

Pondering the Word...

THE ANAWIM WAY

Daily Liturgical Meditations

*Pentecost to Fourteenth Week
in Ordinary Time*

*May 28 to July 15, 2023
Cycle A - Year 1*

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What is the Anawim Spirituality?

Our spirituality has three essential characteristics:

Liturgical

The Liturgy is the source of our formation. Daily, we draw inspiration from the readings and prayers of the Liturgy, which we understand to be the ponderings of Mary's heart. For this reason, we honor Mary under the title of Our Lady of the Liturgical Life.

Eucharistic

Jesus in the Eucharist is the center of our spirituality. By faithful participation in Holy Mass and frequent Eucharistic Adoration, we are empowered by the Presence of Jesus to go forth to serve the people of God in all the circumstances of life.

Marian

We entrust ourselves to Mary, the mother and model of every Christian. She continually forms us in her spirit of humility, compassion and reconciling love, transforming us into the likeness of Jesus. She shares with us her spiritual motherhood as we are called to bring forth the life of Jesus in others.

If you would like to explore the Anawim Community further, we invite you to contact us.

*Pentecost Sunday
and
Eighth Week in Ordinary Time*

“Peace be with you... Receive the Holy Spirit.”

John 20:19, 22

Theme for the Week

The Holy Spirit is the promised Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth who will guide us to all truth. The Father and his Son send the Holy Spirit, who comes in power to restore all things in Christ. Let us call on the Spirit to make us true apostles. Empowered by the Spirit, let us go forth in confidence to proclaim the Good News of Salvation so that through us he can give life to others and renew the face of the earth!

THE SPIRIT'S GIFTS OF PEACE AND FORGIVENESS

A Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis

Today we celebrate the great feast of Pentecost, in memory of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the first Christian community. Today's Gospel (cf. Jn 20:19-23) takes us back to the evening of Easter and shows us the Risen Jesus who appears in the Upper Room, where the disciples have taken refuge. They were afraid. He "stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you!'" (v. 19). These first words pronounced by the Risen One – "Peace be with you" – are to be considered as more than a greeting: they express forgiveness, the forgiveness granted to the disciples who, to tell the truth, had abandoned him. They are words of reconciliation and forgiveness. And when we wish peace to others, we too are granting forgiveness, and asking for forgiveness as well. Jesus offers his peace precisely to these disciples who are afraid, who find it hard to believe what they have seen, that is, the empty tomb, and they underestimate the witness of Mary of Magdala and of the other women. Jesus forgives; he always forgives, and offers his peace to his friends. Do not forget: Jesus never tires of forgiving. It is we who tire of asking for forgiveness.

By forgiving and gathering his disciples around him, Jesus makes them a Church, *his* Church, which is a community reconciled and ready for mission. Reconciled and ready for mission. When a community is not reconciled, it is not ready for mission: it is ready for discussions within it; it is ready for internal [discussions]. The encounter with the Risen Lord upends the lives of the Apostles and transforms them into courageous witnesses. Indeed, immediately afterwards he says, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (v. 21). These words help us understand that the Apostles are sent to continue the same mission that the Father entrusted to Jesus. "I send you": it is not time to stay locked up, nor to regret: to regret the 'good times,' those times spent with the Master. The joy of the Resurrection is great, but it is an expansive joy, which should not be kept to oneself: it is to be given. On the Sundays of the Easter Season we first heard this same episode, then the encounter with the disciples of Emmaus, then the Good Shepherd, the farewell discourses and the promise of the Holy Spirit: all this is directed toward strengthening the disciples' faith – and ours as well – in view of the mission.

And precisely to inspire mission, Jesus gives his Spirit to the Apostles. The Gospel states: “he breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (v. 22). The Holy Spirit is fire that burns away sins and creates new men and women; he is the fire of love with which the disciples can ‘set the world on fire,’ that tender love that favors the little ones, the poor, the excluded... In the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation we received the Holy Spirit with his gifts: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of God. This last gift – fear of God – is the very opposite of the fear that first paralyzed the disciples: it is love for the Lord; it is the certainty of his mercy and his goodness; it is the confidence that we are able to move in the direction he indicates, without ever lacking his presence and support.

The feast of Pentecost renews the awareness that the life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit abides in us. He also gives us the courage to go outside the protective walls of our “Upper Rooms,” of our little groups, without easing into a quiet life or withdrawing into sterile habits. Let us now raise our thoughts to Mary: when the Holy Spirit came, she was there, with the Apostles, a protagonist with the first Community that experienced the wonders of Pentecost; and let us pray that she obtain for the Church the ardent missionary spirit.

Pope Francis, Angelus Message
Solemnity of Pentecost, May 31, 2020
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May 28, Pentecost Sunday

Vigil Mass: Gen 11:1-9 or Ex 19:3-8a, 16-20b or Ez 37:1-14 or Jl 3:1-5; Ps 104:1-2, 24, 35, 27-28, 29, 30; Rom 8:22-27; Jn 7:37-39

Extended Vigil: Gen 11:1-9; Ps 33:10-15 / Ex 19:3-8a, 16-20b; Dn 3:52-56 or Ps 19:8-11 / Ez 37:1-14; Ps 107:2-9 / Jl 3:1-5; Ps 104:1-2, 24 and 35, 27-30; Rom 8:22-27; Jn 7:37-39



First Reading: Acts 2:1-11

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, “Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his native language? We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.”



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34

Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.

or **Alleluia.**

Bless the LORD, O my soul!

O LORD, my God, you are great indeed!

How manifold are your works, O LORD!

the earth is full of your creatures.

R. Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.

or **Alleluia.**

If you take away their breath, they perish

and return to their dust.

When you send forth your spirit, they are created,

and you renew the face of the earth.

R. Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.

or **Alleluia.**

May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
 may the LORD be glad in his works!
Pleasing to him be my theme;
 I will be glad in the LORD.

***R. Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.
or Alleluia.***



Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

Brothers and sisters: No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.



Sequence: Veni, Sancte Spiritus

Come, Holy Spirit, come!
And from your celestial home
Shed a ray of light divine!
Come, Father of the poor!
Come, source of all our store!
 Come, within our bosoms shine.
You, of comforters the best;
You, the soul’s most welcome guest;
 Sweet refreshment here below;
In our labor, rest most sweet;
Grateful coolness in the heat;
 Solace in the midst of woe.
O most blessed Light divine,
Shine within these hearts of yours,
 And our inmost being fill!
Where you are not, we have naught,
Nothing good in deed or thought,
 Nothing free from taint of ill.
Heal our wounds, our strength renew;

On our dryness pour your dew;
Wash the stains of guilt away:
Bend the stubborn heart and will;
Melt the frozen, warm the chill;
Guide the steps that go astray.
On the faithful, who adore
And confess you, evermore
In your sevenfold gift descend;
Give them virtue's sure reward;
Give them your salvation, Lord;
Give them joys that never end. Amen.
Alleluia.

Gospel Acclamation:

Alleluia, alleluia. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: John 20:19-23

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."



Meditation:

On the great Solemnity of Pentecost we celebrate the fulfillment of the promise Jesus made before his departure – that he would send the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 16:7). The New Testament's word for the Spirit is *Paracletos*, the Paraclete, which is translated as *Comforter*, *Counsellor*, and *Advocate*, reflecting the different ways in which he intervenes in our lives. Since there is no single word that can comprehensively describe the Holy Spirit, it is most fitting to turn to him today as "the Lord, the Giver of Life," as we profess in the Nicene Creed: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life."

What sort of *life* does the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, give? It is the life for which Jesus came – that we may “have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10). It is eternal life which Christ obtained for us by his Death on the Cross. Eternal life consists in knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (cf. Jn 17:3). This knowledge is not merely conceptual but is rather a deep appreciation of God’s love shown on the Cross and a commitment to living according to this pattern of love.

As Lord and Giver of Life, the Holy Spirit has the role of helping us appreciate deeply what Jesus has done for us on the Cross. The Spirit inspires us to embrace the reconciliation Christ has won for us, and he leads us to true union with God and with one another, thus making us worthy of Heaven. For this purpose, the Holy Spirit who has been given to us pours into our hearts the love of God (cf. Rm 5:5). This love is what we call the virtue of *charity*, which is “the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God” (CCC 1822). We are called first to welcome and appreciate the gift of God’s love for us through Christ by worshipping God. Then we are called to show the same Christ-like love to other people and help them come to the fullness of truth. It is the Holy Spirit who makes all this possible in us. Hence, St. Paul tells us in today’s second reading: “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” To say that *Jesus is Lord* really means to imitate the charity of Christ, to live the virtue of charity!

Where there is no charity there can only be confusion and disunity. This is the reality of sin, typified in the Old Testament by the event of the tower of Babel (cf. Gn 11:1-9). In that episode, the people wanted to live their lives and pursue their projects as if God did not exist. They lacked the virtue of charity and so failed to acknowledge God. Theirs was the a sin of pride, a lack of charity towards God, which led inevitably to their being divided among themselves.

But God in his infinite mercy did not leave the human family divided and scattered. He wants to reconcile us with himself and with one another and draw us all into Heaven. This is why Jesus came to this world. He brought about reconciliation and peace, unity with God and neighbor, by the Blood of his Cross (cf. Col 1:20). This is the mystery of Easter, which culminates in the sending of the Holy Spirit who continues the work of reconciliation and unity. “For, when your children

were scattered afar by sin, through the Blood of your Son and the power of the Spirit, you gathered them again to yourself” (Preface VIII of Sundays in O. T.).

The Pentecost event is the antidote and the remedy to the event of the tower of Babel. At Babel, sin destroyed the harmony with God and then created such confusion among the people that they could no longer understand each other. At Pentecost, with the coming of Holy Spirit, though the many people present in Jerusalem were of different origins and languages, they were able to understand each other. How was it suddenly possible for each of the people to hear the Apostles speaking “in his native language?” By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life. The Spirit leads us to understand and appreciate the life that Christ has obtained for us; he leads us to the true faith. When we have this gift of faith, no matter what our various origins and languages may be, we are, nonetheless, able to understand each other because we share and live the same faith, as parts of the one Body of Christ. St. Paul makes this point very clear in today’s second reading.

The purifying and invigorating fire of the Holy Spirit is given to the Apostles to continue the work of God’s reconciliation through the forgiveness of sins. Jesus reveals this in today’s Gospel. He institutes the Sacrament of Reconciliation (or Confession) when he says to the Apostles: “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” Through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, this mission is passed on to the priests of the Church to continue the ministry of reconciling people to God. It all happens through the working of the Holy Spirit and the merits of the fire of Christ’s Passion. If we wish to grow in the life of the Spirit and experience the fruits of the Holy Spirit, we need to examine our consciences regularly and confess even our “everyday faults (venial sins)” (CCC 1458). As a matter of fact, doing this is a sign that the Holy Spirit is at work in us.

The Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, comes to us today and at every Eucharistic sacrifice. He gives us life by leading us to the deepest appreciation of God’s love for us. We pray for the renewal of his sevenfold gifts: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of God; and may his fruits abound in us and in the whole Church! Alleluia, alleluia!

What does the phrase “Jesus is Lord” mean to me and what does it entail in my life as a Christian? When I lacked charity in a situation, what confusion and disunity did it bring? How have the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit enabled me to appreciate more God's love for me?

Mary, teach me how to keep the fire of love of the Holy Spirit always burning in my heart.

Notes

SEASONAL INTRODUCTION TO ORDINARY TIME AFTER PENTECOST

Note: *The Easter Season concludes with Pentecost Sunday. From the Upper Room, the Church goes forth empowered by the Spirit to proclaim the life she has within her. Now we enter the period of Ordinary Time, which concludes on Saturday following the feast of Christ the King.*

Before we move into a new season, with its broad thrust through the remaining weeks of the year, it is good to review the events that have brought us to this point. We recall that the new liturgical year began with the First Sunday of Advent, November 27, 2022. Advent led into the Christmas Season, which continued through the Baptism of the Lord, January 9, 2023. January 10 was the start of Ordinary Time, which lasted until the day before Ash Wednesday, February 22 this year. The Season of Lent followed, preparing us for the great Easter Triduum: from Holy Thursday evening, through Good Friday and Holy Saturday, up to Easter Sunday. With the solemn Easter Vigil on the night of April 8, we saw the first dawning of the “Fifty Days” of Easter. This gives us an overview of what we have celebrated in the life of the Church thus far.

This Sunday, May 28, we celebrated the Solemnity of Pentecost. Monday, May 29, begins the period of Ordinary Time after Pentecost. Now that we have been brought to a certain corporate maturity in the growth of the Body of Christ, we are called to proclaim this fullness of life to the whole world. It is through the Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of our Lord that we have been given the fullness of the Spirit, which fills us with an ardor to go forth as Jesus charged the Apostles to do when he ascended to his Father. The period of Ordinary Time after Pentecost will end on December 2, the Saturday following the Solemnity of Christ the King, and a new liturgical year will begin with the First Sunday of Advent, December 3, 2023.

The period of the liturgical year that is now before us represents in a symbolic way the period of time before the end of the world, whenever that will be. All of creation is waiting in expectation for all that is to be fulfilled (cf. Rm 8:19). The thrust of this Season is reconciliation: the

restoration of all things in Christ – a total restoration of creation itself (cf. Eph 1:10). Finally, all creation must be filled with the one life of God to realize the glory that is to be revealed. This becomes our commission, our labor, our life.

Meanwhile, we must see ourselves here on earth as one Body of Christ: we must maintain our unity. That gives us the thrust of the Church and our commission, as we stand at the edge of this new liturgical season. We operate out of this awareness to maintain the integrity of our faith and proclaim this unique restoration.

Several feasts central to the Church are celebrated during the first weeks of Ordinary Time in order to prepare us once more for what lies ahead. Pentecost is followed by the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity (June 4) and the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (June 11). Friday, June 16, is the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, and Saturday, June 17, is the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This exceptional combination of feasts immediately gives to the Liturgy a sense of very deep mystery.

The Immaculate Heart of Mary also gives us the invaluable awareness of being nurtured in the “womb” of Mother Church. As we ponder the word of the Liturgy, Mary directs us into the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus.

Adapted from the writings of Fr. Francis J. Marino,
Founder of the Anawim Community

May 29, Monday, 8th Week in Ordinary Time
The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church

Alternate Readings: Revelation 21:1-5; Judith 13:18, 19 or Isaiah 12:2-6; John 2:1-11 or Luke 1:26-38



First Reading: Genesis 3:9-15, 20

After Adam had eaten of the tree, the LORD God called to him and asked him, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself.” Then he asked, “Who told you that you were naked? You have eaten, then, from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat!” The man replied, “The woman whom you put here with me— she gave me fruit from the tree, and so I ate it.” The LORD God then asked the woman, “Why did you do such a thing?” The woman answered, “The serpent tricked me into it, so I ate it.”

Then the LORD God said to the serpent:

“Because you have done this, you shall be banned

from all the animals

and from all the wild creatures;

On your belly shall you crawl,

and dirt shall you eat

all the days of your life.

I will put enmity between you and the woman,

and between your offspring and hers;

He will strike at your head,

while you strike at his heel.”

The man called his wife Eve, because she became the mother of all the living.

or **Acts 1:12-14**

After Jesus had been taken up to heaven, the Apostles returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away.

When they entered the city they went to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 87:1b-3, 5, 6-7
Glorious things are said of you, O city of God!

His foundation upon the holy mountains
 the LORD loves:

The gates of Zion,
 more than any dwelling of Jacob.

R. Glorious things are said of you, O city of God!

Glorious things are said of you,
 O city of God!

And of Zion they shall say:

“One and all were born in her;

And he who has established her
 is the Most High LORD.”

R. Glorious things are said of you, O city of God!

They shall note, when the peoples are enrolled:

“This man was born there.”

And all shall sing, in their festive dance:

“My home is within you.”

R. Glorious things are said of you, O city of God!

Gospel Acclamation:

Alleluia, alleluia. O joyful Virgin, who gave birth to the Lord; O blessed Mother of the Church, who nurture in us the Spirit of your Son Jesus Christ! **Alleluia, alleluia.**



Gospel: John 19:25-34

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I thirst.” There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth. When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, “It is finished.” And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit.

Now since it was preparation day, in order that the bodies might not remain on the cross on the sabbath, for the sabbath day of that week was a solemn one, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs be broken and that they be taken down. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and then of the other one who was crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately Blood and water flowed out.



Meditation:

It is most fitting that today, Monday after the Solemnity of the Pentecost, we celebrate the new Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church. It can rightly be said that Pentecost is the day that the mission of the Church started, the day when the Apostles and disciples, gathered in prayer with the Blessed Mother, were empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Today's Liturgy invites us to ponder the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary who is both *Mother* and *Model* of the Church. God in his infinite wisdom decided that a woman, Mary, should be inseparably associated with the work of our salvation. The *woman* is foreshadowed in today's reading from the Book of Genesis: "I will put enmity between you and *the woman*, and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel." Many of the Church Fathers saw in this passage a reference to the victory over Satan which Jesus would win on the Cross. It is the first messianic prophecy, the first glimmer of our salvation, announced right after mankind's fall from grace (cf. CCC 410).

It is certainly not by chance that when Jesus performed his first sign, changing water into wine, her referred to his mother as "woman" (cf. Jn 2:1-12). And in today's Gospel, which takes us to the fulfillment of all his signs, his victorious Death, Jesus calls Mary "woman" again as she stands by the Cross.

St. John Chrysostom writes with great spiritual insight regarding the event of Jesus' Death and the role of the "woman," his Mother, standing by the side of the Cross: "You have observed his outstanding triumph, the splendid achievement of the Cross. Now let me tell you something even more remarkable, the manner in which he gained his victory, and you will marvel all the more. Christ conquered the devil using the same means and the same weapons that the devil used to win. Let me tell you how this occurred. The symbols of our fall were a virgin, a tree, and death. The virgin was Eve (for she had not yet known man); then there was the tree; and death was Adam's penalty. And again these three tokens of our destruction, the virgin, the tree, and death, became the tokens of our victory. Instead of Eve there was Mary; instead of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the wood of the Cross; instead of Adam's death, the death of Christ" (Homily, *De coemeterio et de cruce*. In *Liturgy of the Hours*, Office of Readings, Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Saturday, Vol. 4, p. 1660).

This explains why Jesus calls his Mother “Woman” rather than the usual “Mother.” He is identifying her as the new “mother of all the living,” the New Eve. To the beloved disciple, Jesus says, “Behold, your mother,” revealing Mary as the mother of every “beloved disciple” – that is, of all of us. She is the Mother of all the faithful, the Mother of the Church founded by Jesus – hence the Memorial we are celebrating today. In the alternate first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we see the Blessed Virgin at prayer with the nascent Church. She is already fulfilling her mission as spiritual Mother of the Church.

Mary accomplishes her role as Mother by being first of all a true disciple of her Son. She who was flawlessly faithful, joining Jesus all the way to the tomb, is the perfect model for all who are called to follow him along the way of the Cross and to remain at the foot of the Cross. As members of the Church, we learn from Mary how to live in obedience to the will of God. She forms her children in her way of docility to the Holy Spirit and her attentiveness to the needs of others. Mary helps us live in fidelity to the commandment of love, with willingness to carry in our own bodies the death of Christ, so that the life of Christ may also be made manifest in us (cf. 2 Cor 4:10).

How do I experience Mary as my Model and Mother? As I ponder on Mary’s role at the foot of the Cross, what are my inner feelings toward her? How is Mary present with me when I pray?

Mary, Mother of the Church, guide me, your child, to be a true disciple of Jesus.

In 2018, Pope Francis proclaimed an additional feast in honor of Mary: The **Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church**. This newest feast on the Church’s universal liturgical calendar is to be celebrated each year on the Monday after Pentecost, thereby highlighting the connection between Pentecost as the “birthday of the Church” and Mary through whom the Church is born. Mary’s maternal role was revealed when Jesus from the Cross said to the beloved disciple, “Behold your Mother.” Her mission was manifest in the Upper Room as she prayed with the Apostles in the days of preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Mary is thus fittingly honored as the spiritual Mother of all who are saved by death and resurrection of Christ and who are filled with his Spirit. The title “Mother of the Church” was officially established in a decree of St. Pope Paul VI at the end of the Second Vatican Council (November 21, 1964). (The optional memorial of St. Paul VI is not celebrated this year.)



First Reading: Sirach 35:1-12

To keep the law is a great oblation,
and he who observes the
commandments sacrifices a peace offering.
In works of charity one offers fine flour,
and when he gives alms he presents his sacrifice of praise.
To refrain from evil pleases the LORD,
and to avoid injustice is an atonement.
Appear not before the LORD empty-handed,
for all that you offer is in fulfillment of the precepts.
The just one's offering enriches the altar
and rises as a sweet odor before the Most High.
The just one's sacrifice is most pleasing,
nor will it ever be forgotten.
In a generous spirit pay homage to the LORD,
be not sparing of freewill gifts.
With each contribution show a cheerful countenance,
and pay your tithes in a spirit of joy.
Give to the Most High as he has given to you,
generously, according to your means.

For the LORD is one who always repays,
and he will give back to you sevenfold.
But offer no bribes, these he does not accept!
Trust not in sacrifice of the fruits of extortion.
For he is a God of justice,
who knows no favorites.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 50:5-6, 7-8, 14 and 23

To the upright I will show the saving power of God.

“Gather my faithful ones before me,
those who have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.”
And the heavens proclaim his justice;
for God himself is the judge.
R. To the upright I will show the saving power of God.
“Hear, my people, and I will speak;
Israel, I will testify against you;
God, your God, am I.

Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you,
for your burnt offerings are before me always.”

R. To the upright I will show the saving power of God.

“Offer to God praise as your sacrifice
and fulfill your vows to the Most High.

He that offers praise as a sacrifice glorifies me;
and to him that goes the right way I will show the salvation of
God.”

R. To the upright I will show the saving power of God.

Gospel Acclamation: see Matthew 11:25

Alleluia, alleluia. Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth;
you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the Kingdom. ***Alleluia,***
alleluia.



Gospel: Mark 10:28-31

Peter began to say to Jesus, “We have given up everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come. But many that are first will be last, and the last will be first.”



Meditation:

Today’s Gospel comes right after the story of the rich young man (cf. Mk 10:17-22). That man walked sadly away from Jesus after the Lord tried to teach him that his possessions, which were not evil in themselves, had become an obstacle to his eternal happiness. We can learn from his sad example that we cannot truly fulfill the commandments as long as we remain attached to our possessions.

Peter and the Apostles react after the young man has walked away. “We have given up everything and followed you.” It is as if he were saying to Jesus, “We have already done what that rich man refused to do.” But there is obviously a question behind Peter’s statement: *What are we going to get out of this? What will be the fruit of our sacrifice?* Jesus answers that anyone who has given up everything for him and for the Gospel will receive a hundred times more than he gave up. He will

receive “a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come.” The Lord is telling us that if we entrust ourselves and our temporal lives to him, he will give us himself and his everlasting, divine life.

Jesus speaks of sacrifice and persecution as well as rewards. He never hides the reality of the Cross behind glittery promises of an easy, comfortable life. But while the cost at times seems very high, in comparison to the benefits, clearly it is not. What looks like something that will bring us into the “last” place will in fact result in making us “first,” rich in glory, in union with the Lord forever. When Jesus invites us to follow him, he has this glorious destination in mind. He calls us to follow the way he himself follows, the path of love to the point of laying down his life for us. In this way, he shows us how to make everything in our life into a gift, drawing us into a communion of love that will last forever.

The Book of Sirach was written perhaps two hundred years before Jesus gave this instruction to the disciples. It prepares us to accept the Lord’s call to make a total gift of ourselves, giving us the awareness that no gift will outdo the extraordinary generosity of God. Sirach does not know that God repays one hundredfold. He is in joyful admiration that God repays sevenfold: “For the LORD is one who always repays, and he will give back to you sevenfold.” (The number seven in the Bible is often used to symbolize completion.)

The Sirach reading concludes with a warning not to try to bribe the Lord: “But offer no bribes, these he does not accept!” We must not allow a worldly mentality to infect our relationship with our Father. When we make gifts in his honor, we are not buying his love; we are not manipulating him into granting us favors. Our gift, large or small, should reflect the gift of our heart to him. He already loves us more than we can imagine. He is already determined to favor us. He is only looking for an opportunity to fill us with his blessings. Our renunciation of our attachments and our generosity to those in need make a space in our hearts where the Lord himself can dwell. He purifies and expands our hearts so that he can bless us even more.

We can find joy in giving because faith assures us that the Lord finds joy in giving to us. He tells us, “Give to the Most High as he has given to you, generously, according to your means.” When we do, he gives to us, even *more* generously, according to *his* means – and he is an inexhaustible fountain of selfless love, ready to share with us his very life.

Why is it so difficult to be a disciple of Jesus if I am too attached to my possessions? How do I accept sacrifices that are difficult but fruitful? How can I entrust myself and my temporal needs to Jesus in faith and trust?

Mary, free me from my attachments so I can love the Lord more fully.

Notes

May 31, Wednesday
Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary



First Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-18a

Shout for joy, O daughter Zion!
Sing joyfully, O Israel!

Be glad and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The LORD has removed the judgment against you,
he has turned away your enemies;
The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst,
you have no further misfortune to fear.
On that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged!
The LORD, your God, is in your midst,
a mighty savior;
He will rejoice over you with gladness,
and renew you in his love,
He will sing joyfully because of you,
as one sings at festivals.

or ***Romans 12:9-16***

Brothers and sisters: Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor. Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality. Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Have the same regard for one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not be wise in your own estimation.



Responsorial Psalm: Isaiah 12:2-3, 4bcd, 5-6

Among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

God indeed is my savior;
I am confident and unafraid.
My strength and my courage is the LORD,
and he has been my savior.
With joy you will draw water
at the fountain of salvation.
R. Among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

Give thanks to the LORD, acclaim his name;
among the nations make known his deeds,
proclaim how exalted is his name.

R. Among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

Sing praise to the LORD for his glorious achievement;
let this be known throughout all the earth.

Shout with exultation, O city of Zion,
for great in your midst
is the Holy One of Israel!

R. Among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

Gospel Acclamation: see Luke 1:45

Alleluia, alleluia. Blessed are you, O Virgin Mary, who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Luke 1:39-56

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

And Mary said:

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children for ever.”

Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.



Meditation:

On Sunday, we celebrated the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Today we ponder an earlier event in which the Spirit was already active, not in public display overflowing from the Upper Room, but in secret, in the hidden world of the womb. We celebrate the joyful visit of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth. It is a kind of Pentecost event for Elizabeth and for her unborn son, John the Baptist. This is the famous event known as *The Visitation*, which is also the Second Joyful Mystery of the Rosary. As Mary visited Elizabeth, she also visits us and brings us into the presence of Jesus. She who is “blessed because she believed” wants us all to believe with her and to be blessed with her.

Today’s Gospel is the source of a part of the *Hail Mary*, the prayer in which we echo Elizabeth’s words to Mary, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” This greeting, addressed to Mary, points to the centrality of Jesus Christ and to the vital connection between him and his mother. Mary is “blessed among women” because Jesus, the “fruit of her womb,” is the second Person of the Blessed Trinity. When Elizabeth finds herself in the presence of God-made-flesh in the womb of her young cousin, the baby in her own womb dances with joy. She is suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit, and her first words are, “Most blessed are you!”

On this Feast, we are led to reflect on the mystery of the *interior life*. Pregnancy is a physical experience of a secret life. A pregnant woman knows and is constantly aware that she is carrying another life within her, hidden from the eyes of the world, hidden in the womb. As the two pregnant women meet, their two unborn children also meet, but on a level only the mothers can sense – though they are also aware that the mystery of God at work in them is far beyond their understanding.

When we reflect on our own interior life, we are actually reflecting on the divine life hidden within us. God truly dwells in us; we are temples of the Holy Spirit. If the gift of pregnancy places many additional responsibilities on a mother – how she should live, what she can and cannot do, how she takes care of herself and her unborn child – how much more does the gift of the presence of God within us place responsibilities on us! We are not independent agents, free to do as we please; we are bearers of a precious, hidden gift that must not be neglected.

The joy that comes from being with God, from having God present in our hearts, is a *dynamic joy*. It impels us to reach out beyond ourselves. Mary is not forced to visit Elizabeth; she “traveled in haste” because she is overflowing with joy, leaping for joy. John leaps in the womb for the same reason. We too should leap for joy at the presence of God. This is the dynamic joy that the prophet Zephaniah proclaims in the first reading. Indeed, his words apply to us all: “Be glad and exult with all your heart” for “the LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty Savior!”

Mary’s joy is expressed in her song, the *Magnificat*. She acknowledges that she is blessed, but it is only because God who is mighty has done great things for her. Once she says this, she says no more about her herself, turning her attention wholly to God and his ways. God “has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.” The *Magnificat* is the song of the weak and the poor who experience the goodness of God. It is the song of the *anawim* who discover the joy of depending on God. He pours out his favor upon the poor. Because Mary is the poorest, the weakest, and the most humble, God favors her most of all. She invites us to be *anawim* with her – to be poor in spirit and dependent on God. As we joyfully celebrate this Feast, may we follow the way of Mary, the way of littleness, of poverty of spirit, so that we can be filled with the Holy Spirit and joyfully bring the presence of Christ to everyone we meet.

When have I experienced a “visitation” in my life? As a bearer of the precious gift of God within me, what means am I taking to make this life flourish? Experiencing the joy of the Lord within, how do I reach out to share this joy with others?

Mary, grant me the grace to be other-centered.

June 1, Thursday, 8th Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Justin, Martyr
Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest (Philippines)

Optional Readings for Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest:
Isaiah 6:1-4, 8 or Hebrews 10:11-18; Psalm 23:2-3, 5-6; John 17:1-2, 9, 14-26



First Reading: Sirach 42:15-25

Now will I recall God's works;
what I have seen, I will describe.

At God's word were his works brought into being;
they do his will as he has ordained for them.

As the rising sun is clear to all,
so the glory of the LORD fills all his works;

Yet even God's holy ones must fail
in recounting the wonders of the LORD,
Though God has given these, his hosts, the strength
to stand firm before his glory.

He plumbs the depths and penetrates the heart;
their innermost being he understands.

The Most High possesses all knowledge,
and sees from of old the things that are to come:

He makes known the past and the future,
and reveals the deepest secrets.

No understanding does he lack;
no single thing escapes him.

Perennial is his almighty wisdom;
he is from all eternity one and the same,

With nothing added, nothing taken away;
no need of a counselor for him!

How beautiful are all his works!
even to the spark and fleeting vision!

The universe lives and abides forever;
to meet each need, each creature is preserved.

All of them differ, one from another,
yet none of them has he made in vain,

For each in turn, as it comes, is good;
can one ever see enough of their splendor?



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 33:2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made.

Give thanks to the LORD on the harp;
with the ten-stringed lyre chant his praises.

Sing to him a new song;
pluck the strings skillfully, with shouts of gladness.

R. By the word of the Lord the heavens were made.

For upright is the word of the LORD,
and all his works are trustworthy.

He loves justice and right;
of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.

R. By the word of the Lord the heavens were made.

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made;
by the breath of his mouth all their host.

He gathers the waters of the sea as in a flask;
in cellars he confines the deep.

R. By the word of the Lord the heavens were made.

Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all who dwell in the world revere him.

For he spoke, and it was made;
he commanded, and it stood forth.

R. By the word of the Lord the heavens were made.

Gospel Acclamation: John 8:12

Alleluia, alleluia. I am the light of the world, says the Lord; whoever follows me will have the light of life. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Mark 10:46-52

As Jesus was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a sizable crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind man, the son of Timaeus, sat by the roadside begging. On hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, son of David, have pity on me." And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he kept calling out all the more, "Son of David, have pity on me." Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you." He threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. Jesus said to him in reply, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man replied to him, "Master, I want to see." Jesus told him, "Go your way; your faith has saved you." Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.



Meditation:

The Holy Spirit who descended on Pentecost floods our souls with an interior light which makes it possible for us to see and understand things from a divine perspective. As St. Paul says, “We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the things freely given us by God” (1Cor 2:12). This wisdom is not limited to spiritual realities. We can also understand and appreciate more deeply the wonders of physical creation.

Today Sirach reminds us that creation is the work of God. It reflects his beauty and fills our hearts with wonder. “The glory of the LORD fills all his works.” We can recall the beauty of a sunrise, or a rainbow, or the stars, and we must agree that, indeed, “How beautiful are all his works!” Creation is so glorious that “even God’s holy ones,” the angels, “must fail in recounting the wonders of the LORD.” However, the Lord’s most beautiful creation is the human person, made in his own image and likeness. The human person is much more important and valuable than anything else in creation. In our concern for the protection of the environment, we can sometimes miss this. To see a *person* is to see a *precious icon of God*.

Today’s Gospel invites us to reflect on one lowly person, someone whom most people would likely ignore, the blind beggar Bartimaeus. In the eyes of the crowd, Bartimaeus looks like the lowest, least worthy of all people, not an icon of God. The people are upset by his loud cries – which are actually prayers, beautiful and full of faith. Perhaps the crowd is also offended that he calls Jesus, “Son of David,” which is a title of the Messiah. Later on, in Jerusalem, the chief priests and scribes will grow indignant when the children in the streets honor Jesus with this title as they shout, “Hosanna to the Son of David” (Mt 21:15).

Once we look past the surface and recognize his true greatness, Bartimaeus stands out as a stirring example of faith. The crowds in Jericho, completely blind to his spiritual strength and even his basic human dignity, scold him for causing a disturbance. But because he has faith, the blind man is able to see what they cannot see: that Jesus can heal him. Faith also gives him the courage to defy popular expectations and to shout out all the louder: “Son of David, have pity on me!” We should never allow people’s opinions to interfere with our relationship with God.

How did this simple beggar get such faith? We do not know his story. However, the link between faith and humility, which the Scriptures often point out, certainly applies to him. Bartimaeus's sufferings and humble circumstances have shaped his heart and prepared him to receive the gift of faith. His humility is evident in his prayer. He does not ask to be able to sit in a place of honor in glory, or for riches, or for any worldly advantage. He asks for the gift of *sight*, which is symbolic of the gift of *faith*. His prayer echoes in the heart of everyone who longs to see the face of God: "I want to see."

As we ponder this example, we may ask ourselves if we are more like the blind man or like the crowd. We can see physically, but when we focus only on the beautiful things of this world, or when we deny that we need help from God, or when we neglect the dignity of God's lowly ones, we remain spiritually blind. Instead of shouting out to God for his mercy, we end up shouting at our children and our neighbors, filled with our own sense of justice. Yes, God can heal our blindness, but we must turn to him with humility, faith, and prayer.

"Your faith has saved you." Jesus' words point out the importance of faith. He is not saying that the blind man healed himself by the power of his positive attitude. It is clear that Jesus is the one who healed Bartimaeus. Yet he attributes the healing to Bartimaeus's faith. Faith opens the door for God to do great things. We are all lowly, poor, blind beggars; but when we come before God in our lowliness, we receive a new way to see, a way that makes us spiritually rich and powerful: the gift of faith.

What are my inner feelings when I ponder on the reality that I am a precious icon of God? How is Bartimaeus a model of faith and courage for me? In what areas of my life do I need spiritual healing?

Mary, Mother of Faith, heal my spiritual blindness so I may walk more closely with the Lord.

St. Justin, pray for us.

Justin was born into a pagan family in Palestine around 100 AD. He studied the wisdom of Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek thinkers and became a professional philosopher. One day, while reading by the seashore, an elderly man came by and they talked together about religion and philosophy. The man was a Christian and

witnessed about Jesus and how he fulfilled all the prophecies in the Jewish holy books. Justin investigated the matter and realized he had found the wisdom that he had been searching for all his life. He became a Christian teacher and moved from Ephesus to Rome. There he wrote and spoke openly about Christ, addressing two explanations of the Christian faith to the emperor himself. Justin became one of the most influential teachers of the 2nd century. Turned over to authorities for his Christian faith by a rival philosopher, Justin was martyred around 165. An eyewitness account of his interrogation and martyrdom, read on his feast day in the Church's Office of Readings, recounts the dialogue between Justin and the prefect Rusticus. He is asked if he is convinced he will go to heaven after being scourged and beheaded. He answers that he trusts he will for he knows that God's favor will be shown to all who have lived good lives.

The **Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest** is celebrated annually on the Thursday after Pentecost. Approval for this feast was first granted by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in 1987 as a fitting and effective way to promote greater appreciation for the gift and mystery of the priesthood. The feast focuses on Jesus' Priestly Office, particularly in the Eucharistic sacrifice, our central act of worship. The Second Vatican Council taught many things about the Priesthood of Christ. Because we all share in his Priesthood through the Sacrament of Baptism, he is the model for all believers. He is represented in a special way by ordained priests, who in administering the Sacraments of the Church act in persona Christi Capitis ("in the person of Christ the Head"; cf. CCC 1548). The laity are thus urged to pray that priests be more like Jesus Christ, the compassionate and trustworthy High Priest (cf. Heb 2:17), ever living to intercede for humanity before the Father (cf. Heb 7:25). This is also a day of prayer for priestly vocations. The liturgy of Christ the Eternal High Priest was first introduced in the Philippines as a Memorial in 2021; last year it was celebrated as a Feast.

Notes

June 2, Friday, 8th Week in Ordinary Time
Saints Marcellinus and Peter, Martyrs



First Reading: Sirach 44:1, 9-13

Now will I praise those godly men,
our ancestors, each in his own time.

But of others there is no memory,
for when they ceased, they ceased.
And they are as though they had not lived,
they and their children after them.
Yet these also were godly men
whose virtues have not been forgotten;
Their wealth remains in their families,
their heritage with their descendants;
Through God's covenant with them their family endures,
their posterity, for their sake.

And for all time their progeny will endure,
their glory will never be blotted out.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 149:1b-2, 3-4, 5-6a and 9b
The Lord takes delight in his people.

or ***Alleluia.***

Sing to the LORD a new song
of praise in the assembly of the faithful.
Let Israel be glad in their maker,
let the children of Zion rejoice in their king.

R. The Lord takes delight in his people.

or ***Alleluia.***

Let them praise his name in the festive dance,
let them sing praise to him with timbrel and harp.
For the LORD loves his people,
and he adorns the lowly with victory.

R. The Lord takes delight in his people.

or ***Alleluia.***

Let the faithful exult in glory;
let them sing for joy upon their couches;
Let the high praises of God be in their throats.
This is the glory of all his faithful. Alleluia.

R. The Lord takes delight in his people.

or ***Alleluia.***

Gospel Acclamation: see John 15:16

Alleluia, alleluia. I chose you from the world, to go and bear fruit that will last, says the Lord. **Alleluia, alleluia.**



Gospel: Mark 11:11-26

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple area. He looked around at everything and, since it was already late, went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

The next day as they were leaving Bethany he was hungry. Seeing from a distance a fig tree in leaf, he went over to see if he could find anything on it. When he reached it he found nothing but leaves; it was not the time for figs. And he said to it in reply, “May no one ever eat of your fruit again!” And his disciples heard it.

They came to Jerusalem, and on entering the temple area he began to drive out those selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. He did not permit anyone to carry anything through the temple area. Then he taught them saying, “Is it not written:

My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples?

But you have made it a den of thieves.”

The chief priests and the scribes came to hear of it and were seeking a way to put him to death, yet they feared him because the whole crowd was astonished at his teaching. When evening came, they went out of the city.

Early in the morning, as they were walking along, they saw the fig tree withered to its roots. Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.” Jesus said to them in reply, “Have faith in God. Amen, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it shall be done for him. Therefore I tell you, all that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours. When you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance, so that your heavenly Father may in turn forgive you your transgressions.”



Meditation:

Sometimes people without faith find it difficult to face the future. There is so much that is dark and unknown, and it can seem that, in spite of all our efforts, nothing really changes. Then we die

and are forgotten. Rather than let this depressing thought overwhelm them, many people simply refuse to think much about the future, concentrating instead on “living the good life,” whatever that may mean to them.

The author of the Book of Sirach knew that the only truly “good life” is a life lived in accord with the plan of God. Writing in the second century B.C., he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to instruct people on the great wisdom of living according to the Law. In today’s reading, Sirach wants to pay fitting honor to the “godly men” who preceded him. However, he has limited knowledge of what happens after death. The truth about the afterlife was not fully revealed until Jesus came and taught about the final judgment, the punishment of the wicked, and the eternal rewards of the just.

Sirach knows that most people are entirely forgotten within a few generations after their death. This is still true today. We may have public records of people who lived in centuries past, but few of them are at all significant to us. What, then, can Sirach say about the holy ancestors who are long gone and forgotten? He turns his attention to the good fruit of their lives, that is, their descendants. His idea is that the progeny of the godly ancestors is their glory. If the present generation lives by virtue and faith, in fidelity to the commandments, they can thank their ancestors for passing on these treasures. We are right to be grateful to the generations who have preceded us, but our gratitude should be much greater to those who contributed to our journey of faith, our *spiritual* fathers and mothers.

For those who belong to the family of God by faith, the “glory” that “will never be blotted out” is much more than the procreation of the next generation. It is the joy of everlasting life with God, the genuine “good life” for which we are created. To pursue this glorious calling, we need to go beyond superficial impressions and learn to see things as God sees them.

Today’s Gospel helps us to look beneath the surface and into the heart. Jesus uses the analogy of the fig tree to teach us this lesson. The particular tree that he observes outside Bethany gives the impression that it is vibrant and fruitful, yet there is no fruit on it. It is a symbol of hypocrisy, which Jesus strongly condemns. We can be like this fig tree,

fixated on looking good, going through all the “right” motions, attending Mass, saying prayers. However, if our hearts are not open to making a gift of ourselves in love, we are offering mere lip service. All leaves, no fruit. Such a life renders us proud and barren.

When Jesus enters the temple area, he sees that it is being desecrated with buying and selling, filled with the greed of man instead of the Spirit of God. He condemns this behavior, telling the people they have turned God’s house into a “*den of thieves.*” There is a parallel to the fig tree. Just as the tree gave a false appearance of fruitfulness, so the temple gave the false impression of being a holy “*house of prayer.*” Both appear to be what they are not.

The Lord wants our heart to be a genuine “*house of prayer,*” not a “*den of thieves.*” He teaches us not to tolerate anything that defiles his house – selfishness, pride, and hypocrisy. These mountains of our sin can be “lifted up and thrown into the sea” by the power of his mercy. So the Lord encourages us to turn to him with faith and pray with confidence in his goodness. It is by our trust in him, not by our efforts to impress him, that our hearts are transformed and we are made capable of bearing good fruit for his Kingdom.

What enables me to go beyond superficial impressions to see things as God sees them? Who are my spiritual fathers and mothers who accompany me in my journey of faith? Is my heart a genuine “house of prayer” or a “den of thieves”?

Mary, Temple of the Holy Spirit, allow the Spirit to purify my heart to become more like the Heart of Jesus.

Sts. Marcellinus and Peter, pray for us.

Little is known of these two holy men, **Marcellinus**, a priest, and **Peter** an exorcist. Both were beheaded under Diocletian around 304 or 305. Pope Damasus wrote a beautiful inscription in the catacombs of Marcellinus and Peter, stating that they demonstrated edifying serenity in the face of death. Both are mentioned in the Roman Canon.

June 3, Saturday, 8th Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Charles Lwanga and Companions, Martyrs



First Reading: Sirach 51:12 cd-20

I thank the LORD and I praise him;
I bless the name of the LORD.

When I was young and innocent,
 I sought wisdom openly in my prayer
I prayed for her before the temple,
 and I will seek her until the end,
 and she flourished as a grape soon ripe.
My heart delighted in her,
My feet kept to the level path
 because from earliest youth I was familiar with her.
In the short time I paid heed,
 I met with great instruction.
Since in this way I have profited,
 I will give my teacher grateful praise.
I became resolutely devoted to her –
 the good I persistently strove for.
My soul was tormented in seeking her,
My hand opened her gate
 and I came to know her secrets.
I directed my soul to her,
 and in cleanness I attained to her.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11

The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

The law of the LORD is perfect,
 refreshing the soul.
The decree of the LORD is trustworthy,
 giving wisdom to the simple.
R. The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.
The precepts of the LORD are right,
 rejoicing the heart.
The command of the LORD is clear,
 enlightening the eye.
R. The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;
The ordinances of the LORD are true,
all of them just.

R. The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

They are more precious than gold,
than a heap of purest gold;
Sweeter also than syrup
or honey from the comb.

R. The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

Gospel Acclamation: see Colossians 3:16a, 17c

Alleluia, alleluia. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; giving thanks to God the Father through him. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Mark 11:27-33

Jesus and his disciples returned once more to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple area, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders approached him and said to him, “By what authority are you doing these things? Or who gave you this authority to do them?” Jesus said to them, “I shall ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was John’s baptism of heavenly or of human origin? Answer me.” They discussed this among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘Of heavenly origin,’ he will say, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’ But shall we say, ‘Of human origin?’”—they feared the crowd, for they all thought John really was a prophet. So they said to Jesus in reply, “We do not know.” Then Jesus said to them, “Neither shall I tell you by what authority I do these things.”



Meditation:

The chief priests, scribes, and elders of Jerusalem approach Jesus in the temple area and ask him a question. Normally, we would consider these religious leaders the “wise men” of their time. We would expect them to seek the deeper meaning of Jesus’ teachings and actions. Asking questions is part of growing in wisdom. Jesus, however, can tell that they are not being sincere. They are not really seeking wisdom. They do not want to learn the truth about Jesus’ authority over the temple. They are only looking for a way to assert their own authority over him. In other words, they are simply pursuing their own will, not the will of God.

The Lord does not answer them directly. He refers them instead to the mission of John the Baptist, who was sent by God to prepare the way for his coming. If these elders are wise, they will accept the guidance of John. The ordinary people, with the simple wisdom of common sense, recognize that John is a true prophet. The chief priests and scribes, however, have rejected the mission of John. In answer to Jesus' question, they decide to feign ignorance. When they pretend not to know the truth about John, Jesus can see that they are not ready to receive any greater truth, so he tells them nothing more. If we are preoccupied with accomplishing our own will, we end up like these pathetic scribes and elders, who remain convinced of their own righteousness and wisdom, but in fact have neither the prophetic guidance of John the Baptist nor the saving wisdom of Jesus.

Earlier in his ministry, Jesus taught, "Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find" (Mt 7:7). This teaching applies particularly well to our pursuit of wisdom. When we seek with sincerity and humility, we find. When we manipulate and maneuver, we do not find, because we are not really seeking wisdom. We are not submitting ourselves to the authority of God; we want to be in authority ourselves.

The true pursuit of wisdom is deeply satisfying. "The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart." In today's first reading, Sirach concludes his Book with a joyful and grateful recollection of his life-long pursuit of wisdom. He marvels at how good God has been to him in granting him the wisdom he sought from his youth. His efforts in pursuit of her have met with overwhelming results. "In the short time I paid heed, I met with great instruction." As we ponder the word of God today, we follow the example of Sirach and open our hearts to divine wisdom. We take a "short time" to reflect on the day's readings, and we receive "great instruction." We learn to approach the Lord, not with a fixation on our own agenda, but with purity of heart.

The Bible often personifies wisdom as a woman. We who are led by the Liturgy and formed in the heart of the Church can see how this insight points to the Blessed Virgin Mary. "The Church's Tradition has often read the most beautiful texts on wisdom in relation to Mary. Mary is acclaimed and represented in the Liturgy as the 'Seat of Wisdom.' In her, the 'wonders of God' that the Spirit was to fulfill in Christ and the

Church began to be manifested” (CCC 721). Mary’s perennial good counsel to us is, “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). Whenever we follow this wisdom – which the chief priests and scribes foolishly failed to do – we find the deep joy that comes from entrusting ourselves to the authority of God. Indeed, “the precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart”!

*In what ways do I pursue my own will and not the will of God?
What is the joy that I experience when I open my heart to divine wisdom? How does divine wisdom enable me to approach the Lord with a pure heart?*

Mary, Seat of Wisdom, grant me your wisdom so that I may do whatever the Lord wills for me.

St. Charles Lwanga and Companions, pray for us.

The twenty-two Ugandan martyrs, the first martyrs of black Africa, were pages at the court of King Mwanga. **Charles Lwanga** was the chief of the royal pages. He became the moral leader of the others, instructing them in the Catholic Faith and inspiring them to remain faithful and chaste. These courageous young men who resisted the homosexual demands of the king were tortured and finally executed during the period from November 15, 1885 to January 27, 1887.

Notes