reading, the Israelites turned their back on God by creating and worshipping a golden calf. Moses had gone up Mount Sinai to get the Ten Commandments, and the people grew impatient—and they worshipped the calf for...bringing them out of Egypt! Moses was furious! He knew that God had liberated them—and now they had turned from God!

What is your "golden calf"? When I was young, my "golden calf" was work. My priorities then were not Jesus, then others, then me. Back then, I came first, then others, then Jesus.

In today's second reading, Saint Paul talks about Jesus inviting him to ministry. Paul used to persecute Christians. He hunted them down and turned them in. Then Jesus called him to ministry. Paul knew he wasn't worthy to be a minister of Christ.

When a Franciscan brother invited me to minister to senior citizens in 1992, that turned my life around. I became part of that ministry, and I felt what Paul talks about when he says that Jesus welcomed him with open arms. Even though I previously worshiped a "golden calf," Jesus welcomed me! I've been part of ministry ever since. I continue to visit the elderly at home, in the hospital and in nursing homes.

If you have a "golden calf" in your life, ask God for forgiveness, and ask God to lead you back and to help you live as a child of God. We're all children of God, and we all stray—some of us for a short time and some of us for a longer time—but God is always there with open arms.

Pope Francis says, "Don't be afraid to ask God for forgiveness. God never tires of forgiveness. God is true mercy!"

*We're all children of God,  
and we all stray...  
but God is always there  
with open arms.*

## Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A, 2014

Isaiah 55:6-9 | Psalm 145:2-18 | Philippians 1:20-27 | Matthew 20:1-16a

Have you ever found yourself saying that God isn't fair? Have you ever felt as if God had abandoned you? Have you ever thought that it's not fair that you're not enjoying life, or that it's not fair that "the last shall be first"?

Perhaps you remember the story, "Footprints in the Sand." A man had a dream that he was walking with the Lord on a beach, and, for each scene of his life, there were two sets of footprints in the sand: his footprints and the Lord's footprints! He noticed that during difficult times in his life, when he really struggled, there was only one set of footprints in the sand. He asked, "Lord, didn't you promise me that if I followed you, you would be with me all the days of my life?" And Jesus responded, "My precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. It was during those most difficult times in your life that I carried you!"

In today's first reading, Isaiah says, "Seek the Lord while he may be found! Call to him while he is near!"

In today's second reading, Saint Paul is torn between wanting to go to heaven and wanting to remain on earth to continue his ministry. He longs for the joys of heaven, but he also knows that there's work to be done here on earth.

There's a certain poem that says,

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve;  
 I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.  
 I asked God for health, that I might do greater things;  
 I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.  
 I asked God for riches, that I might be happy;  
 I was given poverty, that I might be wise.  
 I asked for power, that I might have the praise of all;  
 I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.  
 I asked for all things necessary to enjoy life;  
 I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing that I had asked for,  
 but everything that I had hoped for.  
 Despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered;  
 I am, among all people, most richly blessed!

Sometimes we want all sorts of things, but God knows what we need. In today's gospel, the workers complain that the master is not fair: The ones who worked all day received the same amount as those who hardly worked. Jesus is talking about the righteous and sinners. Today the Church remembers Saint Matthew, the tax collector—considered a sinner by the Jews—who went on to write a gospel. God is the judge of all, deciding who's worthy and who's not. The Jews certainly must have complained that Jesus showed a preference for Matthew, who followed him. As we remember Saint Matthew, may we remember that God doesn't abandon us. God knows exactly what we need, and God alone decides who's first and who's last!

*God doesn't abandon us,  
 God knows exactly what we need,  
 and God alone decides  
 who's first and who's last!*

## Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B, 2015

Wisdom 2:12, 17-20 | Psalm 54:3-8 | James 3:16—4:3 | Mark 9:30-37

Today's first reading, from the book of Wisdom, talks about how evil people test the righteous. In last Sunday's gospel, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do the people say that I am?" They replied, "John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the prophets."

John the Baptist came before Jesus, preparing the way of the Lord. When King Herod took his brother's wife, John the Baptist said, "It is not lawful for you to take your brother's wife!" King Herod imprisoned John the Baptist. During a celebration that night, the daughter of Herodius danced for the king, and he was so delighted that he promised her whatever she wished. She asked her mother, and her mother said, "We want the head of John the Baptist!" John the Baptist was beheaded because he stood for righteousness.

Like John the Baptist, we, here at Holy Family, have suffered persecution, too. We've all heard of the letters that the Roman Catholic Church shared about us—but we continue forward, freely sharing the Church's sacraments with God's people without all the "hoops" that they make people jump through! To those who are divorced and remarried, who've lived with and loved another for years but were denied communion in the Roman Catholic Church, we say, "Welcome!" Through the Eucharist, we invite them to live in God—and God in them! Imagine all the years that those people suffered, not being able to receive the Body and Blood of Christ!

*To those who are  
divorced & remarried,  
...denied communion in  
the Roman Catholic Church,  
we say, "Welcome!"  
Through the Eucharist,  
we invite them to live in God –  
and God in them!*

Today we celebrate over 20 years of service by our Joy Group, a ministry for senior adults, where we strive for J.O.Y., putting Jesus first, then Others, then You. We were a social group, we went on pilgrimages together, and we've prayed over 1,000 rosaries together! We try to live the gospel, which tells us that, if you want to be first, you have to be last!

In today's second reading, James talks about seeking wisdom from above, which is pure, peaceful, gentle, full of mercy, never-changing, and sincere. May we always seek wisdom from above, that we might receive the Lord and the One who sent him!

## **Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Year C, 2019

Amos 6:1-7 | Psalm 146:6-10 | 1Timothy 6:11-16 | Luke 16:19-31

Today's gospel talks about the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man dressed in fine, purple clothes and linen, and Lazarus was poor. The rich man ate his fill of the best meats; Lazarus competed with the dogs for the leftovers. The rich man followed money, while Lazarus chose to be one of God's people.

When the rich man died, he was buried. When Lazarus died, he was carried away by the angels to heaven. From the netherworld, the rich man saw Lazarus with Abraham and said, "Send Lazarus to dip his finger in water!" The rich man was suffering torment and simply wanted to quench his thirst. The rich man chose money as his "god."

In today's first reading, Amos warns the people of Israel not to be complacent. They were eating fine foods and living a life of luxury, with no regard for the poor and those in need. Amos warned that they would be the first to be exiled because they neglected the needs of the poor.

There are 736 million people who live in poverty in our world. In Austin, we have a population of about one million, so that's 736 "cities" the size of Austin, filled with people in poverty!

The gospel challenges us to recognize the needs of those around us. Think, for example, of all the food you waste. Restaurants have to throw away leftover food. Due to requirements of the health department, they can't give it away.

I remember speaking with one woman who worked for a food company, and she saw all the food that was thrown away. She said, "I'm willing to buy it at half price!" They said no. Rather than feed the homeless, they throw away the food!

Amos warned the people to have compassion on those in need. Otherwise, they would suffer—like the rich man in today's gospel, who ended up in the netherworld.

In today's second reading, Timothy is told to fulfill his commitment of baptism and be faithful to God, to be patient and forgiving, to love—all those qualities that earn us a place in heaven. It's the same lesson as Lazarus and the rich man: If we're complacent, we'll suffer, but, if we're compassionate with those in need, the Lord will bless us and take us home to God.

It's hot enough here in Austin in the summer; we don't want to go to the netherworld! Let's take seriously our responsibility, our duty to help the poor and the needy.

Here at Holy Family, we help local food banks, and we support ElderCare. We know there's a need to help the poor.

Let's be challenged by today's gospel:  
Rather than love money, let's have a love  
for God and God's people—for those in  
need. Let's open our hearts and our  
homes to them, extending a hand to our  
neighbors in need!

*Rather than love money,  
let's have a love for  
God and God's people –  
for those in need.*

## Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A, 2020

Isaiah 5:1-7 | Psalm 80:9-20 | Philippians 4:6-9 | Matthew 21:33-43

"The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel." The job of the prophet Isaiah was to convert the people from their evil ways. He talked with them to no avail, so he decided to sing the song of his friend who planted a vineyard on fertile land with the choicest vines. His friend built a tower and hedge to protect it, and he built a wine press. But when he went to gather the grapes, all he found were...sour grapes!

Isaiah was talking about the Israelites. God brought them from Egypt, where they were captives, to the fertile land of Israel, where they settled in the "land of milk and honey." God looked after the people—but they turned from God. After all that God had done for them, the vineyard resulted in "sour grapes"!

I used to work in the cotton fields, where we cleared all the weeds around the stalks, so that the cotton would grow up healthy. That's what God did: God prepared the land, pulled out the rocks, and irrigated it, so that it would produce fruit—but the people turned from God.

The gospel talks about a vineyard as well. Jesus tells the story of a landowner who planted a vineyard, then he leased it to some tenants and he went away. When harvest time came, he sent the servants to collect his share, but the tenants mistreated the servants—the prophets, who tried to convert the people from their evil ways. So he sent his son, saying, "Surely they will respect my son." The son was Jesus, and they crucified him.

In today's second reading, Saint Paul talks about the peace that is beyond all understanding and that guards our heart and mind, that we might understand what is good, honorable and pure and so produce good fruit in our lives. If we don't produce good fruit, we risk losing God's kingdom. So, let's bear good fruit, so that the kingdom of God will not be taken away from us!

*If we don't  
produce good fruit,  
we risk losing  
God's kingdom.*

## Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B, 2018

Genesis 2:18-24 | Psalm 128:1-6 | Hebrews 2:9-11 | Mark 10:2-16

Today's readings talk about marriage—and how two people become one.

I recall the story about a gentleman who was very wealthy. One day, his doctor told him he had a terminal illness and that he should get his affairs in order. The man called his wife. He said, "Honey, when I die, can you do me one favor? Will you put all my money with me in the casket?" She said, "Sure." After his funeral, one woman asked the man's wife, "Did you really put all his money in the casket?" She said, "I sure did. I wrote him a check!"

Before marriage, we're single. Then we meet a partner, and we become a couple. After our vows, we become one—which is why today's first reading talks about us becoming "one flesh."

The Lord wants us to be one and to dwell in him, as he dwells in us. Through the exchange of vows in matrimony, we promise to love and honor one another all the days of our lives. Our promise is like the promise of God, who never abandons us but is with us through the good and the bad times. We love and honor our partner all the days of our lives!

I think of the loving example of Tony and Diana Coy: Tony donated his kidney to Diana. That's the beauty of the two becoming one, of sharing and caring for one another.

I also think of the elderly couples who still hold one another's hands, and who finish one another's thoughts. They've gone through all sorts of trials together, supporting one another – and they're still together, enjoying their "golden years."

Today's second reading says that God sent Jesus Christ, who was made "lower than the angels" for our sake, suffering for our sake, that we might be holy.

In matrimony and in our partnerships, we have to support one another, so that we can say with the psalmist, "May the Lord bless us all the days of our lives!"

## Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C, 2019

Amos 6:4-7 | Psalm 146:6-10 | 1Timothy 6:11-16 | Luke 16:19-31

Today's gospel talks about faith and how we're supposed to be servants. The Twelve asked Jesus, "Increase our faith!" Jesus had just talked to them about sin and temptation. He said, "If your brother or sister comes to you seven times asking for forgiveness," forgive them seven times. He also said, "Woe to the one who causes little ones to sin. It would be better that a millstone were wrapped around their neck and that they be thrown into the sea!" The Twelve realized that the ministry of Jesus would be pretty tough, so they asked him to increase their faith. He replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed – and mustard seeds are tiny – you could tell the mulberry tree to be uprooted and planted in the sea – and it would obey you!"

When hardships come upon us, we ask that our faith might be increased. When we lose a loved one and are left without answers regarding the cause, we ask for an increase in faith. When things are difficult, we ask for an increase in faith. Sometimes we're like Habakkuk, asking for help amid destruction and injustice, and we feel that

*Faith is not hoping  
that God can;  
faith is knowing  
that God will.  
With faith,  
all things are possible.*

God doesn't don't hear our cry. But the Lord says, "Have faith. Be patient. My works will come to pass."

What is faith? Faith is not hoping that God *can*; faith is knowing that God *will*. With faith, all things are possible.

Jesus talks about how we're supposed to be servants to our brothers and sisters. It's not only our duty; it's our responsibility to do the work of the hands of Christ. That's our duty and our responsibility!

When God invites you to ministry, the responsorial psalm says, "harden not your hearts." When you are asked to forgive your brother or your sister, "harden not your hearts." When you're asked to care for your loved ones, "harden not your hearts."

In today's second reading, Timothy is told to live his faith and be faithful to God. He is told not to be a coward, but to give testimony of the Lord's works. May we share our faith, giving testimony to those we meet – because with faith all things are possible!

## Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A, 2020

Isaiah 25:6-10 | Psalm 23:1-6 | Philippians 4:12-20 | Matthew 22:1-14

I heard a story the other day about a dog and a hog. The dog admired the hog, saying, "They come and feed you in the morning, mid-morning and afternoon – while they treat me like...a dog!"

In today's gospel, we have the story of a king who invited everyone to a wedding feast for his son. That's how God is: inviting us all to the banquet of salvation, to share in God's love and mercy! All are fed at God's banquet – and no one is treated like a dog!

All were invited to the banquet, but not everyone came. Some were busy. Others had to work. In the end, few accepted the invitation. Jesus told the story about the Jews: They refused the invitation to God's kingdom of love and mercy, so God reached out to the Gentiles – and the banquet hall was filled!

Not all who came were prepared. In the story, we find one gentleman who wasn't dressed for the feast. He wasn't ready for the banquet.

We often speak of our Eucharist as a banquet. All are invited, but not everyone comes.

In today's first reading, Isaiah speaks of God gathering all the people on Mount Zion for a feast of celebration, with rich foods and choice wines. God says, "On this mountain the veil that veils all nations will be destroyed, and the Lord will swallow up death forever."

In today's second reading, Saint Paul speaks of his ability to survive in good times and in bad times because he placed his faith and hope in God.

If we trust in the Lord, we, too, can persevere in good times and in bad. Our responsorial psalm echoes this: "The Lord is my shepherd. There is nothing I shall want!"

*If we trust in the Lord,  
we, too, can persevere  
in good times and in bad.*

## Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C, 2019

2Kings 5:14-17 | Psalm 98:1-4 | 2Timothy 2:8-13 | Luke 17:11-19

Today's gospel is the story of ten lepers who were healed by Jesus, but only one of them was grateful and returned to Jesus. He prostrated himself in front of Jesus and gave him thanks. Jesus told him to go see the priest, because the priest was the one who allowed lepers back into the community after they were healed. Until then, lepers lived outside the community. They were isolated.

The story reminds me of a girl who suffered alcohol poisoning. She was in a coma, and her mom said, "Let's call a priest and give her the last rites—just in case she doesn't come out of her coma." The priest came in and anointed the girl, and eventually she woke up and came out of her coma. That girl never went back to church. She never gave

thanks to God — like the nine lepers in today's gospel. They went their own way. Yes, they were healed, but they didn't pause to give thanks to God!

The one leper who did give thanks was a...Samaritan. The Jews and the Samaritans didn't get along. The Jews referred to Samaritans as foreigners. So in today's gospel, only this "foreigner" returned to give thanks.

Isn't it true that we're not always grateful for all the things we have? That we don't always show our gratitude?

In today's first reading, Naaman, the commander of the army, contracted leprosy as well. He became an outcast! The prophet Elisha told him to wade into the waters of the Jordan River seven times. Naaman likely hesitated and wondered, "Why seven times?" But he was obedient — and he was cleansed! At that moment, he realized that Elisha was a prophet, and he was determined to worship Elisha's God! He realized that, with Elisha's God, all things are possible!

God healed Naaman, and Naaman was grateful — so grateful that he wanted to find a way to repay the prophet Elisha, and Elisha refused.

When we come to celebrate the Eucharist, we come to give thanks for all that we have as individuals and as a community.

In today's second reading, Timothy recognizes that he has been consecrated to do God's work and to proclaim the gospel of Christ.

Let's be grateful for all that God has given us — and not like the nine lepers in today's gospel. When we're ill, we often find ourselves praying to God and asking for healing, and then, when we're healed, our need and our gratitude fade.

May we always give thanks to God through whom all things are possible!

*Isn't it true that  
we're not always grateful  
for all the things we have?  
That we don't always  
show our gratitude?*

*When we're ill, we often  
find ourselves praying to God  
and asking for healing, and then,  
when we're healed, our need  
and our gratitude fade.*

## Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B, 2015

Isaiah 53:10-11 | Psalm 33:4-5, 18-22 | Hebrews 4:14-16 | Mark 10:35-45

God sent Jesus into the world not only to perform wondrous signs, but that we might enjoy the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. God gloried Jesus through his ministry.

In today's gospel, James and John want to be glorified. They don't understand that ministry is about serving and not being served. When we serve others, we don't do it to be recognized. We do it for our own self-satisfaction.

In today's gospel, Jesus asks them if they can "walk the walk," if they can drink from the same "cup" of suffering. They say "yes."

We, too, are called to say "yes" to the Lord, to share our time, talent and treasure with others, to care for the homeless, to pray for those in need.

*We, too, are called  
to say "yes" to the Lord,  
to share our time, talent  
and treasure with others,  
to care for the homeless,  
to pray for those in need.*

This month is domestic violence awareness month. Because of my own journey, I was asked early on by Safe Place to reach out to other families who lost their daughters to violence. I did that for about ten years. Some of those families found comfort in God's Word.

In today's second reading, we are asked to trust in Jesus the High Priest, and in his forgiveness and mercy. We, too, are called to trust in God, and we pray with the psalmist, "Lord, may your mercy be upon us as we place our trust in you!"

## Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C, 2019

Exodus 17:8-13 | Psalm 121:1-8 | 2Timothy 3:14-4:2 | Luke 18:1-8

In today's gospel, Jesus tells us to pray always and not grow weary. Today we celebrate the sacrament of anointing, and we ask for God's healing. When we don't experience healing, we get impatient, perhaps even weary. Jesus encourages us to persist and not to give up—and to have faith in God, who is able to work through all the circumstances of life. Jesus is saying, "Don't give up! Continue to ask God for your needs!"

In today's first reading, as long as Moses held his hands up in prayer, the Israelites were winning the battle. He got tired, though, and, when he let his hands down, the Israelites started to lose. In the end, Joshua and Hur sat Moses on a rock, and they held up his hands, and the Israelites were victorious!

In the same way, we need to persevere, lifting up one another in prayer.

In today's gospel, we have the story of a widow who came to bother the judge every day. She drove him so crazy that he gave her what she wanted and rendered a decision in her favor.

*Jesus is saying,  
"Don't give up!  
Continue to ask God  
for your needs!"*

Perhaps you've had a similar experience: When you take children to a store, they bother you for the toys they want until you give in!

Jesus says that we need to approach God every day in prayer, and sooner or later, God will grant us what we need—not always what we want, but surely what we need.

We all face difficulties in life. We pray that God will give us the strength we need to overcome those trials.

The author of today's second reading encourages us to be persistent as well. As teachers of God's ways, we need to be patient with others as they grow as Christians and followers of Christ.

In the end, God will hear our plea. God will hear our prayers and grant us what we need on our earthly journey!

## Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C, 2019

Wisdom 11:22–12:2 | Psalm 145:1-14 | 2Thes. 1:11–2:2 | Luke 19:1-10

Today's gospel is about Zacchaeus, the tax collector who wanted to encounter Jesus. As a tax collector, he was regarded as a sinner. Tax collectors worked for the Roman Empire and were known for extorting people and taking more than their fair share of taxes.

Zacchaeus was also short, so he climbed up a tree to see Jesus. When Jesus saw him, Jesus told him to come down so that Jesus could enjoy a meal at Zacchaeus' home. Sometimes we are like Zacchaeus, looking to encounter the Lord.

When people began talking about how Jesus went to Zacchaeus' home, Zacchaeus defended himself before Jesus. He said, "I will give half of my belongings to the poor, and if I have extorted anybody, I will pay them back four times." That encounter with Jesus transformed Zacchaeus' life!

Seeing how Zacchaeus was transformed, Jesus proclaimed, "Salvation has come to this house today!"

We pray that we, too, might experience such a conversion in our lives—a conversion to God and a conversion to love!

Zacchaeus experienced God's love and forgiveness.

The author of the second letter to the Thessalonians says, "Pray that God will make you worthy of your calling, so that you can be gloried in God, and God in you."

As we hear the story of Zacchaeus today, let us ask ourselves what we are doing to encounter the Lord. Let's ask ourselves how we are transforming ourselves and being better followers of Christ!

*We pray that we, too,  
might experience such  
a conversion in our lives –  
a conversion to God  
and a conversion to love!*

## Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A, 2020

Wisdom 6:12-16 | Psalm 63:2-8 | 1Thessalonians 4:13-18 | Matthew 25:1-13

In today's gospel, Jesus shares the parable of ten virgins: five were prepared for the coming of the bridegroom, and five were not. Those virgins represent us, and the bridegroom is the Lord.

Five of the virgins brought extra oil for their lamps, and five didn't. As the bridegroom approached, the virgins who were running out of oil asked to borrow some from those who brought extra oil – but this parable isn't about sharing. It's about being prepared.

This story causes us to ask ourselves how prepared we are for the coming of the Lord. Are we more like the wise virgins or the foolish virgins?

In Matthew 24, Jesus tells the story of the great flood: Those who were unprepared for the flood were washed away!

In another place, Jesus speaks of the thief coming in the middle of the night: If we knew when the thief were coming, we'd be prepared!

How might we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Bridegroom?

Our first reading speaks of the virtue of wisdom. To achieve God's kingdom, we need to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength.

*To achieve God's kingdom,  
we need to love God  
with all our heart,  
all our soul, all our mind  
and all our strength.*

In today's second reading, Paul speaks of the hope of eternal life. We know that death is not the end of our journey, but is a new beginning.

The story is told of two friends who enjoyed playing ball together. They made a pact that when the first died, he would come back from the dead and tell the other what it's like. One man died, and he came back to visit his friend, who asked, "What is heaven like?" The man said, "It's beautiful and peaceful, and we play ball all day long every day! It's wonderful! The reason I'm here is because...we need you on the team tomorrow!"

When we lose a loved one, we often think of them with other members of our family who've gone before us. That's the hope that Saint Paul talks about: When we fall asleep in death, death is not the end of our journey.

*When we fall asleep in death,  
death is not the end  
of our journey.*

Let's reflect this week on how prepared we are for the coming of the Bridegroom, and let's pray for the virtue of wisdom, which is unfading and available to all who seek it. May we seek the virtue of wisdom, and may we seek to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength!

## **Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Year C, 2019

2Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14 | Psalm 17:1-15 | 2Thes. 2:16—3:5 | Luke 20:27-38

In today's first reading, we hear about the Maccabean martyrs, the mother and her seven sons who were tortured to death because of their faith in God. They didn't want to break the law, which said that they couldn't eat pork. They preferred to observe God's law and suffer death, than to break God's law and risk losing salvation. The Maccabeans believed in life after death. They knew that their suffering on this earth couldn't begin to compare to the glory they would experience in the afterlife! Their faith in the afterlife was so strong that they were willing to endure death.

Every Sunday, we profess our faith in the resurrection of the dead.

In today's gospel, the Sadducees tried to trick Jesus with a riddle about a woman who married seven brothers: Whose wife will she be in heaven? Back then, it was the law that, if your brother died, you married his widow, to provide for her and for her children — since her children were your "blood." Jesus responded, "In this world, we marry and remarry, but in the resurrection we neither marry nor are given in marriage. We're like the angels. We're children of God!"

Saint Paul says that we are children of God and co-heirs with Christ. If we suffer with Christ, we will be gloried with Christ. Jesus suffered death, but he was raised to life again.

We reflect on the Maccabean martyrs, and we call to mind various modern-day “martyrs” and witnesses. As we celebrate Veteran’s Day tomorrow, we reflect on those who served in the military and sacrificed their lives for us to enjoy such freedoms as the freedom of religion. I also think of Father Jayme, who gave up his ministry in the Roman church to start an inclusive Catholic community here at Holy Family, where all are welcomed and where we don’t judge others. Father Libardo, too, gave up all he had in Rome to fight for the place of women in ministry within Independent Catholicism. All of you are martyrs and witnesses every time someone questions, criticizes or attacks you for being an Independent Catholic – and you stand up for Jesus’ message of inclusivity! We know that being in communion with any particular religion won’t save us – but that being in communion with God will!

*All of you are martyrs and witnesses  
every time someone questions,  
criticizes or attacks you  
for being an Independent Catholic –  
and you stand up for Jesus’ message  
of inclusivity!*

## Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A, 2014

Proverbs 31:19-31 | Psalm 128:1-5 | 1Thes. 5:1-6 | Matthew 25:14-30

The story is told of the man who became ill. His doctor told him he only had a short time to live. From his deathbed, he made his wife promise that she would bury him with all his money. She said, “Yes, of course!” After the funeral, the widow was speaking with one of her girlfriends, who said, “You didn’t do that, did you?” And she said, “Yes, I did – but I wrote him a check!”

Today’s gospel talks about a man who shared his “talents” with others. I marvel at the many talents here at Holy Family. With your

talents, you have built this community! You have shared of your time, talent and treasure to create Holy Family. I imagine the Master saying to you, “Come, share your master’s joy!”

Today’s first reading speaks of the worthy wife. Her value to her husband is greater than pearls! She works with her hands and creates all sorts of goods. Do you remember back in the old days when our mothers used to make dresses out of flour sacks? That

*You have shared of your  
time, talent and treasure  
to create Holy Family.*

*I imagine the Master*

*saying to you,*

*“Come, share your master’s joy!”*

was a long time ago! Mothers are the first ones to rise and the last ones to go to bed. They protect their children, telling them to cover up before going out in the cold. They feed their families and only eat after everyone else is fed. The book of Wisdom says, “Give her a reward for her labors, that she may be praised at the city gates.”

Those words remind us of our own mothers. They gave us life. They encouraged us in our education. They introduced us to our faith. When I came back to the church, people said, “You’re Alvina’s son!” She paved the way for me.

Today’s second reading tells us the Lord will come like a thief in the night—but do not be afraid because we are children of the light and of the day!

Let us live as children of the light and of the day, using the talents that our Master has given us, so that we, too, like the worthy wife, will be praised at the city gates!

## Solemnity of Christ the King of the Universe

Year A, 2020

Ezekiel 34:11-17 | Psalm 23:1-6 | 1Cor. 15:20-26, 28 | Matthew 25:31-46

Today's scriptures talk about the end of time and what will happen then, when Christ rules as the king of the universe. Today's gospel refers to Christ as the Good Shepherd who will separate us in the final judgment: There will be those on his right and those on his left. What we do for others will make the difference. The corporal works of mercy will separate the "sheep" from the "goats"! How we treat the marginalized — those on street corners and those who don't look "normal" — will determine where we go!

*What we do for others  
will make the difference.  
The corporal works of mercy  
will separate the "sheep"  
from the "goats"!*

In today's first reading, God promises to look after and tend God's sheep. We are God's sheep! God says, "I will look after them and give them rest. I will seek out those who stray and bring back the injured. I will heal the sick." Ezekiel is talking about the corporal works of mercy!

We see those same corporal works of mercy in today's gospel. "I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was ill and in prison, and you visited me." If we follow the corporal works of mercy, we stand a chance of being at the Lord's right hand.

In today's gospel, we notice that people on both sides recognized him as Lord. They say, "Lord, when did we not give you food or drink?" And the Lord will reply, "When you did these things for the least of your brothers or sisters — the most marginalized — that's when you did it for me!"

*"When you did these things  
for the least of your  
brothers or sisters —  
the most marginalized —  
that's when you did it for me!"*

Do we recognize the face of Christ in those who are “different” and in those who are most marginalized? We’ll get to God’s kingdom through the corporal works of mercy!

In today’s second reading, Saint Paul speaks of Jesus as the first fruits of the resurrection. He was the first to rise from the dead, and he conquered death, guaranteeing us eternal life!

We need to ask ourselves: Do we want to be on God’s left or on God’s right? We want to be on God’s right, where we can inherit the

*Let’s practice the  
corporal works of mercy,  
so that we may dwell  
in the house of the Lord,  
the Good Shepherd,  
forever!*

kingdom that was prepared for us since the beginning of creation! We don’t want to be on God’s left, where we’ll receive eternal punishment.

Let’s practice the corporal works of mercy, so that we may dwell in the house of the Lord, the Good Shepherd, forever!

## **Solemnity of Christ the King of the Universe**

Year B, 2015

Daniel 7:13-14 | Psalm 93:1-5 | Revelation 1:5-8 | John 18:33-37

The story is told of the priest, the minister and the rabbi who were enjoying an afternoon out on the lake, in a boat. After a while, the priest got out of the boat, walked on the water, went to get himself a drink, then came back. The rabbi did the same: He walked on the water and came back. The minister got up to do the same. He got out of the boat – and went straight down into the water. The priest looked at the rabbi and said, “We should have told him where the stepping stones below the surface are!

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King, and we ask ourselves who Christ is for us. Is he the Alpha and the Omega for us? Is he the beginning and the end for us? The present and the future for our lives? What vision do we have of Christ the King?

In today’s first reading, Daniel had a vision of Christ coming in the clouds of heaven with glory, kingship and dominion over all people and all nations – with a dominion that is everlasting and a kingship that will never be destroyed.

In the book of Revelation, we hear: “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us a kingdom and priests to serve our God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever!” When we say the Our Father at Mass, we end by saying, “For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever.”

In today’s gospel, Jesus tells us that God’s kingdom is not like the kingdoms of this world, causing us to reflect on the role of Christ the King in our lives. When we’re young, we don’t have a lot of time for Christ, but when we get older, we start thinking more and more about Christ.

Let’s reflect today on the role that Christ the King might play in our lives—and how we might make him the center of our lives!

*¡Que viva Cristo Rey!*

May Christ reign  
in our hearts and in our lives!