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SUMMER
Fifteenth Sunday
In ORDINARY TIME

First Reading

1 Kings 16:29-17:16

In the thirty-sixth year of Asa, king of Judah, Ahab, son of Omri, became king of Israel, and reigned over Israel in Samaria for twenty-two years. Ahab, son of Omri, did what is evil in YHWH's sight more than any of his predecessors.

It was not enough for him to imitate the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nabat; he even married Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, the King of Sidon, and converted to veneration and worship of Baal. Ahab erected an altar to Baal in the temple of Baal which he built in Samaria, and made a sacred pole. He did more to anger Israel's God YHWH than any of the kings of Israel before him.

During his reign, Hiel from Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He lost his first-born son, Abiram, when he laid the foundation, and his youngest son, Segub, when he set up the gates, as YHWH had predicted through Joshua, son of Nun.

Elijah from Tishbe in Gilead, told Ahab, "As surely as the Israel's God YHWH, whom I serve, is alive, during these years there will be no dew or rain except at my word."

YHWH then told Elijah, "Leave here, go east and hide in the Wadi Cherith, east of the Jordan; you are to drink from the stream, and I have given orders to ravens to feed you there." So he left and did as YHWH

commanded; he traveled and remained by the Wadi Cherith, east of the Jordan, and ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the stream.

After some time, however, the stream ran dry, because no rain had fallen in the land; so YHWH said to him, “Move on to Zarephath in Sidon and stay there; I have selected a widow to provide for you.”

He left and went to Zarephath, and as he arrived at the entrance of the city, a widow was gathering sticks there. He called out to her, “Would you please bring me a small cupful of water to drink?” She left to get it, and he called after her, “Could you bring along a bit of bread?”

“As sure as your God YHWH lives,” she answered, “I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar and a little oil in my jug. Just now I was collecting a couple of sticks, to go in and prepare something for myself and my son; and when we have eaten it, we will die.”

“Do not be afraid,” said Elijah. “Go and do what you intended; but first make me a little roll and bring it to me; then you can prepare something for yourself and your son. You see, Israel’s God YHWH says this: ‘The jar of flour will not become empty or the jug of oil run dry until the day YHWH sends rain upon the earth.’”

She left and did as Elijah had said. She was able to eat for a year, along with him and her son; the jar of flour did not become empty or the jug of oil run dry, as YHWH had predicted through Elijah.

Elijah prayed that it would not rain, and no rain fell; he prayed again, and rain poured down from the sky.

Then the prophet Elijah rose like a fire, and his words burned like a torch; he shut up the sky by what the Master had said. He prayed again and rain poured down from the sky.

Second Reading

The Treatise on the Mysteries by St. Ambrose

We gave a daily instruction on proper conduct when the readings were taken from the history of the patriarchs or the maxims of Proverbs; these readings were intended to teach and train you, so that you would accustom yourselves to the ways of our forefathers, and enter their paths and walk in their footsteps, in obedience to God’s commands. Now the season reminds us that we must speak of the mysteries, and lay out the

meaning of the sacraments.

If we had thought fit to teach this to those who were not yet initiated by the Bath, we would be considered traitors rather than teachers. Then too, the light of the mysteries is in itself more effective where people do not know what to expect than where some instruction has been given beforehand.

And so open your ears; enjoy the fragrance of eternal life, breathed on you by the sacraments. We explained this to you as we celebrated the mystery of “the opening,” when we said, “Effetha, ‘be opened.’” Everyone who was to come for the grace of the Bath had to understand what he was asked, and must remember what he was to answer. This mystery was celebrated by the Prince when he healed the man who was deaf and dumb, in the Good News as we reported it to you.

After this, the holy place of all holy places was opened up for you; you entered the sacred place of regeneration. Recall what you were asked; remember what you answered. You renounced the devil and his deeds, the world and its dissipation and sensuality. Your words are recorded, not on a monument to the dead but in the book of the living.

There you saw the levite, you saw the priest, you saw the high priest. Do not consider their outward form; think of the grace given by their service. You spoke in the presence of angels, as it is written, “The lips of a priest guard knowledge, and people look for the law from his mouth, because he is the angel of the omnipotent Master.” There is no room for deception, no room for denial. He is an angel whose message is the Prince’s kingdom and eternal life. You must judge him by his office, not by his appearance. Remember what he handed on to you, assess its value, and so acknowledge his standing.

You entered to confront your enemy, since you intended to renounce him to his face. You turned toward the east, because one who renounces the devil turns toward the Prince and fixes his gaze directly on him.

We were once stupid, disobedient, and misled, and at that time we lived in malice and envy; we were hateful ourselves, and hated each other. Because of his mercy, God saved us through the Bath of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit.

All our lives were once ruled by physical desires, and by nature we deserved God’s anger. Because of his mercy, God saved us through the

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Bath of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since your light of truth guides us to the Prince's way, may all of us who follow him please reject what is contrary to the Good News. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

1 Kings 18.16-40

Ahab came to meet Elijah, and when he saw him, said, "Is that you, troublemaker of Israel?"

"I am not the one making trouble for Israel," he answered; "it is you and your family, by abandoning YHWH's commands and following the Baals. Summon all of Israel to me now on Mount Carmel, as well as the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table." So Ahab sent word to all the descendants of Israel and had the prophets assemble on Mount Carmel.

Elijah then appealed to all the people in this way: "How long are you going to waver back and forth? If YHWH is God, follow him; if Baal is, follow him." But the people did not answer him.

So Elijah told the people, "I am the only surviving prophet of YHWH, and there are four hundred fifty prophets of Baal. Give us two young bulls; have them choose one, cut it into pieces, and place it on the wood, but not start a fire. I will prepare the other one and place it on the wood without starting a fire. You are to call on your gods and I will invoke YHWH; the God who answers with fire is God." And the people answered, "We agree."

Elijah then told the prophets of Baal, "Choose one young bull and prepare it first, because there are more of you. Call upon your gods, but do not start the fire." They took the young bull that was turned over to them, and prepared it and called on Baal from morning to noon, and said, "Answer us, Baal, please!" But there was no sound, and no one

answering.

They hopped around the altar they had prepared, and when it was noon, Elijah taunted them, “Call louder, because he is a god and may be meditating, or he may have gone to rest, or be on a trip. Maybe he is asleep, and has to be waked up.” They called out louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until blood gushed over them. Noon passed, and they remained in a trance until the time for offering sacrifice; but there was not a sound. No one answered, and no one was listening.

Then Elijah told all the people, “Come here to me.” When they had done so, he repaired YHWH’s altar, which they had destroyed. He took twelve stones, representing the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom YHWH had said, “Your name will be Israel.” He built an altar in YHWH’s honor with the stones, and made a trench around the altar large enough for two seahs of grain. When he had arranged the wood, he cut up the young bull and laid it on the wood. “Fill four jars with water,” he said, “and pour it over the holocaust and over the wood.” He told them, “Do it again,” and they did it again. “Do it a third time,” he said, and they did it a third time; the water flowed around the altar, and the trench was filled with the water.

At the time for offering sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and said, “YHWH, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel, and that I am your slave and have done all this by your command. Please answer me, YHWH; answer me, so that this people will know that you are God, YHWH, and that you have brought them back to their senses.”

YHWH’s fire came down and consumed the holocaust, the wood, the stones, and the dirt, and lapped up the water in the trench. As they saw this, all the people fell prostrate and said, “YHWH is God! YHWH is God!”

Then Elijah told them, “Seize the prophets of Baal; none of them is to escape!” They were seized, and Elijah had them brought down to the brook Kishon, and there he slit their throats.

Elijah approached the people and said, “How long are you to waver back and forth? If the Master is God, follow him.”

No one can serve two masters; you cannot serve God and money. If the Master is God, follow him.

*Second Reading**The Treatise on the Mysteries by St. Ambrose*

What did you see in the baptistry? Water, of course, but not simply water. You saw the levites serving there, and the high priest asking questions and consecrating. First of all, the Emissary taught you that we must fix our eyes “on what is unseen, not what we can see, because the things we see exist in time, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

In another place, you can read that “the invisible things” of God “from the creation of the world, can be understood through the things that have been created, and his eternal power and divinity” can be known through his products. The Master himself says, “If you do not believe me, at least believe my deeds.” Then believe that the presence of the divinity is there. You believe in its activity, and refuse to believe in its presence? How could there be activity if there were no presence beforehand?

Consider how ancient the mystery is, since it was prefigured in the creation of the world itself. In the very beginning, when God made heaven and earth, “the Spirit,” God tells us, “moved over the waters.” Was the Spirit not active as he moved over the waters? When the prophet tells you that “by the utterance of the Master, the heavens were set up, and by the Spirit, the breath from his mouth, all of their array was put in place,” realize that the Spirit was active in this making of the world. The fact that he moved over the waters, and the fact that he was active, both rest on prophetic testimony. Moses tells us that the Spirit moved over the waters; David testifies that the Spirit was active.

Listen to another piece of evidence. Everything material had become corrupt because of its sins. God said, “My Spirit will not remain in men, because they are matter.” In this way, God shows that spiritual grace is repelled by the uncleanness of matter and by the stain of more serious sin; so God resolved to restore the gift he had given. He sent the flood and ordered Noah, the virtuous man, into the Vessel. When the flood began to subside, Noah first sent a raven, then a dove, which, as we read, came back with an olive branch. You see water, you see wood, you look at a dove, and you are hesitant to believe the mystery?

The water is what the matter is bathed in, to wash away all its sin. In it all evil is buried. The wood is what Master Jesus was fastened to when he suffered for us. The dove is the one in whose form the Holy Spirit descended, as you have learned from the New Treaty: the Spirit, who

breathes peace of soul and tranquillity of mind into you.

I will pour water over the thirsty land and streams upon the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit on your offspring, and they will grow like willows by flowing streams.

The water I give will become a spring inside him, gushing up to eternal life. I will pour my Spirit on your offspring, and they will grow like willows by flowing streams.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since your light of truth guides us to the Prince's way, may all of us who follow him please reject what is contrary to the Good News. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

1 Kings 19:1-9, 11-21

Ahab told Jezebel everything that Elijah had done, including that he had killed all the prophets with his sword. Jezebel then sent a messenger to Elijah, with her statement, "May the gods do (various things) to me if by this time tomorrow I have not done to your life what was done to each of the prophets."

Elijah became afraid and fled for his life into Beersheba of Judah. He left his slave there and went a day's journey into the wilderness, until he came to a broom tree and sat under it. He prayed for death. "I have had enough, YHWH! Take my life, please, because I am no better than my ancestors!"

He lay down and fell asleep under the broom tree; and then an angel touched him and ordered him to waken and eat. He looked up, and there at his head was a loaf baked and a jug of water. After he had eaten and drunk, he lay down again.

But YHWH's angel came back a second time, touched him, and ordered, "Waken and eat, or the journey will be too long for you." He

rose and ate and drank; and then, strengthened by that food, he walked forty days and forty nights to God's mountain Horeb.

There he came to a cave in which he took shelter; and YHWH said, "Go outside and stand on the mountain in YHWH's presence; YHWH will be passing by."

A strong, heavy wind was tearing at the mountains and crushing rocks in front of YHWH; but YHWH was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake; but YHWH was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, there was a fire; but YHWH was not in the fire. Then, after the fire, there was a barely audible sound—and when Elijah heard it, he hid his face in his cloak and went and stood at the entrance of the cave.

"Why are you here, Elijah?" a voice asked him. "I have been full of zeal for YHWH, the God of armies," he answered. "But the descendants of Israel have abandoned your Treaty, torn down your altars, and slaughtered your prophets with their swords. I am the only one left, and they are trying to have me killed."

"Go, take the road back to the desert near Damascus," said YHWH to him. "When you arrive there, you are to anoint Hazael as king of Aram; and then you are to anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi, as king of Israel, and Elisha, son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah, as prophet to succeed you. If anyone escapes Hazael's swords, Jehu will kill him; and if he escapes Jehu's swords, Elisha will kill him. But still, I will leave behind seven thousand men in Israel, who are everyone who has not knelt to Baal or kissed him."

Elijah then left, and came upon Elisha, son of Shaphat, as he was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, following the twelfth. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak over him. Elisha left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, "May I please kiss my father and mother goodbye, and then I will follow you?"

"Go back to where you were," answered Elijah. "Have I done anything to you?" Elisha then left him, took the yoke of oxen, and slaughtered them. He used the plow to boil the meat, and gave it to his people to eat; and then he left and followed Elijah as his attendant.

The Master told Moses, "When my glory passes, I will put you in the hollow of the rock and cover you with my hand until I pass by; because

no one sees me and stays alive.

No one has ever seen God, but the only Son God ever fathered, who is in the Father's bosom, has made him known; because no one sees me and stays alive.

Second Reading *The Treatise on the Mysteries by St. Ambrose*

The Emissary teaches you "that our ancestors were all covered by the cloud, all of them passed through the sea, and all were bathed in Moses in the cloud and the sea." In addition, Moses says in his song, "You sent your Spirit, and the sea overwhelmed them."

You observe that in this crossing by the Hebrews there was already a symbol of the holy Bath. The Egyptians died; the Hebrews escaped. What else is the daily lesson of this sacrament than that guilt is drowned and error destroyed, while goodness and innocence pass through unharmed?

You are taught that our ancestors were covered by the cloud, a cloud of blessing that cooled the fire of bodily emotions. A cloud of blessing: it is with a cloud of blessing that the Holy Spirit overshadows those whom he comes to visit. The Holy Spirit came at length on the Virgin Mary, and the power of the Supreme Being overshadowed her, when she conceived for all mankind the one who is redemption. This great miracle was prefigured through Moses; and so if the Spirit was prefigured, is he not now really present, because Scripture tells you that "the law was given through Moses, but God's blessings and truth came through Prince Jesus"?

Marah was a spring of bitter water. When Moses threw wood into it, its water became fresh. Water, you see, is no use for future rescue without the announcement of the Master's cross. But when it has been consecrated by the saving mystery of the cross, it is then ready for use in the washbasin of the Spirit and in the cup of rescue. And so, in the same way as Moses in his role of prophet threw wood into the spring of Marah, the priest sends into the font of the Bath the announcement of the Master's cross, and the water becomes fresh, and ready for the giving of grace.

And so do not believe what your body's eyes tell you. What is not seen here is what is more truly seen, because what is seen belongs to time; but what is not seen belongs to eternity. What is not grasped by the

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eyes and is seen by the mind and the soul is seen in a truer and deeper sense.

Finally, learn from the readings we have gone through from the books of the Kings. Naaman was a Syrian; he was a leper and could not be healed by anyone; but then a girl from among the captives said that there was a prophet in Israel who could wash off the disease of leprosy from him. He took gold and silver, we are told, and went to see the king of Israel; and the king, when he learned the reason for his coming, ripped his clothes apart, and said that it was to trump up a reason for war, because what he asked was beyond a king's power.

Elisha, however, told the king to send the Syrian to him, and he would learn that there was a God in Israel. When he came, Elisha ordered him to bathe seven times in the Jordan river. Then Naaman began to reflect that the rivers in his own country had better water, and that he had often bathed in them and never been washed clean of his leprosy. This gave him pause, and he was about to refuse to obey the prophet's instructions; but on the advice and persuasion of his slaves, he yielded and bathed, and was immediately made clean. He realized then that it is not water that cleans, but grace.

Here was a man who was skeptical before being cured. You are already cured, and so should not have any doubt.

The Master led his people out like sheep, and guided them in safety, and they were unafraid; and the sea engulfed their enemies.

All of them were bathed into Moses in the cloud and the sea; and the sea engulfed their enemies.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since your light of truth guides us to the Prince's way, may all of us who follow him please reject what is contrary to the Good News. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

 Wednesday*First Reading**1 Kings 21.1-21, 27-29*

Since Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel next to the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria, Ahab said to Naboth, “Give me your vineyard to be my vegetable garden, since it is nearby and next to my house, and I will give you a better vineyard in exchange, or, if you prefer, I will give you whatever money it is worth.”

Naboth answered, “God forbid that I would give you my ancestral heritage!”

Ahab went home furious at the fact that Naboth had answered that he would not give up his ancestral heritage, and he lay down on his bed and turned away from food because he refused to eat.

His wife Jezebel came to him and asked, “Why are you so angry you will not eat?” and he answered, “Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and asked him to sell me his vineyard or take another vineyard in exchange for it, and he refused to let me have his vineyard.”

“Well you are a fine ruler over Israel, you are!” answered his wife. “Get up and eat and cheer up; I will get the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite for you.”

She then wrote letters in Ahab’s name, sealed them with his seal, and sent them to the elders and nobles who lived in the same city as Naboth. This was what she wrote in the letters. “Proclaim a fast and set Naboth at the head of the people; and then find two reprobates to face him and accuse him of having cursed God and his king; and then take him out and stone him to death.”

His fellow citizens, the elders and nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel ordered them in writing through the letters she had sent them. They proclaimed a fast and placed Naboth at the head of the people. Then two reprobates came in and confronted him with the accusation, “Naboth has cursed God and his king.” They then led him out of the city and stoned him to death; and then sent the information to Jezebel that Naboth had been stoned to death.

When Jezebel learned that Naboth had been stoned to death, she told Ahab, “Go take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to sell you—because Naboth is dead, not alive.”

When he heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab started off on his way to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

But YHWH told Elijah the Tishbite, “Start down to meet Ahab, the king of Israel, who is ruling in Samaria. He will be in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has come to take possession. This is what you are to tell him: ‘YHWH says, “After committing murder, are you also going to take possession?’ For this, YHWH says, “In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth up, dogs will lick up your blood also.’””

“Have you found me out, my enemy?” Ahab asked Elijah.

“Yes,” he answered. “Because you have devoted yourself to doing evil in YHWH’s sight, I am bringing evil upon you; I will destroy you and cut off every male in Ahab’s line, whether slave or free, in Israel.”

When Ahab heard what he said, he ripped his clothes apart, and put on sackcloth over his bare skin. He fasted, slept in the sackcloth, and went about subdued; and then YHWH told Elijah the Tishbite, “Have you seen that Ahab has humbled himself before me? And since he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring on the harm in his time. I will bring the harm on his house during the reign of his son.”

Wash your hands clean, sinners, and purify your hearts, fickle people; mourn and weep; humble yourselves before the Master.

You condemned an honest man and put him to death, and he offered you no resistance. Mourn and weep; humble yourselves before the Master.

Second Reading

The Treatise on the Mysteries by St. Ambrose

You were told earlier not to believe only what you saw. This was to prevent you from saying, “Is this the great mystery that ‘eye has not seen nor ear heard nor man’s heart conceived’? I see the water I have seen every day; does the water in which I have often bathed without being made holy have the power to sanctify me?” Learn from this that water does not make anyone holy without the Holy Spirit.

You have read that the three witnesses in the Bath—the water, the blood, and the Spirit—are one and the same. This means that if you take any one of these away, the sacrament of the Bath is not conferred. What is water without the Prince’s cross? Only an ordinary element without sacramental effect. Also, without water there is no sacrament of rebirth:

“Unless a person is born again from water and the Spirit, he will not enter God’s kingdom.” A catechumen believes in the Master’s cross with which he is also signed, but unless he is bathed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, he cannot receive the forgiveness of sins or the gift of spiritual grace.

The Syrian Naaman bathed seven times under the old Law, but you were bathed in the name of the Trinity. You professed your faith in the Father—remember what you did—and the Son and the Spirit. Note the sequence of events: In professing this faith, you died to the world, you rose again to God, and, as though buried to sin, you were reborn to eternal life. And so believe that the water is not without effect.

The paralytic at the pool was waiting for someone. Who was this if not Master Jesus, born from a virgin? At his coming, it is not a matter of a shadow healing an individual, but Truth himself healing the universe. He is the one whose coming was waited for, the one of whom God the Father spoke when he said to John the Bather, “The one on whom you see the Spirit coming down from heaven and resting is the one who will bathe people in the Holy Spirit.” He is the one John gave evidence of: “I saw the Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove and lighting on him.” Why did the Spirit come down like a dove if not to let you see and understand that the dove sent out by holy Noah from the Vessel was a symbol of this dove? In this way, you were to recognize a forerunner of the sacrament.

Is there any room left for doubt? The Father speaks clearly in the Good News: “This is the Son I love, the one in whom I am very pleased.” The Son speaks too, above whom the Holy Spirit showed himself in the form of a dove; and also the Holy Spirit, who came down as a dove. David also speaks clearly: “The voice of the Master is over the water; the God of glory makes thunder; the Master is above the many rivers.” Again, Scripture gives evidence to you that fire came down from heaven in answer to Gideon’s prayers, and that when Elijah prayed, God sent fire which consumed the sacrifice.

Do not consider what individuals deserve; think of the condition of being a priest. If you do look at achievements, consider the achievements of Peter and Paul in the same way as you consider the achievements of Elijah; they have handed on to us this sacrament which they received from Master Jesus. Visible fire was sent upon them to give them faith; an

invisible fire is at work in those of us who believe. That visible fire was a sign; invisible fire is supposed to teach us. And so believe that Master Jesus is present when he is invoked by the prayers of the priests; he said, "I am there where two are three meet together." How much more does he give his loving presence where the Church is, and where the sacraments are.

You went down into the water. Remember what you said: "I believe in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," not "I believe in a greater, a lesser, and a least." You are committed by this spoken understanding of yours to believe the same of the Son as of the Father, and the same of the Holy Spirit as of the Son, with this one exception: you proclaim that you must believe in the cross of Master Jesus alone.

The one who is coming after me is greater than I, and I am not fit to carry his sandals. He will bathe you in the Holy Spirit and in fire.

Stop doing evil and learn to do good, says the Master. He will bathe you in the Holy Spirit and in fire.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since your light of truth guides us to the Prince's way, may all of us who follow him please reject what is contrary to the Good News. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

1 Kings 22.1-9, 15-23, 34-38

Three years passed without war between Aram and Israel; but in the third year, King Jehoshaphat of Judah came down to the king of Israel, who said to his slaves, "Do you not know that Ramoth-gilead is ours and we are doing nothing to take it from the king of Aram?" He asked Jehoshaphat, "Will you come with me to fight against Ramoth-gilead?"

"You and I are like a unit," answered Jehoshaphat to the king of Israel, "and your people are the same as my people, and your horses and

my horses are also.” Jehoshaphat added to the king of Israel, “Try to find what YHWH says at once.”

The king of Israel convened the prophets, who numbered about four hundred, and asked, “Should I go attack Ramoth-gilead, or should I hold back?”

“Go ahead,” they answered. “YHWH will hand it over to the king.”

Jehoshaphat, however, said, “Is there no other prophet of YHWH here for us to consult?”

“There is one more person we could consult YHWH through,” answered the king of Israel: “Micaiah, son of Imlah; but I hate him because he makes bad prophesies about me, not good ones.”

“Your majesty should not speak of harm coming to you,” said Jehoshaphat; and so the king of Israel called an officer and had him summon Micaiah, son of Imlah, at once.

When he entered the presence of the king, the king asked him, “Micaiah, shall we go to fight against Ramoth-gilead, or should we hold back?”

“Go ahead,” said Micaiah. “You will succeed; YHWH will hand it over to the king.”

“How many times do I have to command you to tell me nothing but the truth in YHWH’s name?” answered the king.

Micaiah then said,

“I see all of Israel
scattered on the mountains
like sheep without a shepherd,
and YHWH saying, ‘They have no master;
have each go back home in peace.’”

The king of Israel then said to Jehoshaphat, “Did I not tell you that he makes bad prophesies about me, not good ones?”

Micaiah went on, “And so listen to what YHWH says: I saw YHWH seated on his throne, with all of heaven’s army standing to his right and his left. YHWH asked, ‘Who will fool Ahab, so that he will go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ One said this, another that, until one of the spirits came forward and presented himself before YHWH, and said, ‘I will deceive him.’ YHWH asked, ‘How?’ and he answered, ‘I will go our and become a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets.’ YHWH answered, ‘You will succeed in your deception of him. Go our and do

this.’ So now YHWH has put a lying spirit into the mouths of all these prophets of yours; but YHWH has actually decreed harm to you.”

The king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah then went up to Ramoth-gilead, where someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the joints of his breastplate. He ordered his charioteer, “Rein about, and take me out of the ranks; I am disabled.”

The battle grew fierce during the day, and the king, who was propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans, died in the evening. The blood from his wound flowed to the bottom of the chariot, and at sunset a cry went through the army, “Every man to his city! Every man to his land! The king is dead!”

So they went to Samaria, where they buried the king. When the chariot was washed at the pool in Samaria, the dogs licked up his blood and prostitutes bathed there, as YHWH had prophesied.

Do not be deceived by the prophets among you; they prophesy falsely to you in my name. I alone know the purpose I have for you.

I will bring a prophet forward for them, and I will place my words in his mouth. I alone know the purpose I have for you.

Second Reading The Treatise on the Mysteries by St. Ambrose

After this, you went up to the priest. Now consider what followed. Was it not what David spoke of when he said, “It is like the scented oil on the head, running down the beard—Aaron’s beard.” This is also the oil spoken of by Solomon: “Your name is oil poured out, so that maidens loved you and attracted you.” How many souls there are who are reborn today, Master Jesus, and loved you and said, “Draw us after you; we will hurry to follow you, in the fragrance of your clothes,” so that we can breathe in the fragrance of resurrection.

Understand why this is done: “Because a wise man’s eyes are in his head.” The oil flows down upon the beard, which is to say on the grace of youth; it flows onto Aaron’s beard in order to make you “a chosen race” a race of priests, bought at a great price. We are all anointed with spiritual grace to share in God’s kingdom and priesthood.

Then you received white clothes as a sign that you had taken off the clothing of sin and put on the chaste covering of innocence, as the psalmist prophesied: “You will shower me with the sacred herb, and I

will be washed clean; you will wash me and I will become whiter than snow.” One who is bathed is seen to become clean in terms of the Law and the Good News. In terms of the Law, because Moses used a bunch of hyssop to shower the blood of the lamb upon the people; in terms of the Good News, because the Prince’s clothes were white as snow when in the Good News he revealed the glory of his resurrection. A sinner who is forgiven is made whiter than snow. The Master promised the same thing through Isaiah: “If your sins are like scarlet, I will make them white as snow.”

As she wears the clothes given her in the rebirth by water, the Church says, “I am black but beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem.” Black because of the frailty of humanity, beautiful through grace; black because she is made up of sinners, beautiful through the sacrament of faith. When they see these clothes, the daughters of Jerusalem cry in wonder, “Who is this coming up, all in white?” She was black; how is she suddenly made white?

When the Prince sees his Church dressed in white—and for her sake he himself had put on “filthy clothing” as you can read in the prophesy of Isaiah—and when he sees the soul washed clean by the water of rebirth, he cries, “How beautiful you are, my beloved, how beautiful you are! Your eyes are like a dove’s eyes” because it was in the form of a dove that the Holy Spirit came down from heaven.

Remember, then, that you have received a spiritual seal, “the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of holy fear.” Keep safe what you received. God the Father sealed you, the Master the Prince strengthened you and sent the Spirit into your hearts as the pledge of what is to come, as you learned in the reading from the Emissary.

You have believed the Good News and have been sealed with the Holy Spirit in accordance with the promise. He is the pledge of our inheritance, the promise of freedom for those God has won for himself to the praise of his glory.

God has anointed us and sealed us as his own; and as a pledge of what is to come, he has given us the Spirit that lives within our hearts, the promise of freedom for those God has won for himself to the praise of his glory.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since your light of truth guides us to the Prince's way, may all of us who follow him please reject what is contrary to the Good News. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

*First Reading**2 Chronicles 20.1-9, 13-24*

The Moabites, Ammonites, and with them some Meunites came to fight against Jehoshaphat, and the message was brought to Jehoshaphat, “A huge horde is coming against you from Edom across the sea; they are already in Hazazon-tamar (which is En-gedi).” Jehoshaphat was frightened, and hurried to consult YHWH, proclaiming a fast for all of Judah. Then Judah met to try to obtain help from YHWH; delegates came from every one of the cities of Judah to consult YHWH.

Jehoshaphat stood up at the meeting of Judah and Jerusalem in YHWH's house in front of the new court, and said, “YHWH, God of our ancestors, are you not the God in heaven, and do you not rule over all the kingdoms of the Gentiles? Power and might are in your hands, and no one can withstand you. Was it not you, our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and gave it forever to the descendants of your friend Abraham? They have lived in it and built a sanctuary to your honor, and said, ‘When bad times come upon us, the sword of judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before you, because your name is in this house, and we will call out to you in our trouble, and you will listen and save us!’”

All of Judah was standing before YHWH, with their children, wives, and young sons. And YHWH's Spirit came upon Jahaziel, son of Zechariah, son of Behaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the clan of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly, and he said, “Listen to this, all of Judah, inhabitants of Jerusalem, and King Jehoshaphat: YHWH tells you, ‘Do not be afraid or lose heart at the sight of this vast horde, because the battle is God's, not yours! Go down against them tomorrow;

you will see them coming up by the ascent of Ziz, and you will come upon them at the end of the wadi which opens on the wilderness of Jeruel. You will not have to fight in this encounter. Take your places, stand firm, and see how YHWH will be with you to set you free, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid or lose courage. Tomorrow, go out to meet them, and YHWH will be with you.”

Then Jehoshaphat knelt with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before YHWH in worship. Levites from among the Kohathites and Korahites rose to sing the praises of YHWH, God of Israel, in a resounding chorus.

In the early morning they went quickly out to the wilderness of Tekoa. As they were leaving, Jehoshaphat halted, and said, “Listen to me, Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: Trust in your God YHWH, and you will become firm. Trust in his prophets and you will be successful.”

After consulting with the people, he appointed some to sing to YHWH and some to praise the Holy Appearance as it went out at the head of the army. They sang, “Thank YHWH, because his mercy lasts forever.”

At the moment they began their joyful hymn, YHWH laid an ambush against the Ammonites, Moabites, and those from Mount Seir who were coming against Judah, so that they were conquered. That is, the Ammonites and Moabites attacked the inhabitants of Mount Seir, and completely exterminated them; and when they had finished with the inhabitants of Seir, they began to destroy each other. When Judah came to the watchtower over the desert, they saw only corpses fallen on the ground, with no survivors.

Our struggle is not against human enemies; it is against principalities and powers, against evil spirits. Stand firm and let the truth be the belt around your waists.

Stand firm, and you will see the Master coming to set you free. Stand firm, and let the truth be the belt around your waists.

Second Reading

The Treatise on the Mysteries by St. Ambrose

God’s holy people, fresh from the water and resplendent in these clothes, are hurrying to the Prince’s altar, and saying, “I will go in to God’s altar, and to the God who makes my youth joyful.” They have

sloughed off the old skin of error, with “their youth renewed like an eagle’s,” and they are eagerly approaching that heavenly banquet.

As they come and see the sacred altar prepared, they cry, “You have made a table ready in my sight.” David puts these words into their mouths, “The Master is my shepherd; I have all I need. He gives me a field for my pasture, and has led me to refreshing water.” Further on, we read, “Even though I walk through a valley dark as death, I will not be afraid of harm, because you are by me, with your crook and staff that give me courage. You have made a table ready for me in the sight of my enemies; you pour the scented oil upon my head, and my cup overflows.”

It is wonderful that God rained manna on our ancestors and they were fed every day with food from heaven; and in this connection, it is written, “Men ate angels’ bread.” But those who ate that bread all “died” in the desert. But the food that you receive, that “living bread which comes down from heaven,” supplies the very reality of eternal life, and anyone who eats it will never die, because it is the body of the Prince.

Consider now which is the more excellent: the bread of angels or the meat of the Prince’s body, which is in fact the body that gives life. The first was manna from heaven, the second is above the heavens. One belonged to heaven, the other comes from the Master of the heavens; one is subject to decay if it is kept until the following day, while the other is free from all decay, because if anyone tastes it with reverence, he will be incapable of decay. For our ancestors, water flowed from the rock; for you, blood flows from the Prince. Water satisfied their thirst temporarily; blood washes you clean forever. The Jews drank and still felt thirst, but when you drink, you will be incapable of thirst. What happened as a symbol is now fulfilled in reality.

If what you are astounded by is a shadow, consider how great is the reality whose mere shadow astounds you. Listen to this, which shows that what happened in the time of our ancestors was only a shadow. “They drank,” it says, “from the rock that followed them; and the rock was the Prince. All this took place as a symbol for us.” You now know what is superior: light is better than its shadow, reality than its symbol, and the body of the Giver to the manna he gave from heaven.

Our ancestors passed through the sea, and were all bathed into Moses in the cloud and the sea. Everything that happened to them was symbolic.

All of them ate the same spiritual food and all of them drank the same spiritual drink. Everything that happened to them was symbolic.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since your light of truth guides us to the Prince's way, may all of us who follow him please reject what is contrary to the Good News. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

2 Kings 2: 1-15

When YHWH was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a tornado, he and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. "Would you stay here, please," said Elijah to Elisha. "YHWH has sent me to Bethel."

"As surely as YHWH is alive and as you are alive yourself," answered Elisha, "I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel, where the guild prophets went out to Elisha and asked him, "Do you know that YHWH will take your master away today?"

"Yes, I know," he answered. "Be quiet."

Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here, please, Elisha, because YHWH has sent me on to Jericho."

"As surely as YHWH is alive and you are alive yourself," answered Elisha, "I will not leave you." They went on to Jericho, where the guild prophets approached Elisha and asked him, "Do you know that YHWH is going to take your master away from you today?"

"Yes, I know," he answered. "Be quiet."

Elijah then said to Elisha, "Please stay here; YHWH has sent me on to the Jordan."

"As surely as YHWH is alive and your are alive yourself, I will not leave you," answered Elisha. And so the two went on together. Fifty of the guild prophets followed, and when the two stopped at the Jordan,

stood facing them at a distance. Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water, which divided, and both crossed over on dry ground.

After they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask for whatever I can do for you, before I am taken from you.”

“May I receive a double share in your spirit?”

“You have asked something that is not easy,” he answered. “Still, if you see me taken up from you, your wish will be granted. Otherwise, not.”

As they walked on, talking together, a flaming chariot with flaming horses came between them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a tornado. When Elisha saw this happen, he cried, “My Father! My Father! Israel’s chariots and drivers.” And then when he could no longer see him, Elisha gripped his own clothes and tore them in two.

Then he picked up Elijah’s mantle, which had fallen from him, and went back and stood at the bank of the Jordan. Wielding the mantle which had fallen from Elijah, he struck the water in his own turn, and cried, “Where is YHWH, Elijah’s God?” And when Elisha struck the water, it divided, and he crossed over.

The guild prophets in Jericho, who were on the other side, saw him, and said, “Elijah’s spirit has rested on Elisha.” They went to meet him, bowing to the ground before him.

Now I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the time of the Master’s coming—that tremendous, fearsome day. He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers.

John will be great in the sight of the Master, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah. He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers.

Second Reading The Treatise on the Mysteries, by St. Ambrose

We see that grace can achieve more than nature; and yet so far we have been considering instances of what grace can do through a prophet’s blessing. If the blessing of a human being had power even to change nature, what do we say of God’s action in the consecration itself, in which the very words of the Master and Savior are effective?

If the words of Elijah had power even to bring down fire from heaven, will not the Prince’s words have power to change the natures of

the elements? You have read that in the creation of the whole world, “he spoke and they came to be; he commanded and they were created.” If the Prince could by speaking create out of nothing what did not yet exist, can we say that his words are unable to change existing things into something they previously were not? It is no lesser feat to create new natures for things than to change their existing natures.

What need is there for argumentation? Let us take what happened in the case of the Prince himself and construct the truth of this mystery from the mystery of the incarnation. Did the birth of Master Jesus from Mary come about in the course of nature? If we look at nature, we regularly find that conception results from the union of man and woman. It is clear, then, that the conception by the Virgin was above and beyond the course of nature. And this body that we make present is the body born of the Virgin. Why do you expect to find in this case that nature takes its ordinary course in regard to the Prince’s body, when Master Jesus himself was born of the Virgin in a manner above and beyond the order of nature? This is in fact the real flesh of the Prince, which was crucified and buried. This is then in truth the sacrament of his flesh.

The Master himself declares, “This is my body.” Before the blessing contained in these words, a different thing is named; after the consecration, a body is indicated. He himself speaks of his blood. Before the consecration, something else is spoken of; after the consecration, blood is designated. And you say, “Amen,” that is, “It is true.” What the mouth utters, the mind within should acknowledge; what the word says, the heart should ratify.

So the Church, in response to grace so great, exhorts her children, exhorts her neighbors, to hurry to these mysteries. “Neighbors,” she says, “Come and eat; brothers and sisters, drink and be filled.” In another passage, the Holy Spirit has made clear for you what you are to eat, and what you are to drink. “Taste,” says the prophet, “and see that the Master is good; it is a blessing for a man to put his trust in him.” The Prince is in that sacrament, because it is the body of the Prince. It is therefore spiritual food, not bodily food. In this way, the Emissary also says, speaking of its symbol, “Our ancestors ate spiritual food and drank spiritual drink.” That is, the body of God is spiritual; the body of the Prince is that of a divine spirit, because the Prince is a spirit. We read, “The spirit before our face is the Prince, the Master.” and in the letter of

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Saint Peter, we have this: “the Prince died for you.” Finally, it is this food that gives strength to our hearts, and this drink which gives “joy to the heart of man,” as the prophet has written.

While they were at dinner, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, tore the bread apart and gave it to his students, with the words, “All of you take this and eat it; this is my body.”

Those who live with me said, “Who will give us meat to eat?” “All of you take this and eat it; this is my body.”

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since your light of truth guides us to the Prince’s way, may all of us who follow him please reject what is contrary to the Good News. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Sixteenth Sunday In Ordinary Time

First Reading

2 Corinthians 1.1-14

Paul, an emissary of Prince Jesus because of the will of God, and my brother Timothy, to God's community in Corinth; as well as to the sacred people in the whole of Greece:

Blessings on you from God our Father and the Master Prince Jesus.

We have to give praise to the God and Father of our Master Prince Jesus—the Father of sympathy and tenderheartedness and the God of every kind of support—the one who has encouraged us in every hardship we have had, so we can support others in all their hardships with the support we received from God; because, to the extent that the Prince's suffering has overflowed into us, support for us from the Prince has also been overflowing.

And any time we have hardships, this is for your support and rescue; and when we receive encouragement, this is for your encouragement, working in you so that you can bear as much suffering as we have to undergo. And our hope for you has its foundation in our knowledge that if you are suffering what we are suffering, your support will be the same as the support we have.

I say this because we don't want to keep from you, brothers and sisters, how hard it was for us while we were there in Asia. The trouble was far too heavy for us to bear; we practically gave up on life; it even seemed to us as if we had been sentenced to death—which forced us not to rely on ourselves, and to put our trust in the God who brings the dead back to life—because he was the one who rescued us from this kind of dying. He still is rescuing us, and, we hope, will keep on rescuing us if you help us out and join in our prayers, so that many lips will voice their

thankfulness for the blessings given to us by many people.

We do have this to be proud of: our conscience tells us that in our dealings with the world—and especially with you—we have shown God’s single-mindedness and sincerity; not human wisdom, God’s gift. We haven’t written anything to you that is beyond you, and that you can’t understand; and I hope that you will come to understand completely, just as now you understand partially, that we are going to be as proud of you as you are of us on our Master Jesus’ day.

Your love, Master, sustains me; in the midst of all my troubles, your comfort makes my soul joyous.

As we share so extensively in the Prince’s suffering, we also share extensively through the Prince in his comfort.

Second Reading Letter to the Magnesians by St. Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius, also called “Theophorus,” to the community at Magnesia on the Menander River: a community blessed with the favor of God the Father in Prince Jesus, our Savior, in whom I send you greetings. I am also sending you every good wish in God the Father and in Prince Jesus.

I was delighted to hear of your love for God which is so well-regulated and devout; and so I decided to say a few words to you in the faith of Prince Jesus. Because of the honor I have to have a name of the greatest splendor, I sing the praises of the communities, in spite of my being still a prisoner, and pray that they will be united with the body and spirit of Prince Jesus, who is our eternal life—a union in faith and love, which is preferable to anything else, and above all a union with Jesus and the Father, because if in him we are subjected to all the power of the ruler of this world and escape unharmed, we will make our way to God.

I have had the honor of seeing you in the person of your bishop Demas, who is a man of God, and in the persons of your deserving priests, Bassus and Apollonius, and my fellow-slave, the deacon Zotion. May I continue to find enjoyment in him, because he is as obedient to the bishop as to the favor of God, and as obedient to the priests as to the law of Prince Jesus.

It is, of course, hardly becoming of you to take advantage of your bishop’s youth; what should be done is to show him every sign of respect, with your eyes on the power of God the Father. And this, I

understand, is what your holy priests do, since they do not misuse his youthful condition, and defer to him with the good judgment that comes from God—or rather, it is not to him they defer but to the father of Prince Jesus, who is the overseer of everyone.

So then, for the honor of the one who loves us, it is proper to obey without hypocrisy. That is, a man is not so much deceiving the bishop he can see as he is trying to deceive the bishop he cannot see. In this case, he has to deal, not with a man, but with God, who knows the secrets in his heart.

And so we should live as real Christians and not merely have the name; because there are many people who invoke the bishop's name but do everything with no relation to him. Men like this, I think, do not have a good conscience, because they do not assemble in accordance with the law, as they are commanded.

Everything has an end; and two things, life and death, are set side by side before us; and each man is going to go "to his own place." In the same way as there are two coinages, one belonging to God and the other belonging to this world, and each bears its own image, so unbelievers bear the image of this world, and those who have faith with love bear the image of God the Father through Prince Jesus. Unless we are ready through his power to die in the image of his suffering, his life is not in us.

Be an example for all believers in speech and actions, in love, faith, and purity; and in this way you will save both yourself and those who listen to you.

Ponder these duties and attend to them, so that everyone will see your progress; and in this way you will save both yourself and those who listen to you.

Prayer

Dear Master, please be merciful to your people, fill us with your gifts, and make us always eager to serve you in faith, hope, and love. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.


 Monday
*First Reading**2 Corinthians 1.15-2.11*

It was because I was so convinced of this that I had originally planned to come to you in such a way that you would get a double benefit: I was going to come on the way to Macedonia, and then on the way back, I would stay with you and you would send me on to Judea.

That was my plan. Now am I a person to treat things lightly? Do I plan with material plans, so that with me, “Yes I will” is the same as “No I won’t?” No, God can be trusted that what we say to you is not Yes and No at the same time; the son of God, Prince Jesus, the one the proclamation from us to you is about—from me and from Silvanus and from Timothy too—was not Yes and No at the same time; he was Yes. Every declaration from God has its Yes in him; and that is why it is through him that the Amen comes when we praise God. The one who has planted us solidly on the Prince along with you and has anointed us is God; and he has put his seal on us and given us the guarantee of his Spirit in our hearts.

As God is my witness, I hope to die if it wasn’t for your sake that I haven’t gone back to Corinth. Not that I want to enslave your belief to me; we are co-workers with you in the gift you have, and your faith is firm. No, I made up my mind that when I came back to you, the visit was not going to be a painful one. If I give you pain, who is going to cheer me up but the very ones I gave pain to? That was just what I meant in my letter: I wasn’t going to come and be made miserable by the people who ought to be making me happy—and I had enough confidence in you to think that my happiness would make all of you happy.

That is, I wrote that letter from a great deal of anguish and heartache; I was actually shedding tears, not to make you suffer, but to let you know how overwhelming is the love I have for you.

And if one of you can be said to have been the cause of my pain, I was not the one he hurt; to some extent, not to make an issue of it, he has hurt all of you. But the penalty he received from most of you is enough; what he needs now is the opposite: for you to forgive him and support him, or the suffering might become so overwhelming as to

drown him in it.

So please, convince him of your love for him. I only wrote that letter to find out by a practical test if you would be obedient in everything. But if you forgive any wrong, so do I; in fact, I have already forgiven him before the Prince for your sake—if there is anything for me to forgive—so that Satan won't be able to take advantage of the situation; we know what he is up to.

God has set us up firmly in the Prince; he anointed and sealed us, and as his pledge to us, he sent his Spirit to live in our hearts.

Our God the Master made a Treaty with us and spoke to us face to face; and as his pledge to us, he sent his Spirit to live in our hearts.

Second Reading Letter to the Magnesians by St. Ignatius of Antioch

In the people I spoke of, I saw and loved in faith your whole community; and so I urge you to exert yourselves to do everything in God's harmony. The bishop is to preside as God's representative, the elders are to perform the role of the council of Emissaries, and the deacons, who are so dear to me, are to be entrusted with the service of Prince Jesus, who was with the Father before time began, and has now finally shown himself to us. Please follow God's ways, and have respect for each other; no one is to criticize his neighbor in the way the world does; you should always love each other in Prince Jesus. There should be nothing among you that would divide you, and you should live in harmony with the bishop and those who are over you as a sign and model of eternal life.

The Master did nothing either by himself or through his Emissaries without his Father, with whom he is united; and in the same way, you should also undertake nothing without the bishop and the elders. Do not try to persuade yourselves that what you do on your own is right and proper; when you meet together, there should be one request, one prayer, one mind, and one hope in love and holy joy, because Prince Jesus is one and complete above everything else. You must all be quick to assemble, as you would to one Temple of God, one altar, and to the one Prince Jesus, who came out of the one Father, while still remaining one and the same with him, and who returned to him.

Do not be misled by false teaching or by old, shallow stories. That is,

if we still live by the Law, we admit that we have not received God's favor. But the holy prophets lived in accordance with Prince Jesus, and that is why they were harassed. They were inspired by his grace to bring full conviction to a skeptical world that there is one God, who is now revealed through his Son Prince Jesus, his Word, who came out of the Father and was pleasing in every way to the one who sent him.

Those who lived by the ancient customs attained a fresh hope; they no longer observed Saturday, but Sunday, the Master's day, because on that day life rose for us through the Prince and through his death. Some deny this mystery, but through it we have received our faith and because of it we keep going, so that we will be able to prove ourselves students of our only teacher, Prince Jesus. Even the prophets were waiting for him as their teacher, since they were his students in spirit. That is why the Prince, whom they were right to await, raised them back to life when he appeared. Then how can *we* live without him?

You should all have the same mind, and care for each other, and be kind, gentle, and humble. This is what you have been called to do, so that you will receive a blessing for your inheritance.

Please love each other with brotherly affection; outdo each other in showing respect, and serve the Master. This is what you have been called to do, so that you will receive a blessing for your inheritance.

Prayer

Dear Master, please be merciful to your people, fill us with your gifts, and make us always eager to serve you in faith, hope, and love. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

uesday

First Reading

2 Corinthians 2.12-3.16

Anyway, as I went to Troas to deliver the report of the good news about the Prince, there was no relief for my spirit even though doors flew open to me in the Master, because I did not find my brother

Titus there; so I said goodbye to the people and went on to Macedonia.

But thank God for how he always keeps us as the captives in his triumphal march of conquest with the Prince, and for having the sweet smell of knowledge of him be brought everywhere by us; because we are the incense the Prince offers to God among those who are saved and those who are doomed; the scent is deadly to the ones who belong to death, but it gives life to those who come from life.

And isn't this something no one is good enough to deserve?

Of course, we have never "interpreted" God's word to fit our own ideas; we have said what we said in the Prince out of sincere hearts, as if it came from God and was said in God's presence.

What, are we going to start all over again defending our conduct? Are we like people who need a letter of recommendation to you? Or from you? You are our letter, written in our hearts; a letter any man can recognize and read for himself. That's just what you are: a letter the Prince gave us to deliver, written with the spirit of the living God and not ink, not something engraved on stone tablets, but on the tablet which is the flesh of your hearts.

Actually, this kind of thing is what gives us confidence in God because of the Prince. It isn't that we are good enough in ourselves to claim anything as if it was our own doing; our competence comes from God; he made us competent to be in the service of the new Treaty, which is spiritual, not written in a document. The one that was written down brings death; the spiritual one gives life.

Through the Prince, we have full confidence in God, who has made us fit servants of his new Treaty, written in the Spirit, not some code.

We know that we cannot take credit to ourselves for anything, because all of our competence comes from God, who has made us fit servants of his new Treaty, written in the Spirit, not some code.

Second Reading Letter to the Magnesians, by St. Ignatius of Antioch

We should not be insensible of the Prince's loving kindness, since if he had acted as we do, we would certainly have been lost. And so, we should become his students and learn to live in the Christian way; those who are called by any other name do not belong to God. Throw away the evil yeast that has become old and sour and replace it with the new

yeast, which is Prince Jesus. He is to be the salt of your lives, so that none of you will rot, since it is by your soundness that you will be judged. It is stupid to acknowledge the Prince with your lips and at the same time practice Judaism, because Christianity did not develop into Judaism, Judaism developed into faith in Christianity. It was in this that people of every language believed and were brought together for God.

I am not writing this to you, my dear friends, because I heard that any of you is discontented in this way, but because, even though I am less of a man than you are yourselves, I would like all of you to be on guard against falling into the snares of false teaching. Have a firm faith in the reality of the Master's birth, and the suffering and return to life which took place while Pontius Pilate was procurator. All these events are facts, and really were done by Prince Jesus, who is our hope; and may none of you ever be turned away from him!

I would like you to be my joy in every way, if I deserve it; because, even though I am in prison, I am not fit to be compared to those of you who are living in freedom. I know that you are not swollen with pride, because you have Prince Jesus inside you; and I know that you are embarrassed when I praise you, as Scripture says, "a virtuous man is his own prosecutor." So be careful to make your foundation the teachings of the Master and his Emissaries, so that "you will succeed in everything you do," both in body and in soul, in faith and love, in the Son, the Father, and the Spirit, in the beginning and the end, along with your supremely commendable bishop and his spiritual crown, with your elders and deacons, who are men of God. Be obedient to the bishop and to each other, as Prince Jesus was in his bodily life to the Father, and the Emissaries were to the Prince and to the Father and the Spirit, so that there will be unity in body and spirit.

I have given you only a brief bit of advice, because I am aware that you are filled with God. Please remember me in your prayers, so that I will be able to reach God; and remember the community in Syria, from which I do not deserve to be called. I need your united prayers and love of God so much! Please remember, then, the community in Syria, so that it will be made stronger by your prayers.

The Ephesians at Smyrna, where I am writing these lines, send their regards. They have convened here like yourselves for the glory of God; and they have given me support in every way, and so has their bishop

Polycarp. The other communities send their regards for the glory of Prince Jesus.

I wish you well; may you live in God's harmony, and possess that undivided spirit which is Prince Jesus.

God grant that the Prince will live in your hearts through faith; if you have your roots and foundation in love, then you will be filled with the fullness of God.

And so live in Jesus the Prince; you are to have your roots and foundation in him, and be fixed in the faith you were taught; if you have your roots and foundation in love, then you will be filled with the fullness of God.

Prayer

Dear Master, please be merciful to your people, fill us with your gifts, and make us always eager to serve you in faith, hope, and love. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Wednesday

First Reading

2 Corinthians 3.7-4.4

And if the service of death that was engraved on the stone tablets came into being with a splendor great enough that the children of Israel could not look at Moses' face because its brightness—which was to end—dazzled them, wouldn't you expect the service of the spirit to be even more splendid? If it was so glorious to be in the service of what condemned us, won't it be supremely glorious to be in the service that acquits us? That radiance, in fact, wasn't any radiance at all in comparison with the resplendence that outshines it; if there was splendor in what is to end, there is much more splendor in what will not end.

It is because we have this sort of hope that we do everything openly, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep from dazzling the children of Israel until the end of what was destined to end. But what happened was that their minds grew blind; and to this day that same veil

stays over the reading of the old Treaty; and it will not lift, because the Treaty ended with the Prince—and so right up to today, whenever it is read, Moses' veil lies over the Israelites' hearts.

“But whenever Moses turns to YHWH, the veil is lifted”; and YHWH, of course, is the Spirit; and where YHWH's Spirit is, there is freedom. And all of us have no veil on our faces, and reflect the Master's glory; we have been transformed into a copy of him, and glow with his splendor, just as it came from the Master who is a spirit.

This is why we aren't really discouraged, because we have this service, which is, so to speak, our comfort; and so we have given up hiding things as if we were ashamed of them, and don't engage in devious behavior or “interpret” God's word to fit our own ideas. No, we stand right up in the light of the truth and match our conscience with anyone's before God.

And if the report we deliver has a veil in front of it, it is only veiled for the people who are doomed—the ones whose unbelieving minds the god of the present times has blinded so thoroughly that there is no dawning of the light of the news of the Prince's glory—the Prince, who is the visible counterpart of God.

With our faces unveiled, all of us, who reflect the glory of God as a mirror would, are being transformed from splendor to splendor.

We worship in the Spirit of God and we take pride in Jesus the Prince; all of us, who reflect the glory of God as a mirror would, are being transformed from splendor to splendor.

Second Reading *The Imitation of Christ by Thomas à Kempis*

Turn to the Master with your whole heart, and leave this miserable world behind; and then your soul will find rest, because the kingdom of God is the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit, and if you prepare a fitting home in your heart for him, the Prince will come to you and comfort you.

“His glory” and beauty “are inside you,” and he enjoys living there. The Master often visits human hearts, where he shares with us human beings pleasant conversations, welcome comfort, abundant peace, and a wonderful intimacy. So come, faithful soul; make your heart ready for your husband to live inside you; because he says, “If anyone loves me, he

will keep what I say, and we will come to him and make our home inside him.”

Make room for the Prince. When you possess the Prince, you are rich, because he is all you need. He will provide for you himself, and will faithfully see to all your concerns; you will not have to place your hope in human beings. Put all your trust in God, and let him be both your fear and your love; and he will respond on your behalf and do whatever is in your best interest.

You do not have “a city that lasts” here; and wherever you find yourself, you will always be a pilgrim from another city. Until you are intimately united with the Prince, you will never find your real rest.

Put your thoughts on the Supreme Being and direct your prayers constantly to the Prince. If you do not know how to contemplate the glory of heaven, take comfort in the suffering of the Prince, and be willing to live inside his sacred wounds. Put up with it with the Prince, and suffer for him, if you want to be a king with him.

Once you have completely entered the depths of Jesus and have a taste of his powerful love, then you will not care about your own convenience or inconvenience; you will be even happier when you are insulted and injured, because the love of Jesus makes a person despise his own needs.

Our hope is in you, Master; and our hope will never be useless; please rescue me and set me free in your virtue.

You, Master, are my hope; I have put my trust in you from the time I was young; please rescue me and set me free in your virtue.

Prayer

Dear Master, please be merciful to your people, fill us with your gifts, and make us always eager to serve you in faith, hope, and love. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

HURSDAY

First Reading

2 Corinthians 4.5-18

The proclamation we deliver is not about us; it is about the Master Prince Jesus; it only deals with us as your slaves because of Jesus.

Because the God who said, “Light will shine from darkness” is the one who has made our hearts glow so that light would shine out to reveal God’s glory in the Prince’s face.

But we keep this treasure in clay pots, so that the overflowing of the power will come from God and not from us; we have every sort of hardship, but it doesn’t bother us; we are confused, but not stymied; we are hunted, but are not left in the lurch; we are knocked down, but not out; everywhere we go we bring the death of Jesus along with us in our own bodies, so that Jesus’ life will shine out from our bodies. Every minute those of us who are alive are being sentenced to death because of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus will shine in our dead flesh. And so death is at work in us, and life at work in you.

And since we have the same spirit our belief talks about, then, following what was written, “I believed and that is why I spoke out,” we believe, and that is why we speak out, since we know that the one who brings Jesus back to life will bring us back to life with Jesus and stand us—and you too—along beside him.

You see, it is all for you; so that the gift will be received more fully, and through its completeness make thanks overflow for the glory of God.

That is why we are not depressed. Even though the man we are on the outside is decaying, what we are inside renews itself day after day. The slight, short-lived hardships we have are outweighed by far by the eternal glory that is ours; and we keep looking at what can’t be seen, not at what is visible, since what is visible lasts only a while, and what is not visible is eternal.

God has said, “Light is to shine out of darkness,” and he has shone in our hearts for us to make known the glory of God shining on the face of Prince Jesus.

Our God the Master has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard his voice. He has shone in our hearts for us to make known

the glory of God shining on the face of Prince Jesus.

Second Reading *Explanations of the Psalms by St. Ambrose*

“Why do you turn your face away?” We think that God is turning his face away from us when we find ourselves in such torment that our senses are clouded in darkness and we cannot see the glory of the one who is truth. We are convinced that if God would pay attention to our condition and be pleased to visit our souls, nothing could plunge us into gloom.

If a person’s face sheds more light than other parts of his body, so that when we look at someone we either see him as a stranger or recognize him as someone we know, the face of God would pour much more light on those on whom he directs his gaze.

In his usual way, St. Paul has something striking to say on this subject; he uses his gift for making the Prince better understood to bring him closer to us through the use of appropriate ideas and expressions. He tells us, “God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, has made light shine in our hearts, so that we would be able to receive the revelation of God’s glory in the face of Prince Jesus.” We know, then, the place where the Prince is shining inside us; he is the eternal splendor shedding light on our minds and hearts. He was sent by the Father to shine on us in the glory of his face, and so enable us to see what is eternal and heavenly, where before we were imprisoned in the darkness of this world.

There should be no need for me to speak of the Prince when even the Emissary Peter said to the man born lame, “Look at us.” He looked at Peter and was filled with light by the grace of faith. He would not have received healing if he had not believed with faith.

That was the glory the Emissaries possessed; yet Zacchaeus, hearing that Master Jesus was passing by, climbed a tree, since he was short and could not see him because of the crowd. He saw the Prince and discovered the light; he saw the Prince and gave up what was his own, even though he was a man who took what belonged to others.

“Why do you turn your face away?” We may say this in another way: Even if, Master, you turn your face away from us, we are still “sealed with the glory of your face.” Your glory is in our hearts, and shines in the depths of our spirit. No one could live, in fact, if you were to turn away

your face.

God has said, “Light is to shine out of darkness,” and he has shone upon our hearts for us to make know the glory of God shining on the face of Prince Jesus.

Remember the days gone by, after you had been filled with light, when you endured a great struggle with suffering. He has shone upon our hearts for us to make known the glory of God shining on the face of Prince Jesus.

Prayer

Dear Master, please be merciful to your people, fill us with your gifts, and make us always eager to serve you in faith, hope, and love. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

2 Corinthians 5.1-21

That is, we know that if this tent of an earthly home we have collapses, we have a home from God in heaven, and it is an eternal building not made with human hands. And we suffer in this tent, because we long to cover ourselves with the other building—if, when we get dressed in it, we won't still be really naked. I mean, we are burdened and in pain in this tent we have, since we don't want to have it taken off; but what we want is to put on the other one over it, so that the dead one will be absorbed by life. God, after all, is the one who has constructed us for this very thing, and as a pledge of it, he has given us his Spirit.

And so we keep trusting in this, and know that while we are at home in our body, we are not at home with the Master—but we behave this way by our belief, not because we can see it. Still, because of our trust we would rather lose our home in the body and be at home with the Master. And that is why we try hard, whether we are at home or not at home, to be what he likes. All of us have to appear, remember, in the Prince's courtroom, for each of us to be awarded what is due to him for his

conduct in the body, whether it was good or bad.

Anyway, it is with this fear of the Master before our eyes that we try to instill faith in others.

Of course, God already is aware of all this, but I hope that in your heart of hearts you know all about us, too. —No, we aren't going to start defending ourselves again; we're giving you grounds for being proud of us, so you will have something to say to the people whose pride comes from the way they look and not what is in their hearts. If we are crazy, it is for God; if we are sane, it is for you; love for the Prince keeps us in bounds, once we have reached the conclusion that one man died for everyone—and so everyone is dead—and he died for everyone so that the ones who are alive won't live any more for themselves, but for the one who died and came back to life for them.

That is why we don't pay attention in material terms to anyone any more. And if we once even thought of the Prince as a political prince, we don't think of him that way any longer. The result is that if someone is in the Prince, he is a new creation; what is old has vanished, and suddenly has become something new.

And all this comes from God, who has brought us into harmony with himself through the Prince, and giving us the service of bringing others into harmony too—in this sense: that God was the one who was bringing the world into harmony with himself in the Prince, without any longer keeping records against people of the rotten things they do, and was putting in us the words that do the transforming.

What this means is that we act as official representatives of the Prince, who is, so to speak, God talking to you through us; and we beg you, in the Prince's name, come into harmony with God. He made over into sin the one who knew no sin, so that we could become God's virtue in him.

God has brought us into conformity with himself through the Prince, and he gave us the service of bringing about the conformity.

He did not spare his own Son, and handed him over for all of us; and he gave us the service of bringing about the conformity.

Second Reading

The Confessions of St. Augustine

The real Liaison was the one you revealed to common men in your secret mercy, and whom you sent so they would learn that same humility

by following his example. This was the “Link and Liaison between God and man, the man Jesus, the Prince,” who intervened between sinful mortals and the immortal Virtuous One, and who was mortal himself like men, and virtuous, as God was. And in this way, since life and peace are the reward for virtue, he could annul the death of sinners now made virtuous by a virtue united with God, since he willed to share death with them.

Good Father, how you loved us, “and did not spare your only Son as you handed him over for us sinners!” How you loved us, for whose sake the one “who did not think being equal to God was something he had to keep hold of, became subject to death on a cross.” He was the only one who was free among the dead and “had the power to give up his life and the power to take it back again.” For our sake, he became in your sight both victor and victim: victor, in fact, because he was victim. It was also for our sake that he became both priest and sacrifice before you; and priest, in fact, because he was a sacrifice, and changed us from slaves to sons by being your Son and our slave.

So it is right for me to have firm hope that you will heal all my feebleness through the one who is enthroned beside you and “intercedes for us.” Otherwise, I would despair; because these weaknesses of mine are very great and numerous; but your medicine is stronger. We might have thought your Word would be removed from any union with man, and so have despaired of ourselves, if he had not “become flesh and made his home among us.”

Since I was crushed by my sins and the weight of my anguish, I had taken thought in my heart and contemplated escape into the desert. But you stopped me and gave me strength with the words, “The Prince died for everyone, so that those who are alive would no longer live for themselves but for the one who died for them.”

And here, Master, I am placing upon your shoulders my worries so that I will live and “meditate upon the wonders of your Law.” You know my ignorance and weakness; please teach me and heal me. Your only Son, in whom “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden,” redeemed me with his blood. “No arrogant man is to speak evil of me,” because I meditate on my ransom, and I eat it and drink it and try to share it with others; even though I am poor, I want to be filled with it in the company of those who eat and are filled; and “those who are looking

for him will praise the Master.”

The love of the Prince overwhelms us, now that we are convince that the Prince died for everyone, so that those now living will live no longer for themselves but for the one who died and came back to life for their sake.

He did not spare his own Son, and handed him over for all of us, so that those now living will live no longer for themselves but for the one who died and came back to life for their sake.

Prayer

Dear Master, please be merciful to your people, fill us with your gifts, and make us always eager to serve you in faith, hope, and love. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

2 Corinthians 6.1-7.1

And since we are working along with him, we urge you not to waste the gift God has given you; Scripture says, “I listened to you at the proper moment; I helped you on the day of rescue.” But this is the proper moment now; now is the day of rescue.

And while we are doing this, we don’t do anything offensive to anyone, so that no one can find fault with our service; we try to show justification for everything we do as God’s servants, in how steadfast we are in the hardships we bear, in the coercion we tolerate, in the constraints we endure, when we are whipped, when we are imprisoned, when we are mobbed, overworked, deprived of sleep, or starved; and we do it with innocence, understanding, patience, and kindness, with a holy spirit, in sincere love, in speaking what is true, in the power of God; and we use the weapons of virtue we have in our right hand and our left, using glory and disgrace, a good reputation and a bad reputation—we are the frauds who are true, the unknowns everyone knows, the dead ones who turn out to be alive; we are punished and not killed; we seem

to be suffering and are always happy; we seem poor and hand out riches to the crowds; we seem to have nothing, and own everything.

What comes from our mouth hides nothing from you, my friends in Corinth; our heart is completely uncovered. You won't find any shyness on our part; any shyness you find comes from your own reticence. So pay me back; I'm speaking like a father; be that frank with me.

Don't join the wrong team with the unbelievers; what does virtue have in common with crime? Can light and darkness be friends? What understanding can there be between the Prince and Belial, and how can belief and unbelief be partners? What agreement can God's temple make with idols? And we are the temple of the living God, as God said:

"I will make my home with them and walk among them and I will be their God and they will be my people." And so "come away from among them and separate yourselves," says YHWH, 'and do not touch what is unclean; and then I will accept you and "I will be like a father" to you, "and" you will be "like sons" and daughters "to me,"' says "YHWH, the Ruler of All.'"

This is the promise we have, my friends; and so we should wash off all our material and spiritual filth, and complete the development of our holiness in fear of God.

What do virtue and vice have in common? Is there common ground between the Temple of God and idols? You are the Temple of the living God.

Are you not aware that you are God's Temple, and that his Spirit lives inside you? You are the Temple of the living God.

*Second Reading A Homily on the Second Letter to the Corinthians
by St. John Chrysostom*

"Our heart has grown bigger." In the same way that heat makes things expand, it is the work of love to expand the heart, because its power is to heat and make things boil. "That is, I do not merely love in words," he means; "my loving heart is also in unison with my words; and so I speak with confidence, without restraint or reserve."

There was nothing roomier than Paul's heart, because he loved all the faithful with as intimate a love as any lover could have for his loved

one, and his love was not parceled out and diminished; it was complete and entire for each of them. And how is it surprising that his love for the faithful was like this, since his heart also embraced the unbelievers throughout the whole world?

So he did not simply say, "I love you," but with greater emphasis, he declared, "Our mouth is open, our heart has grown big"; we hold all of you in it, and not only that, but with room for you to move about freely. That is, those who are loved enter fearlessly into the heart of their lover; and that is why he says, "you are not shy because of us; you are shy because of your own reticence." You see, he did not say, "you do not love me," he said, "You do not love me to the same degree," because he did not want to accuse them with anything more severe.

It can be seen, in fact, with what a wonderful love for the faithful he is always on fire with, because it is proved in all his writings. He says to the Romans, "I long to see you, and have often planned to come to you," and "if I can finally succeed by some means in reaching you." He calls the Galatians, "my infants, with whom I am in labor all over again," and says to the Ephesians, "This is the reason I bend my knees on your behalf," and to the Thessalonians, "What is my hope and joy and crown of glory, if not you?" That is, he used to say that he carried them around in his heart and in his chains.

Again, he writes to the Colossians, "I want you to know how strongly I am exerting myself for you and for everyone who has not seen my face"; and he tells the Thessalonians, "We were concerned about you like a nurse taking care of her children, and wanted to share not only the Report of the Good News but our own selves." He also says, "You have no restrictions from us." And so Paul does not merely say that he loves them, but that they love him too, so that in this way he can draw them to him. And, in fact, he gives evidence of this love to the Corinthians when he says, "Titus came, telling us how you longed for us, your sorrow, and your zeal for me."

Love is patient, love is kind; it is never jealous or conceited. Love does not enjoy another person's harm; what it enjoys is the truth.

Hatred provokes arguments, and love buries all insults. Love does not enjoy another person's harm; what it enjoys is the truth.

Prayer

Dear Master, please be merciful to your people, fill us with your gifts, and make us always eager to serve you in faith, hope, and love. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Seventeenth Sunday In Ordinary Time

First Reading

2 Corinthians 7.2-16

Stay on our side. We haven't wronged anyone or ruined anyone, or taken advantage of anyone. I'm not saying this to criticize you; I told you before that in our hearts you and we are together in death and in life. I am being very open with you; and I am very proud of you; I am filled with comfort, my joy overflows in all my hardships.

But to get back to where I was, when we went on to Macedonia, we still found no relief, materially speaking, and there was hardship everywhere—battles on the outside, and fear on the inside. But the God who supports those who are beaten down gave us encouragement in the arrival of Titus; and not only in his arrival, but in the support he gave because of the support you gave him; he reported to us how you longed for us, how sorry you were, and how strongly you took my side; and that made me even happier than his presence.

If I did hurt you by my letter, I don't regret doing it; and if I did feel sorry about it—since I see that that letter did hurt you, if only for a while—I am happy now, not because you were hurt, but because your pain made you change heart; you were hurt in God's way, where no damage was done by what we did. Being hurt in God's way brings about a salutary change of heart that can't be regretted; being hurt in the world's way brings about death.

And now look at the progress you made by being hurt in God's way: you were indignant, then defensive, then afraid, then anxious, then zealous, then concerned about righting the wrong; you cleared yourselves in every way of blame in the matter.

When I wrote that letter, I didn't have in mind the one who did the

wrong, or even the one who was wronged, so much as I had the intention of letting you show publicly the devotion you had for us before God. That is why I am encouraged.

But beyond the fact that you supported us, we were overjoyed to see how happy Titus was; you put a stop to all his worries about you, when he found out that all the bragging I did about you wasn't anything I had to be ashamed of. Our bragging to Titus turned out to be just as true as everything we said to you was true. His heart overflows even more toward you as he remembers how obedient you were, and how you welcomed him in fear and trembling. I'm glad I had confidence in you.

The hurts God sends us produces a salutary change of heart; material hurt is what brings death.

Our hurting was used by God, and so we did not lose by it; material hurt is what brings death.

*Second Reading A Homily on the Second Letter to the Corinthians
by St. John Chrysostom*

Again Paul turns to speak of love, and softens the harshness of his reprimand. That is, after accusing and criticizing them for not loving him as he had loved them—since they had broken away from his love and sided with troublemakers, he again takes the edge off his castigation by saying, “Open your hearts to us,” or in other words, “Love us.” He asks for a favor which will be no burden to them and will be more beneficial to the giver than the receiver. And he did not use the word “love”; he said, “Open your hearts to us.”

“Who is it,” he asked, “who has driven us from your minds, and pushed us out of your hearts? How is it you are shy with us?” As he said earlier, “You have restrictions on your own affection,” he now declares himself more openly, and says, “Open your hearts to us,” and in this way he again draws them to him. You see, nothing wins love so much as the knowledge that one's beloved wants most of all to be loved himself.

“And, as I said before,” he tells them, “you are in our hearts to die together or to live together.” This is love at its height, because, even though he is in their disfavor, he wants both to live and die with them. That is, “you are in our hearts,” not just in any way at all, but “in the way I said.” It is possible to love and to draw back when danger

threatens; but “my love is not like that.”

“I am filled with comfort.” What comfort? The comfort which comes from you, because, since you are changed for the better, you have comforted me because of what you did. It is natural for a lover both to complain that he is not loved in return, and to be afraid that he will cause discomfort by complaining too much. And so he says, “I am filled with comfort; I am overjoyed.”

It is as if he said, “I was terribly saddened because of you, but you have made it up to me completely and given me comfort; because you not only removed the cause of any grief I had, but filled me with a richer joy.”

Then he shows the greatness of that joy by saying not only, “I am overjoyed,” but adding the words that follow: “in all my troubles.” The delight you gave me was so great, he says, that it was not even dimmed by a great deal of trouble, and by its strength and keenness it overcame all those sorrows that had invaded my heart, and removed all awareness of them from me.

I performed actions among you that prove the fact that I am an Emissary, and in all patience I produced evidence, marvelous deeds, and miracles.

I will be glad to spend myself and be spent for you, and in all patience I produced evidence, marvelous deeds, and miracles.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father and protector, since without you nothing is holy or has any value, please guide us to eternal life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

2 Corinthians 8.1-24

Now then, we want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the gift God has given to the communities in Macedonia; because the more

hardships they have to undergo, the happier they become; and from the depths of their poverty there has been an overflowing into riches of generosity on their part.

And I can tell you of my own knowledge that they gave as much as they were able—more than they were able—and on their own initiative they begged and pleaded with us for the favor of helping out in this service toward the sacred people; and they did what we didn't expect and gave even themselves to the Master and us by the will of God, so that we had to ask Titus, who began the project of giving, to go to you and finish it. And since you have such a surplus of everything—belief, command of language, understanding, eagerness to try all sorts of things, and love for us within you—be generous in this undertaking.

Now I am not giving you an order; I am just using other people's zeal as something you can measure your own love against; and of course you know the generosity of our Master Prince Jesus, who was rich and impoverished himself for you so you could become rich out of his poverty.

I will tell you, though, what I think: that this sort of thing does you good, now that last year you were not only willing to start the project, but actually got it under way; what you now have to do is finish it, so that you can translate generous intentions into completion based on what you have. If the intention is there, then all that is expected is based on what you have, not what you haven't got; you don't have to bring hardship on yourselves to relieve others. The idea is that it is only fair for you to use the surplus you have at the moment to help others' scarcity, so that when you don't have enough, others' surplus will fill that need, and everyone is treated equally. Scripture says, "the abundance did not overflow and the scantiness did not create need."

Thank God for putting the same enthusiasm for you in Titus's heart that I have; when he heard what we would like done, he got even more zealous, and it was his own idea to leave to go to you. We sent along with him a brother who has a good reputation for delivering the Report in all the communities—and not only that, but he was hand-picked by the communities to travel with us and to be our assistant in this project to give glory to God and to represent our desires. We are keeping apart from this ourselves so no one will criticize how we handle such a large sum of money; "we intend what is right" not only "in the eyes of God"

but before “men” too.

And we are sending with them a brother of ours whom we have found many times and in many ways to be zealous, and is now even more full of enthusiasm because of the many things he has heard about you.

Titus’s credentials, of course, are that he is my companion and co-worker for you; and the other brothers’ credentials are that they are emissaries from the communities, and are the Prince’s glory. So show them your love and show how our claims about you were justified; and when they believe it, so will the communities.

You are well aware of the generosity of our Master Prince Jesus, who, though he was rich, became poor for us, so that through his poverty you would become rich.

He emptied himself and took on the condition of a slave, so that through his poverty you would become rich.

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Caesarius of Arles

“It is a blessing for people to be merciful, because they will receive mercy.” My brothers and sisters, the thought of mercy is pleasant, but mercy is itself even more so. It is what everyone hopes for, but unfortunately, not what everyone deserves. You see, while everyone wants to receive it, only a few are willing to give it.

How can someone ask for himself what he refuses to give to others? If he expects to receive any mercy in heaven, he should give mercy on earth. Do we all want to receive mercy? Then let us make mercy our patroness now, and she will free us in the world to come. Yes, there is mercy in heaven, but the road to it is paved by merciful acts on earth. As Scripture says, “Master, your mercy is in heaven.”

There is, therefore, an earthly mercy as well as a heavenly one; or in other words, there is a human mercy and a divine one. Human mercy is sympathy for the miseries of the poor; divine mercy grants forgiveness of sins. Whatever human mercy bestows here on earth, divine mercy will return to us in our homeland. In this life, God feels cold and hunger in everyone who is stricken with poverty; because, remember, he once said, “You did to me whatever you did to the most insignificant of my brothers.” Yes, God, who sees fit to give his mercy in heaven, wishes it to be a reality on earth.

52 Seventeenth Week of Ordinary Time

What kind of people are we? When God gives something, we want to receive it; but when he begs from us, we refuse to give him anything. Remember, it was the Prince who said, "I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat." When the poor are starving, the Prince is also hungry. Do not neglect to improve the unfortunate conditions of the poor, if you want to ensure that your own sins will be forgiven. The Prince is hungry now, my brothers and sisters; he is the one who condescends so far as to be hungry and thirsty in the persons of the poor. And what he will return in heaven tomorrow is what he receives here on earth today.

What do you wish for? What do you pray for, my dear brothers and sisters, when you come to church? Is it mercy? How can it be anything else? Show mercy, then, while you are on earth, and mercy will be shown to you in heaven. A poor person asks you for something; you ask God for something. He begs for a bite of food; you beg for eternal life. Give the food to the beggar so that you will deserve to receive life from the Prince; because he is the one who says, "Give, and things will be given to you." It baffles me that you have the impudence to ask for what you do not want to give; give when you come to church. Give to the poor. Give them whatever your resources will allow.

Be kind, in the way your Father is kind. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give to others, and you will receive.

It is a blessing for people to be merciful, because they will receive mercy. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give to others, and you will receive.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father and protector, since without you nothing is holy or has any value, please guide us to eternal life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

2 Corinthians 9,1-15

I realize that I didn't really need to write you anything about this

service to the sacred people; I know your generous impulses; in fact, I brag to the Macedonians how Greece had everything ready last year—and your zeal rubbed off on many of them. And I sent along the brothers to show that our claims about you were not just words on this matter, and that you are ready as I said you were; it would be embarrassing for us, not to mention for you, if I were to come confidently later on and the Macedonians with me would discover that you weren't prepared at all. So just in case, I thought I had to ask the brothers to go ahead of us to have the collection of the generosity you had promised earlier already taken up, so that by its being ready it would look like generosity and not like some kind of taxation.

But just remember that a person who plants sparingly will reap sparingly, and one who plants generously will reap generously. But each of you is to follow his heart, not causing yourself pain and not because you have to; "God" loves "a cheerful giver." And God can give you more than enough of any gift you want, so that in every way at every moment you have a surplus in everything you own for giving to any good cause. This is what is written: "He has strewn his gifts everywhere, and given them to the needy; his goodness lasts forever."

The one who provides seeds for you to plant and bread for you to eat will provide seed for you and multiply it; and he will make the seedlings of your virtuous acts grow tall; you will be rich in everything that you want to be generous in, so that God will be thanked by the work that we do—because this service we are assigned to is not only supplying the needs of the sacred people, it is an overflowing of thanks to God from many mouths; and the reason is that this service will be evidence which will make others give glory to God, from the way you put into practice your allegiance to the report of the good news of the Prince, and from how liberally you share what you have with them and everyone—and their prayer for you will fill them with warmth toward you because of the enormous gift God has given you. Thank God for this indescribable benefit.

Give to others and you will receive—with good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your pocket. That is, the degree to which you give to others will be the degree to which you receive.

Each person should give in accordance with what he has decided within himself, and not grudgingly or as if forced to do so. That is, the degree to which you give to others will be the degree to which you receive.

Second Reading *A Sermon on Love by St. Basil the Great*

Human beings should be like the earth and produce a harvest; they should not let insentient matter appear to surpass them. The earth produces crops for your benefit, not for its own; and when you give to the poor, you are producing a crop which you will reap yourself, since the reward for good deeds goes to those who perform them. Give to a hungry man, and what you give becomes yours, and in fact it returns to you with interest. In the same way that a person who plants benefits from wheat that falls to the ground, you will have tremendous benefit in the world to come from the bread that you place before a hungry man. Your agriculture must be the planting of heavenly seeds: “Plant integrity for yourselves,” says Scripture.

You are going to leave your money behind you here, whether you want to or not. On the other hand, you will take with you to the Master the honor that you have won through your good deeds. In the presence of the judge of everyone, all the people will surround you, praise you as a public benefactor, and tell of your generosity and kindness.

Do you not see how people throw away their wealth on theatrical performances, boxing matches, mimes, and fights between men and beasts, which are sickening to see—and all for the sake of ephemeral fame and popular applause? If you are miserly with your money, how can you expect any similar honor? Your reward for the right use of the things of this world will be eternal glory, a winner’s laurel crown of virtue, and the Kingdom of heaven; God will welcome you, the angels will praise you, and every human being who existed since the world began will admire you. Do you not care at all for this, and reject the hopes that lie in the future for your present enjoyment? Come, distribute your wealth lavishly, and give generously to those who are in need. Earn the psalmist’s praise for yourself: “He gave generously to the poor; his virtue will last forever.”

How grateful you should be to your own benefactor; you should beam with such joy at the honor of having other people come to your

door, instead of being forced to go to theirs! But you are now out of sorts and unapproachable; you avoid meeting people, in case you might be forced to loosen your purse-strings even a little. You can say only one thing: “I have nothing to give you; I am only a poor man.” You certainly are a poor man, destitute of any real riches; you are poor in love, generosity, faith in God, and hope of eternal happiness.

Share your bread with the hungry, and take the poor and homeless into your own house; then your light will shine out like the dawn, and your holiness will go before you.

When you see a man who is naked, dress him, and do not despise your brother; then your light will shine out like the dawn, and your holiness will go before you.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father and protector, since without you nothing is holy or has any value, please guide us to eternal life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Wednesday

First Reading

2 Corinthians 10.1-11.6

This is from Paul personally:

I want to say a few words to you with the meekness and tenderness of the Prince, even though it's when I am face to face with you that I tend to grovel, and only roar at you from a distance.

Please, don't force me to roar when I get there, because I feel sure I can be forceful in answering the charge against us that we're behaving like materialists. If we behave in a materialistic way, we're not going to fight a material battle; the weapons for our battle aren't material things; they are full of God's power to demolish fortresses. And what we demolish are tricky reasonings and everything arrogant that rears itself up

against God's kind of knowledge; and we take captive every idea and make it bow down to the Prince; and we have in preparation a punishment for every kind of rebellion once you all come under our control.

Then face this, each of you: If you are so sure you belong to the Prince, then think again, and realize that we are the Prince's just as much as you are. And if I happen to be a little too ready to brag about our authority—which the Master gave me for constructive and not destructive purposes—I am not going to act ashamed of this, so that you won't think I can only scare you when I write letters.

"Ah, yes, his letters," you say. "They're so stern and forceful; but when he's here with us in the flesh, he's a weakling, and the way he talks is a disgrace." The people who are saying this had better consider that we will be in practice when we get there the kind of people we say we are when we send letters to you.

Of course, we wouldn't dare compare ourselves with or put ourselves in the same class with those people who have come so well recommended—from themselves. They set themselves up as standards—and they can't even measure up to each other!

Well we're not going to make extravagant claims; what we say will be within the bounds the God of moderation set for us to measure up to—which, by the way, extend far enough to include you. We aren't, in fact, going beyond our bounds, as if our limits didn't reach you, when we came as far as your land in reporting the good news about the Prince; we weren't staking out a claim in someone else's territory. It's just that our hope is that as your belief grows, we will grow more important in your eyes—but be still within the bounds set for us—so that we can go on and deliver the Report to countries beyond you—but not into someone else's territory where we claim as ours someone else's work.

"If you are proud of something, be proud of YHWH"; it isn't the person who comes recommended by himself that has the credentials; it is the one the Master recommends.

I'd like you to put up with some craziness for a moment—just bear with me. You see, I'm jealous about you—with God's jealousy—because I offered you to the Prince as his bride, as a maiden to the one to be her only husband; and I am afraid that, like Eve tempted by the serpent, your minds will be corrupted and you will lose your purity and your devotion to the Prince.

Now I realize that if someone comes along and delivers a “proclamation” about a Jesus different from the one in our proclamation, or if you receive a spirit different from the one you received, or a Report different from the one you accepted, you handle that well enough. No, I think that in that respect, I haven’t fallen short of the super-emissaries in any way. I may be a terrible speaker, but I know what I am talking about, and have gotten across each and every thing you needed to know.

Though we live in this world, we do not rely only on the resources of the world to do battle; our warfare is not waged with the weapons of this world.

We arm ourselves with the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit, which is the utterance of God; our warfare is not waged with the weapons of this world.

Second Reading A Catechetical Instruction by St. Cyril of Jerusalem

The Church is called Catholic or universal because it has spread through the entire world, from one end of the earth to the other. It is also called Catholic because it teaches fully and unfailingly all of the lore which ought to be brought to people’s knowledge, whether this is concerned with visible or invisible things, and with the realities of heaven or the things of earth. Another reason for the name Catholic is that the Church beings under religious obedience all classes of men: rulers and subjects, learned and illiterate. Finally, it deserves the term Catholic because it heals and cures without restriction every type of sin that can be committed in soul or in body, and because it possesses within itself every kind of virtue that can be named, whether these are exercised in actions, words, or some kind of spiritual gift.

It is most aptly called a church, which means a “meeting of those called out,” because it “calls out” every human being and collects them all, just as the Master says in Leviticus: “Assemble the whole congregation at the door of the Meeting-Tent.” It is worth noting also that the word “assemble” is used for the first time in the Scriptures at this moment, when the Master appoints Aaron the high priest. And so in Deuteronomy, God says to Moses, “Assemble the people before me and have them hear what I say, so that they will learn awe of me.” there is a further mention of the assembly in the passage about the tablets of the

Law: “And on them were written all the words the Master spoke to you on the mountain out of the middle of the fire, on the day of the assembly”; it is as though he had said, even more clearly, “on the day you were called out by God and convened.” So too the psalmist says, “I will express my gratitude to you in the vast assembly, Master; I will give you praise to the mighty throng.”

Long ago, the psalmist sang, “Praise God in the assembly; bless the Master, those of you who are sons of Israel!” But now the Savior has built a second holy assembly, our Christian Church, from the Gentiles. It was of this that he spoke to Peter: “On this rock I will build my community, and the gates of the world below will not close down on it.”

Now that the single church which was in Judea has been rejected, the churches of the Prince are already multiplying throughout the world, and it is said of them in the psalms, “Sing a new song to the Master; his praise is to be sung in the assembly of the sacred people.”

Taking up the same thing, the prophet says to the Judeans, “I have no pleasure in you, says the Master of armies,” and he immediately adds, “because my name is to be glorified among the nations from the rising to the setting of the sun.” Paul writes to Timothy about this holy Church, “So that you will know how a person should behave in the family of God, which is the community of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of truth.”

You are a chosen race, a holy nation, a people God has claimed as his own. Announce the marvelous deeds of the one who has called us out of darkness into his own wonderful light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people. Announce the marvelous deeds of the one who has called us out of darkness into his own wonderful light.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father and protector, since without you nothing is holy or has any value, please guide us to eternal life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

*First Reading**2 Corinthians 11.7-29*

Then what's wrong with me? That I degraded myself—to dignify you—when I delivered the report of God's good news to you without charging for it? I was stealing from the other communities when I accepted support from them so I could serve you; and when I was with you and needed something, I didn't put a burden on anyone; anything I needed was met in full by the brothers and sisters who came from Macedonia. I was determined then, and I am determined now, not to impose on you in any way. And as the Prince's truth is in me, there will be no silencing this claim I make, through the whole territory of Greece. And why? Because I don't love you? Ask God!

Yes, and I'll keep doing what I'm doing now, to cut off any chance of making a claim to be like us on the part of anyone who is looking for an occasion to do it. The people who are trying this are pseudo-emissaries—frauds masquerading as the Prince's emissaries. Of course, there is nothing surprising in this; even Satan masquerades as an angel of light; and so it is easy enough for his servants to masquerade as servants of virtue—but they'll end up where their actions put them.

Again, I don't want any of you to think I am being crazy; but if you do, then say, "All right, he's crazy," and give me a little time to state my claims. I'm not going to be talking the way the Master likes people to talk; I'm going to say crazy things and lay out my claims like a braggart. There are a lot of people who brag a lot in this world; well, I can brag too.

Anyway, you should have no trouble listening to a crazy man, since you are in your right minds. You put up with people who are enslaving you, eating you out of house and home, catching you in traps, putting themselves on a higher plane than you are, and slapping you in the face. But to my disgrace, I have to admit that we have been weak.

But here I go being crazy; and I say that I can be as arrogant as the next man. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Israelites? So am I. Descendants of Abraham? So am I. The Prince's servants? This is the crazy man talking; I am more of one; I work a lot harder than they do, I've been in prison a lot more, I've been whipped many more times, and many times

faced death; I got the “forty lashes minus one” from the Judeans five times, I’ve been beaten with rods three times, I was stoned once, I’ve been shipwrecked three times, and once spent a whole day and night in the water; most of the time, I’m traveling from one place to another, in danger from fording rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own people, in danger from foreigners, facing the dangers you find in the city, the dangers you find in the country, the dangers in the ocean, the dangers from pseudo-brothers; most of the time I’m working hard, worn out and don’t have enough sleep; I’m hungry and thirsty, and I’ve often gone without eating at all; and I’ve been cold and not had enough to wear; and besides these external troubles, there is the responsibility I carry every day, and my concern for all the communities. If anyone is weak, I am weak; if anyone has obstacles thrown in his way, I am enraged.

The Good News I reported to you is not a human message; I did not receive it from any man, but from our Master Prince Jesus, who revealed it to me.

As surely as the Prince’s truth is in me, I have reported the Good News to you; I did not receive it from any man, but from our Master Prince Jesus, who revealed it to me.

Second Reading A Catechetical Instruction by St. Cyril of Jerusalem

The Catholic Church is the distinctive name of this holy Church, which is the mother of all of us. She is the bride of our Master Prince Jesus, the only Son God ever fathered; as Scripture says, “The Prince loved the Church and handed himself over for her.” She is the foreshadowing and bears the image of “the Jerusalem above that is free and is the mother of us all,” that Jerusalem which once was sterile, but now has a great number of children.

The first assembly—that is, the community of Israel—was rejected, and now in the second, the Catholic Church, “God has designated, first of all, Emissaries, second prophets, third, teachers and wonder-workers, then healers, helpers, administrators, and speakers of various sorts of languages,” as Paul says; and along with these is found every sort of virtue: wisdom and understanding, self-control and honesty, mercy and kindness, and unconquerable endurance of persecution.

“With the weapons of virtue in our right and left hands, with honor and disgrace,” this church in earlier days, when persecution and hardship overflowed, crowned her holy martyrs with the variegated, many-flowered winner’s wreaths of endurance. But now when God has favored us with times of peace, she receives the honor she deserves from kings and men in high status, and from every condition and race of mankind. And while the rulers of the different nations have limits to their sovereignty, the holy Catholic Church alone has a power without limits throughout the entire world, because, as Scripture says, God “has made peace her border.”

If we are instructed in this holy Catholic Church and conduct ourselves honorably, we will gain the Kingdom of heaven and inherit eternal life. In order to enjoy this at the Master’s hands, we put up with everything. The goal set before us is anything but a trivial one; we are straining ourselves toward eternal life. And so, in the Creed, after professing our faith “in the resurrection of the body”—that is, of the dead, which I have already discussed—we are taught to believe “in eternal life,” and it is for this we are struggling as Christians.

Now real and true life is nothing other than the Father, who is the source of life, and who pours out his heavenly gifts on every creature through the Son in the Holy Spirit; and the good things that belong to eternal life are faithfully promised to us men too, because of his love for us.

It is a laudable people to whom the Master spoke this blessing: “You, Israel, are the work of my hands; you are my own possession.”

It is a blessing for a nation to have the Master for its God, to be the people he has chosen for his own. “You, Israel, are the work of my hands; you are my own possession.”

Prayer

Dear God, our Father and protector, since without you nothing is holy or has any value, please guide us to eternal life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

*First Reading**2 Corinthians 11.30-12.13*

But if I have to make my own claims, I'll state my weakness as my claim. And God, the Father of our Master Jesus—may he be praised forever—knows that I'm not lying. When I was in Damascus, King Aretas's ethnarch laid an ambush for me to have me arrested; and I escaped by being put into a basket and lowered off the wall.

But I suppose I have to put forward real claims—not that it will do me any good—so I'll go on and speak of visions and revelations from the Master. I know one of the Prince's men who fourteen years ago—and I don't know if this happened inside his body or outside of it; God knows—was lifted up into the sky as high as Mercury. And I know that this same man—and I still don't know whether this was in his body or out of it; God knows—was raised into paradise, and heard wordless statements that no human being is capable of uttering.

I'll base a claim on that man; but my real claim about myself is based on my weakness. What I am saying is that if I really wanted to make claims, I wouldn't be crazy doing it, because I would be telling the truth. But I don't want to, because I don't want anyone to form any opinion of me based on anything beyond what he sees or hears me to be, like the magnificence of some revelations.

It was for this same reason that I myself, so that I wouldn't grow conceited, was given a thorn in my body—one of Satan's angels—to slap me in the face to keep me from thinking too much of myself. I asked the Master three times to send it away from me, and he told me "My gift is all you need; power becomes complete in weakness."

So I would far rather make my claim based on my weakness, so that the Prince's power will find its home in me. That is why I am satisfied with being weak, with being in disgrace, in need, oppressed, and frustrated because of the Prince; it's when I'm weak that I'm powerful.

But now I've turned into a crazy braggart; but you forced me into it. And you're the ones who should have been listing my qualifications; I don't come in second in any way to those super-emissaries, even though I'm nothing. The evidence that I am the Prince's emissary was

presented to you very meticulously: the proofs and the miracles and the deeds of power. How were you treated any worse than any of the other communities, except that I was the one who didn't charge you anything? Forgive this crime of mine.

I would rather take pride in my weakness, so that the Prince's power will rest on me, because my power is made complete in weakness.

We possess this treasure in clay pots to show that this supreme power comes from God, because my power is made complete in weakness.

Second Reading *Letter to Polycarp by St. Ignatius of Antioch*

Ignatius, also called Theophorus, sends his greetings and every good wish to Polycarp, Overseer of the Church in Smyrna—or rather, the one who has as his overseer God the Father and the Master Prince Jesus.

Since I am aware of your devotion to God, which is firmly established as if it were on solid rock, I am full of gratitude to God for letting me see your admirable face, and may I enjoy the sight of it in God forever! I would beg you by the grace you are endowed with to sprint forward in your race and urge everyone toward rescue. Justify your dignity as an overseer by constant concern for the spiritual and temporal welfare of your flock, and have unity, which is the greatest of all benefits, be your preoccupation. Carry everyone's burdens in the same way as the Master carries yours; have patience with everyone in love—as, of course, you are doing. Devote yourself to prayer continually, ask for even greater wisdom than you now have, and stay alert with an unrelenting spirit. Speak to each person as an individual, following God's example; put up with the weaknesses of everyone, like a perfect athlete of God. The greater the labor, the richer the reward.

If you love only your good students, you gain no benefit from this; you have to win over the more troublesome of them by kindness. The same salve does not heal every wound; convulsions shouldn't be stilled with poultices. "Be clever as a snake" in everything, and always "innocent as a dove." You are both body and soul; so treat the evidence of human faults gently, even while you are praying for knowledge of invisible things; and then you will have all you need, and in fact overflow with every kind of blessing.

Act as circumstances demand, like a pilot who looks at the wind and

a storm-tossed sailor searching for a harbor, so that you will win your way to God with your people. Exercise self-restraint, because you are God's athlete; the prize is immortality and eternal life, as you are very well aware. I am your devoted friend in every way: I and my chains, which you have kissed.

Do not be overwhelmed by those who seem trustworthy and yet teach heresy; remain firm, like an anvil under a hammer. A good athlete must take punishment in order to win. And above all, we must bear with everything for God, so that he on his part will put up with us. Increase your fervor; read the signs of the times. But look for the one who is outside time, the eternal one, the unseen one who became visible for us; he cannot be touched and cannot suffer, yet he became subject to suffering and endured so much for our sake.

Do not neglect widows; after the Master, you are the one to be their guardian. Nothing should be done without your approval, and you should not do anything without God's approval—as, of course, you do—but stand firm. Services should be held often; seek out everyone by name. Do not look down on slaves, whether they are men or women; and, of course, they should not be arrogant either, and should give better service for the glory of God, so that they will gain a better freedom. They should not be anxious for their freedom to be bought at the community's expense, because then they might prove to be slaves of their own desires.

Search out integrity and holiness, faith and love, patience and gentleness. Compete in the good contest of faith and take hold of eternal life.

I will put up with everything for God's chosen people, so that they can be rescued. Compete in the good contest of faith and take hold of eternal life.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father and protector, since without you nothing is holy or has any value, please guide us to eternal life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

SATURDAY

First Reading

2 Corinthians 12.14-13.13

And now I'm getting ready to visit you for the third time—and I'm still not going to charge you anything; I want you, not your money. Parents should provide for their children, not children for their parents; it gives me pleasure to spend for your souls until I have nothing left; but if I love you too much, are you going to love me less?

All right, maybe I haven't imposed on you financially myself; but from the beginning I've been a faker who swindled you out of your money. Oh really? Did I manage this swindle by someone I sent as my representative? I sent Titus and the other brother; was it Titus who swindled you? Don't we behave with the same spirit? Don't we walk on the same path?

Do you think I'm saying all this because I need to defend my conduct? I am speaking in the presence of God and the Prince; and everything I say, friends, is supposed to be constructive for you. What I am afraid of is that when I come, I won't find you what I want you to be, and you won't find me what you want me to be; I'm afraid that I'll find you fighting, jealous, hot-tempered, selfish, running each other down, spreading rumors, and conceited troublemakers; and then when I come God will embarrass me in your eyes, and I will have to suffer for many of the people who have sinned in the past and haven't changed their ways from their filth and casual sex and acting like animals.

Anyway, this is my third visit to you; and "you are to accept as true what comes from the mouths of two or three witnesses." I said a long time ago, and I said a second time when I was with you, and now I am saying again in writing to those of you who sinned before, and all the rest of you, that if I come back, I won't be gentle. If you want proof that the Prince, who is no weakling and has power over you, is speaking in me, you will find it. He may have been crucified out of weakness, but he is alive by the power of God; and even though we are weak in him, when we deal with you we will be living with him by the power of God.

So test yourselves to see if you are living your belief, and evaluate yourselves. Can you recognize that Prince Jesus exists within you? If not, you fail the test. And I hope that you will realize that we didn't fail it.

And I pray to God for you not to do any wrong, not so that we can pass our test, but so you'll be doing what's right even if we look as if we have failed. We have no power to do anything against the truth; we can only act for it. It makes us happy to be weak when you are strong; and this is what we pray for: your rehabilitation. And this is why I'm writing this before I get there, so that while I am with you I won't have to be harsh with you and use the authority the Master gave me, which is supposed to be constructive and not destructive.

And so, brothers and sisters, goodbye, and reform yourselves; cooperate with each other and agree with each other and live in peace; and then the God of love and peace will be with you.

Give a holy kiss to each other. All the sacred people send their good wishes.

Blessings from our Master Prince Jesus
and the love of God and the companionship of the Holy Spirit
be with all of you.

Second Reading Letter to Polycarp by St. Ignatius of Antioch

Avoid evil practices and preach against them. Tell my sisters to love the Master and be content with their material husbands as well as their spiritual one; and in the same way ask my brothers to love their wives in the Prince's name as the Prince loves his Church. If anyone can remain chaste in honor of the Savior's body, he should do so without taking pride in it; because if he brags about it, he is lost; and if he thinks himself for this reason better than his overseer, he is lost. Those who marry should be united with the overseer's approval, so that the marriage will follow God's will and not merely the promptings of the flesh. Everything ought to be done for God's honor.

Listen to your overseer, so that God will listen to you. My life is a sacrifice for those who are obedient to their overseers, elders, and deacons; and I hope it is my fate to share what they have in God. Work together in harmony, struggle together, run together, suffer together, rest together, and rise together as caretakers, advisors, and servants of God. Make an effort to please the one whose soldiers you are, who is the one from whom you draw your pay; none of you must prove to be a deserter. Your Bath is to be your armor, your faith your helmet, your love your spear, and your patience the rest of your gear. Your good deeds

should be your deposits, so that you can draw out well-earned savings. And so, be patient and gentle with each other, with the same patience and gentleness God has for you. Let me have joy in you forever.

Since I have heard that the community of Antioch in Syria is in peace through your prayers, I am also calmer in my reliance upon God. I only hope that I will find my way to God through my suffering, and at the return to life prove to be your student. My admirable friend Polycarp, you should convene a godly council, and appoint someone you consider a good and industrious friend to be named God's courier and have the honor of going into Syria and advancing God's glory by speaking of your untiring love. A Christian is not his own master; his time belongs to God. This is God's work, and it will be yours as well when you have performed it; I have trust in the grace of God that you are ready to act generously when it comes to God's work. Since I know your zeal for the truth so well, I have limited my appeal to these few words.

I could not write to all the communities because I am sailing immediately from Troas to Neapolis as I have orders to do. I would like you, then, as someone who knows God's purpose, to write to the communities of the East and ask them to do the same. Those who can should send representatives, while the rest should send letters through your delegates. In this way, your community will be honored for a good deed which will be remembered forever, as their overseer deserves.

I wish all of you well forever in Prince Jesus; may you all remain in God's unity and care through him.

My regards in the Master.

Be steadfast; stand firm; always devote yourselves fully to the work of the Master, because you know that your work in the Master cannot be useless.

Never grow tired of doing good, because you know that your work in the Master cannot be useless.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father and protector, since without you nothing is holy or has any value, please guide us to eternal life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Eighteenth Sunday In Ordinary Time

First Reading

Amos 1.1-2.3

The writings of Amos, a shepherd from Tekoa, which he received in vision about Israel, in the days of King Uzziah of Judah and King Jeroboam, son of Joash of Israel, two years before the earthquake:

YHWH will roar from Zion,

and will raise his voice from Jerusalem;
the shepherds' pastures will decay
and the summit of Carmel crumble.

This is what YHWH says:

"It is for three crimes of Damascus—for four—

I will not revoke what I say:
Because they threshed Gilead
with iron sledges,

I will send fire down on the house of Hazael
to eat up the castles of Ben-hadad.

I will break the bar of Damascus;

I will root out those living in the Valley of Aven,
and the ruler of Beth-eden with his scepter;
Aram's people will be exiled to Kir,"
says YHWH.

This is what is said by YHWH:

"For three crimes of Gaza—for four—

I will not revoke what I say:
Because they took captive whole groups
to hand them over to Edom,
I will send fire on the wall of Gaza

to eat up her castles;
 I will root out those who live in Ashdod,
 and the ruler of Askelon with his scepter;
 I will turn my hand against Ekron,
 and the last of the Philistines will die out,”
 says YHWH.

This is what is said by YHWH:
 “For three crimes of Tyre—for four—
 I will not revoke what I say:
 Because they handed whole groups over to Edom
 and did not remember the pact of brotherhood,
 I will send fire upon the wall of Tyre
 to eat up her castles.”

This is what is said by YHWH:
 “For three crimes of Edom—for four—
 I will not revoke what I say:
 Because he went after his brother with a sword
 and choked off all pity;
 because he persisted in his anger
 and kept his rage to the end,
 I will send fire upon Teman
 and it will eat up the castles of Bozrah.”

This is what is said by YHWH:
 “For three crimes of the Ammonites—for four—
 I will not revoke what I say:
 Because they ripped open pregnant women in Gilead
 while they added to their territory,
 I will kindle a fire on the wall of Rabbah,
 and it will eat up her castles
 amid an uproar on the day of battle
 and stormwind in a time of tempest.
 Their king will go into captivity,
 and his princes with him,” says YHWH.

This is what is said by YHWH:
 “For three crimes of Moab—for four—
 I will not revoke what I say:
 Because he burned to ashes

the bones of Edom's king,
 I will send fire on Moab
 to eat up the castles of Kerioth;
 Moab will meet death in the tumult
 and shouts and trumpet blasts.
 I will root the judge out from among her,
 and I will slaughter her princes with him," says YHWH.

The Master is seated on his throne forever; and he will judge the world with justice, and govern the peoples even-handedly.

The Master is roaring from Zion, and raising his voice from Jerusalem; and he will judge the world with justice, and govern the peoples even-handedly.

Second Reading

Letter Attributed to Barnabas

My greetings to you, my brothers and sisters. In the name of the Master who loves us, may peace be with you.

Because the Master has bestowed on you an great number of blessings, I am immeasurably overjoyed in your admirable company. You have received a great deal of that indwelling grace which is the Spirit's gift, and this is why I have hope in my own rescue and have even more gratitude when I see the generous fullness of the Master's Spirit pouring over you. I have been so enthusiastic for you that when I saw you, I was overwhelmed.

I am now convinced—I am perfectly aware—that I have learned a great deal by speaking with you, because the Master went with me on the road to virtue; and so I am driven in every way to love you more than my own life. That is, there is certainly a great store of faith and love within you because of your hope for life in the Prince; and so I have been thinking that if my concern for you inspires me to pass on to you a share of what I have received, then I will be rewarded for my service to souls like yours. This is why I am writing you, so that you will have complete knowledge to go along with your faith.

The Master has given us three basic teachings: hope for eternal life, the beginning and end of our faith; honesty, the beginning and end of virtue; and love, which gives cheerful and joyous evidence of virtuous deeds. Now the Master has made the past and present known to us

through his prophets, and has given us the ability to taste the fruit of the future beforehand. And so, when we see the prophecies fulfilled in their designated order, we ought to grow more fully and deeply in awe of him. Let me suggest a few things—not as a teacher, but as one of you—which should bring you joy in your present circumstances.

When bad days are upon us and the worker of malice gains power, we must attend to our own souls and make an effort to know the Master's ways. In those times, reverential fear and perseverance will sustain our faith, and we will find need of tolerance and self-restraint as well. Provided we hold fast to these virtues and look to the Master, then wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and insight will make joyous companions for them.

Actually, the Master has revealed to us through the prophets that he has no need of sacrifices, holocausts, or gifts. He says in one place, "What are your endless sacrifices to me?" says the Master. "I have had my fill of holocausts; I do not want the fat of your lambs, or the blood of your bulls and goats, or your presence in my sight. Who, in fact, made these demands of you? You will not trample my courts any longer. Your sacrifices of finely ground flour are useless; your incense is loathsome to me; I cannot stand your feasts of the new moon or your Sabbaths."

We know that no one becomes virtuous by obedience to the Law; he becomes so by faith in Prince Jesus, and we have believed in Jesus the Prince so that we can be made virtuous by him.

Abraham put his faith in God, who considered it an act of virtue. And we have believed in Jesus the Prince so that we can be made virtuous by him.

Prayer

Dear Father of eternal goodness, our source and guide, please be close to us, listen to the prayers of everyone who praises you, forgive our sins, restore us to life, and keep us safe in your love. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

onday

First Reading

Amos 2.4-16

This is what is said by YHWH:

“For three crimes of Judah—for four—

I will not revoke what I have said:

Because they disregarded YHWH’s law
and did not keep his regulations,

because the lies which their ancestors followed
have led them astray,

I will send fire upon Judah

to eat up the castles of Jerusalem.”

This is what is said by YHWH:

For three crimes of Israel—for four—

I will not revoke what I have said:

Because they sell honest men for silver
and poor men for a pair of sandals;

because they trample the heads of the weak
into the dirt on the ground

and force the little people out of the way;

because son and father go to the same prostitute
and profane my holy name;

because they sit to eat beside my altar
wearing clothes given as collateral,

and drink the wine of those who have been fined
in the house of their God—

while it was I who destroyed before them the Amorites,
who were tall as cedars

and strong as oaks—

because of this, I destroyed their fruit over the ground
and their roots beneath it.

It was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt
and who led you through the desert for forty years

to occupy the land of the Amorites;

it was I who brought forward prophets from among your sons
and nazirites from among your youth.

Is this not so, men of Israel?"
 says the Master.
 "But you gave the nazirites wine to drink
 and commanded the prophets not to prophesy.
 Be careful, then, because I will crush you to the ground
 in the way a wagon crushes things when laden with sheaves.
 Flight will escape from the swift
 and strong men will not keep their strength;
 A warrior will not be able to save his life
 or a Bowman to stand his ground;
 those who are fast will not escape,
 and horsemen will not save their lives,
 and the bravest of the warriors
 will run off naked on that day," says YHWH.

I brought you out of the land of Egypt and led you through the desert
 for forty years; and I said, "These people are fickle and do not grasp my
 ways."

I brought forward prophets from among your sons and gave them
 this command: You are not to prophesy. And I said, "These people are
 fickle and do not grasp my ways."

Second Reading

A Letter Attributed to Barnabas

God has abolished the sacrifices of the old Law so that the new law
 of our Master Prince Jesus, which does not bind by slavish compulsion,
 would have an offering not made by man. On another occasion, he says
 to them, "I gave them no commands about holocausts and sacrifices. I
 said not a word about them. What I did command was this: Do not plot
 harm to anyone else, and do not love perjury."

We are not stupid; surely we ought to understand our Father's kindly
 purpose in this. He does not want us to go astray as they did, or ask how
 we are to approach him. Here is what he says to us: "The sacrifice
 acceptable to God is a broken heart; the fragrance pleasing to the Master
 is a soul that gives glory to its Maker." You see, my brothers and sisters,
 we must carefully look to our own rescue; otherwise, the one who is bent
 on deceiving us will insinuate himself and turn us aside from the path
 that leads to life.

God spoke to them once again when he said to them, “On a day like this, you are keeping a fast that will not carry your plea to heaven. Is that the sort of fast that I demand, a day of mortification like that?” But he says to us, “Is not this what I demand of you as a fast: unlock the fetters of vice, untie the knots of all the contracts that involve extortion, set free those who have been crushed, tear up every unjust agreement, share your food with the starving, and when you meet a naked man, give him clothing; welcome the homeless into your house?”

And so we must run away from everything futile and show an utter hatred for the actions on the way of evil. Do not turn inward and live only for yourselves as though you were already sure of rescue; no, join together and look to your mutual good; because, as Scripture says, “Shame on those who are wise in their own estimation and think themselves clever.” Let us become spiritual instead; let us be a perfect home for God. As far as we can, we should ponder the fear of God and make an effort to keep his commandments, finding our enjoyment in observing what he says.

The Master will “judge the world without consideration for persons”; everyone will receive what he justly deserves; if he has been good, his good deeds will precede him; if evil, the wages of sin are there to ambush him. We must never relax our efforts as though our calling were already realized; we should never fall asleep in a state of sin, or the ruler of immorality might gain power over us and wrench us out of the Kingdom of the Master.

My brothers and sisters, please grasp this further point: You see the Israelites rejected, even after many wonders and miracles were performed among them; and so let us see to it that we are not found among those of whom Scripture says, “Many, many are invited; only few are selected.”

The Law was our nursemaid until the Prince came and made it possible for us to be brought into conformity with God by faith; and now that the time of faith has come, we are under that nursemaid no longer.

Before the time of faith came, the Law kept us strictly within bounds, and watched us closely until faith would be revealed; and now that the time of faith has come, we are under the nursemaid no longer.

Prayer

Dear Father of eternal goodness, our source and guide, please be close to us, listen to the prayers of everyone who praises you, forgive our sins, restore us to life, and keep us safe in your love. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

*First Reading**Amos 7.1-17*

This is what YHWH showed me: He was forming a locust swarm when the late growth began to sprout—the late growth after the king’s mowing. While they were eating all the grass in the land, I said, “Forgive us, God YHWH.

How can Jacob stand this?

He is so small!”

And YHWH relented from this. “It will not happen,” said God YHWH.

Then God YHWH showed me this: He called for a punishment by fire. It had eaten up the great abyss, and was consuming the land, when I said,

“Please stop, God YHWH!

How can Jacob stand this?

He is so small!”

And YHWH relented from this. “This will not happen either,” said God YHWH.

Then God YHWH showed me this: He was standing by a wall with a lead plummet in his hand. YHWH asked me, “What do you see, Amos?” and when I answered, “A plummet,” YHWH said,

“You see, I will put my plummet

in the midst of my people Israel;

I will forgive them no longer.

The high places of Israel will be demolished

and the sanctuaries of Israel will be annihilated;
I will attack the house of Jeroboam with swords.”

Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent word to Jeroboam, King of Israel,
“Amos has been conspiring against you here inside Israel; the country
cannot tolerate all the things he is saying. This is what Amos says,
“Jeroboam will die by a sword-thrust

and Israel will be certain to be exiled from its land.”

This is what Amaziah told Amos: “Be gone from here, visionary; run
off to the land of Judah, and earn your bread there by prophesying, but
never again prophesy in Bethel, because it is the king’s sanctuary and a
royal temple.”

“I was no prophet,” Amos answered Amaziah, “and I belonged to
no guild of prophets; I was a shepherd and a tender of sycamores.
YHWH took me from following my flock and told me, “Go prophesy to
my people Israel. Now listen to what YHWH says:

“You say, do not prophesy against Israel,
or preach against the house of Isaac.

But now this is what YHWH says:

“Your wife will become a prostitute in the city
and your sons and daughters will fall to sword-thrusts;
your land will be divided with a measuring-line
and you yourself will die in an unclean land;
Israel will be driven in exile from its land.””

The Master does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the
prophets. The Master has spoken; who would not prophesy?

The Master took me as I was following my flock and said to me, “Go
prophesy to my people.” The Master has spoken; who would not
prophesy?

Second Reading

A Letter attributed to Barnabas

The Master was willing to hand over his body for destruction so that
by the shedding of his blood we would become holy through the erasure
of our sins. According to Scripture, this refers to both Israel and us: “He
was wounded for our disobedience and bruised by our immorality; it is
by his wounds we are healed. He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
like a lamb that is dumb before its shearer.”

We owe a great debt of gratitude, then, to the Master for letting us see the meaning of the past, for teaching us about the present, and not leaving us in ignorance about the future. In the words of Scripture, "It is not unjust to have nets spread for the birds." This means that it is just to condemn a man if he knows the right way and heads into the way of darkness.

The Master was ready to undergo suffering for our souls, even though he is Master of the whole earth, the one God told at the foundation of the world, "Let us make man in our own image and likeness." But in that case, my brothers and sisters, how could he allow himself to suffer at the hands of men? This is the explanation: The prophets, inspired by grace, foretold what he would do; he allowed himself to suffer because he had to be seen in the flesh in order to destroy the power of death and reveal the return to life from death. In this way, he would carry out the promises that had been made to our ancestors, and while still on earth prepare for himself a new people; he would also show that, after the resurrection, he was to be our judge. In addition, by teaching Israel and performing such great wonders and miracles, he announced the good news and showed the depths of his love for that people.

And after he had renewed us by forgiving our sins in this way, he refashioned us. He gave us the souls of children, as though we had been born over again; because we are the ones Scripture is referring to when the Father says to the Son, "Let us make man in accordance with our own image and likeness, and let him rule over the beasts on the earth and the birds in the air and the fish in the sea." The Master saw the beauty of our fashioning, and added, "Increase and multiply, and fill the earth."

All this God said to his Son; but let me now point out to you how he speaks to us too. It is in fact a second act of creation that the Master has performed in these last days; and that is why he says, "Now I am making the last things like the first." It was this that the prophet had in mind when he said, "Enter a land flowing with milk and honey, and rule over it." It is true, you see, that we have been completely remade. This is what God means by the words of another prophet: "Now I will take the hearts of stone out of this people," that is, the people whom the Spirit of the Master foreknew, "and put hearts of flesh into them." That is, he willed to appear in the flesh and live among us.

And so, my brothers and sisters, the home which is our hearts is a temple sacred to the Master. Again, the Master says, "Let me show my gratitude to you in the assembly of the people." So we are the ones whom he has led into a fertile land.

You are the children of the prophets, heirs of the Treaty God made with our ancestors, when he said to Abraham, "It is in your offspring that all the families of the earth will be blessed."

The Scriptures foresaw how God would make the nations virtuous through faith, and they announced this good news to Abraham: "It is in your offspring that all the families of the earth will be blessed."

Prayer

Dear Father of eternal goodness, our source and guide, please be close to us, listen to the prayers of everyone who praises you, forgive our sins, restore us to life, and keep us safe in your love. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

ednesday

First Reading

Amos 9.1-15

I saw YHWH standing beside the altar, and he said,
 "Strike the foundations, so that the doorjams totter
 till you break them off on the heads of all of them!
 I will slaughter with swords those who are left;
 not one will run off;
 no survivor will escape.
 Though they crash through into the world below the ground
 my hand will bring them out even from there;
 if they climb up into the sky
 I will pull them down;
 should they hide on Carmel's summit
 I will hunt them out there and cart them away;

though they hide from my gaze
in the bottom of the ocean,
I will command the serpent there to bite them;
if they are carried off captives by their enemies
I will command the swords there to butcher them.
I will fix my gaze on them
for their harm, not for good;
I, God YHWH, leader of armies.
I melt the earth with my touch,
so that everyone who lives there grieves,
while it all rises up like the Nile
and settles back down like that river in Egypt;
I have built heaven, my room far above,
and set my dome over the earth;
I call up the water in the ocean
and pour it out over the surface of the earth;
my name is YHWH.
Are you not like Ethiopians to me,
men of Israel?" says YHWH.
"Did I not bring the Israelites from the land of Egypt
in the way I brought the Philistines from Caphtor
and the Arameans from Kir?
The eyes of God YHWH are on this sinful kingdom;
I will destroy it off the face of the earth.
But I will not annihilate the house of Jacob completely,"
says YHWH,
"because, you see, I have given the command
to sift the house of Israel among all the nations
in the way one sifts through a sieve,
without letting a pebble fall to the ground.
All the sinners among my people will die from swords;
all those who say, 'No harm will catch up with us.'
On that day I will bring forward
the fallen shanty of David;
I will wall up its rifts
and raise up its ruins
and rebuild it as it was in ancient times,

so that they can conquer what is left of Edom
and all the nations that are to bear my name.
This is what I, YHWH, say, who will do this.”

“Yes, days are coming,”

says YHWH,

“when plowmen will overtake the reapers,
and wine-harvesters those with the seeds.

The juice of the grapes will drip down the mountains
and all the hills will run with it.

I will effect the restoration of my people Israel;
they will rebuild and inhabit the ruined cities,
plant vineyards and drink the wine,
set out gardens and eat the harvest.

I will plant them on their own ground;
never again will they be plucked out
from the land I have given them;
this is what I, your God YHWH, say.”

“So that the rest of mankind and all peoples who listen to my name will
be able to look for the Master, I will return and rebuild the fallen house
of David,” says the Master.

As Scripture says: “God came to choose from among the Gentiles a
people to bear his name. I will return and rebuild the fallen house of
David,” says the Master.

Second Reading

A Letter attributed to Barnabas

Now consider the way of light; any person who is intent on reaching
the goal he is assigned must be very careful in all he does. And these are
the directions that have been given to us for this journey: love your
Creator; have reverence for your Maker; give glory to the one who
redeemed you when you were dead; be single-minded but rich in
spiritual treasure; do not abandon God’s commandments. Do not be
conceited, and be modest in whatever you do; claim no credit for
yourself. Plot no harm to your neighbor, and do not give pride an
entrance into your heart.

Love your neighbor more than your own life. Do not kill an unborn
child through abortion, nor destroy it after birth. Do not hold back from

punishing a son or daughter; bring them up from childhood in the fear of the Master. Do not set your heart on what belongs to your neighbor, and do not give in to greed. Do not associate with arrogant people; cultivate those who are humble and virtuous.

Accept as a blessing whatever comes your way, in the knowledge that nothing ever happens without God's concurrence. Avoid double-dealing in thought or word, because this sort of deception is a deadly snare.

Share with your neighbor whatever you have, and do not say of anything, "This is mine." If you both share a treasure that cannot decay, how much more must you share what will go out of existence. Do not be careless in your speech; the mouth is a deadly snare. For your soul's good, make every effort to live chastely. Do not hold out your hand for what you can get, only to pull it back when it comes to giving. Cherish as much as the pupil in your eye anyone who speaks to you of what the Master has said.

Night and day you are to keep in mind the hour of judgment; every day you should search out the company of God's faithful, either by reporting what God has said, and giving them hearty encouragement, always considering how you can save souls by your eloquence or by working with your hands to make restitution for your past sins.

Never hesitate to give, and when you do give, never complain; then you will know the one who will repay you. Preserve the traditions you have received, adding nothing and removing nothing. Evildoers are always to be hateful to you. Be fair in your judgments. Never stir up controversy; act as peacemaker and reconcile those who are quarrelsome. Confess your sins, and do not begin to pray with a guilty conscience.

This, then, is the way of light.

I keep my foot off every evil path, so that I can keep what you say, my Master.

I do not turn away from your rules, because you have taught them to me, so that I can keep what you say, my Master.

Prayer

Dear Father of eternal goodness, our source and guide, please be close to us, listen to the prayers of everyone who praises you, forgive our sins, restore us to life, and keep us safe in your love. We make this request

through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



Thursday

First Reading

Hosea 1.1-9,3.1-5

The utterances of YHWH that came to Hosea, son of Beeri, during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and Jeroboam, son of Joash, king of Israel. In the beginning of YHWH's speaking to Hosea, YHWH said to Hosea,

“Go take as a wife a prostitute and children of the prostitute,
because the land devotes itself to prostitution,
and is turning away from YHWH.”

So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, as his wife, and she became pregnant and bore him a son. Then YHWH told him,
“Give him the name Jezreel,

because in a little while
I will punish the house of Jehu
for the bloodshed at Jezreel,
and bring an end to the kingdom
of the house of Israel.

On that day I will break Israel's bow
in the valley of Jezreel.

When she became pregnant again and bore a daughter, YHWH told him,

“Give her the name Lo-ruhama;
I no longer feel pity for the house of Israel;
in fact I utterly abhor them.

Still, I feel pity for the house of Judah;
I will save them by their God YHWH;
but I will not save them by war,
by swords or bows, by horses or horsemen.”

After she weaned Lo-ruhama, she became pregnant and bore a son. Then YHWH said,

“Give him the name Lo-ammi,
 because you are not my people,
 and I will not be your God.”
 Again, YHWH told me,
 “Give your love to a woman
 who has a lover, an adulteress,
 just as YHWH loves the people of Israel,
 though they turn to other gods
 and are fond of their raisin-cakes.”
 So I bought her for fifteen pieces of silver and a homer and lethech
 of barley. Then I said to her,
 “It will be many days that you will wait for me;
 you are not to engage in prostitution
 or belong to any man;
 and I will also wait for you”;
 because the people of Israel will have to remain for many days
 without king or authority,
 without sacrifice or sacred pillar,
 without ephod or household idols.
 Then the people of Israel will turn back
 and look for their God YHWH
 and their king David;
 they will come quivering to YHWH
 and to his beneficence, in the last days.

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people God has made his own. Once you were no people, but now you are the people of God.

Instead of being told, “You are not my people,” they will be called children of the living God. Once you were no people, but now you are the people of God.

Second Reading

A Treatise by Baldwin of Canterbury

Death is strong, because it can rob us of the gift of life; but love is also strong, because it can restore us to a better life. Death is strong, because it can strip us of this robe of flesh; but love is also strong, because it can take death’s pillage away and give it back to us. Death is

strong because no human being can withstand it; but love is also strong, because it can conquer death itself, soothe its sting, calm its violence, and bring its victory to nothing. The time will come when death is defamed and taunted, "Death, where is your sting? Death, where is your victory?"

"Love is as strong as death" because the Prince's love is the very death of death; and that is why it is said, "I will be your death, death; I will be your sting, land below the earth!" Our love for the Prince is also as strong as death, because it is itself a kind of death; it destroys the old life, roots out vice, and throws away dead deeds.

Our love for the Prince is a return, even though a very unequal one, for his love for us; and it is an image modeled on his. That is, "he loved us first," and through the example of love he gave us, he became a seal by which we are made like him. We put aside the image of the earthly man and put on the image of the heavenly man; we love him as he has loved us. That is, in this matter, "he has left us an example so that we could follow in his steps."

That is why he says, "set me upon your heart like a seal." It is as if he were saying, "Love me in the way I love you; keep me in your mind and memory, in your desires and yearnings, and in your complaints and sobs. Remember, man, the kind of being I made you; how far I set you above other creatures; the dignity I conferred upon you; the glory and honor with which I crowned you; and how I made you little less than the angels and set everything under your feet. Remember not only how much I have done for you but all the hardship and shame I have suffered for you. Yet look and see: Do you not wrong me? Do you not fail to love me? Who loves you as I do? Who created and redeemed you but I?"

Master, please take out my heart of stone, a heart so bitter and uncircumcised, and give me a new heart, a heart of flesh, a pure heart. You wash off the heart and then love the clean heart; please take possession of my heart and make it your home; let it be within you, and fill it, since you are higher than the heights of my spirit and closer to me than my innermost self. You are the model of all beauty and the seal of all holiness; please set the seal of your image on my heart. In your mercy, set your seal upon my heart, "God of my heart and the God who is my share forever." Amen.

Love is as strong as death; its flames are like a blazing fire. Deep water

cannot quench love.

There is no greater love than this: to give up your life for those you love. Deep water cannot quench love.

Prayer

Dear Father of eternal goodness, our source and guide, please be close to us, listen to the prayers of everyone who praises you, forgive our sins, restore us to life, and keep us safe in your love. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Hosea 2.4,10-25

This is what is said by YHWH:

“Protest against your mother! Protest!

Because she is not my wife,

and I am not her husband;

have her get rid of her prostitution from in front of her.

Since she has not known

that I was the one

who gave her wheat, wine, and oil,

and her vast store of silver

and gold, which they used for Baal,

that is why I will take back my wheat at harvest-time

and my wine when the grapes are ripe;

I will tear away my wool and my flax,

which she uses to cover her nakedness.

And in this way I will now expose her shame

before the eyes of her lovers,

and no one can rescue her out of my hands.

I will bring an end to all her joy:

her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths,

and all her solemnities.

I will demolish her vines and fig trees,

of which she said, 'These are the wages
 my lovers have given me.'
 I will turn them into weeds
 and wild animals will eat them up.
 I will punish her for the days of the Baals
 to whom she burnt incense,
 while she decorated herself with her rings and jewels,
 and in going after her lovers
 forgot me," says YHWH.
 "And that is why I will hedge in her path with thorns
 and build a wall up against her,
 so that she cannot find her way.
 If she runs after her lovers, she will not catch up with them;
 if she looks for them, she will not find them.
 Then she will say,
 'I will go back to my first husband,
 because it was better with me than now.'
 And so I will tantalize her;
 I will lead her into the desert
 and speak to her heart.
 From there, I will give her the vineyards she had
 and the valley of Achor as a door to hope;
 and she will respond there as she did when she was young,
 when she came up out of the land of Egypt.
 On that day," says YHWH,
 "she will call me 'my husband'
 and never again 'my baal, my lord.'
 Then I will remove from her mouth the Baals' names
 so that they will no longer be invoked.
 I will make a treaty for them on that day
 with the animals in the fields,
 the birds in the air
 and the things that crawl on the ground.
 I will destroy from the land
 bow, sword, and war,
 and I will let them rest in security.
 I will marry you to me forever;

I will marry you legally and morally;
 I will marry you with faithfulness,
 and you will know YHWH.
 On that day, I will respond," says YHWH;
 "I will respond to the heavens
 and they will respond to the earth.
 The earth will respond to the wheat, wine, and oil,
 and they will respond to Jezreel.
 I will plant him for myself in the land,
 and I will have pity for Lo-ruhama.
 I will say to Lo-ammi, 'You are my people,'
 and he will say, 'My God!'"

This is the Lamb's wedding-day; the bride has prepared herself. It is a privilege to be invited to the marriage-feast of the Lamb.

I will marry you to myself in faithfulness, and you will know the Master. It is a privilege to be invited to the marriage-feast of the Lamb.

Second Reading

Spiritual Canticle by St. John of the Cross

The soul that is united to God and transformed in him draws from within God a divine breath, much like the Supreme God himself. And God, who has his home in the soul, breathes out the life of the soul as its prototype. This is what I take Paul to mean when he said, "Because you are children of God, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying 'Abba': 'Dad!'" This is what takes place in those who have achieved perfection.

One should not be surprised that the soul is capable of so sublime an activity; because if God so favors her that she is made God-like by union with the supremely holy Trinity, I then ask you why it should seem so incredible that the soul, which is at one with the Trinity and in the greatest possible likeness to it, should share the understanding, knowledge, and love which God achieves in himself.

How this is possible no other power or wisdom can express, except by explaining how the Son of God obtained this sublime state for us and won for us the power to be the children of God, as he asked of the Father, "Father, I desire that those you have given me will be with me where I am, so that they will see the glory you have given me," that is,

so that they will share with certainty the very task I perform.

And then he said, "I am not asking simply for them, but also for those who will come to believe in me through their teaching; that they will all be one thing as you, Father, are one thing in me and I am one thing in you; so that they will be one thing in us, for the world to believe that you sent me. And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they will be one thing just exactly as we are: I in them, and you in me; so that they will be complete, and the world will know that you sent me, and that I have loved them in the same way you loved me."

In this way, the Father gives them the same love he shares with the Son, though this is not by nature as it is with the Son, but through unity and transformation out of love. One should not think that the Son is asking the Father to make the saints one thing with him in essence and nature in the way the Son is one thing with the Father, but that they are united with him in love, just as the Father and the Son are one and the same thing in the essential unity of love. And so, souls possess the same goods by participation that the Son possesses by nature; and as a result, they are in reality divine by participation, and equals and companions of God.

In this way, Peter said, "May grace and peace be made complete in you in the knowledge of God and Jesus the Prince, our Master; because everything from his divine power, which is given to us for our life and goodness, is given through the knowledge of the one who called us to his own glory and power, by which he has given us great and priceless promises, so that we will become sharers of the divine nature." So the soul, in this union which God has decreed, joins in the work of the Trinity, not yet fully as in the life to come, but nonetheless even now in a real and perceptible way.

My soul, created to enjoy such exquisite gifts, what are you doing? Where is your life going? How miserable is the blindness of Adam's children, if we are really blind to such a brilliant light and deaf to so insistent a voice!

See how great is the love the Father has given us: We are called God's children, and that is what we are.

We know that when he appears, we will be like him, because we will see him as he really is. We are called God's children, and that is what we

are.

Prayer

Dear Father of eternal goodness, our source and guide, please be close to us, listen to the prayers of everyone who praises you, forgive our sins, restore us to life, and keep us safe in your love. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Hosea 6.1-7.2

This is what is said by YHWH:

“In their torment, they will look for me:

‘Come, let us return to YHWH,

because he is the one who has torn us, but he will heal us;

he has stabbed us, but he will bandage our wounds.

He will revive us after two days;

on the third day, he will lift us up

to live in his presence.

Let us know—let us make efforts to know—YHWH;

his coming is as certain as the dawn,

and his doom shines out like the light of day.

He will come to us like the rain,

like a spring watering the earth.’

What can I do with you, Ephraim?

What can I do with you, Judah?

Your devotion is like a morning cloud,

like the dew that vanishes as the day advances.

This was why I stabbed them through the prophets;

I slaughtered them with the words that came from my mouth;

because it is love I want, not sacrifice,

and knowledge of God rather than holocausts.

But they violated the Treaty in their land;

it was there that they were untrue to me.

Gilead is a city of immoral men,
 tracked with blood.
 As if they were bandits ambushing a man,
 a band of priests kill people on the way to Shechem,
 and commit a monstrous crime.
 In the house of Israel I have seen something horrible:
 Prostitution is found there in Ephraim;
 Israel is defiled.
 And for you too, Judah,
 a harvest-time has been set.
 When I would effect restoration of my people,
 when I would heal Israel,
 the guilt of Ephraim stares out at me,
 with the immorality of Samaria;
 they practice lies,
 thieves break in and bandits loot the streets;
 and they do not remind themselves
 that I remember all their evil.
 Even now their crimes surround them
 and are present to my sight.”

Go and learn the meaning of these words: I want a loving heart more than sacrifice; knowledge of my ways more than holocausts.

Your love is like a morning cloud, and like dew that quickly evaporates. I want a loving heart more than sacrifice; knowledge of my ways more than holocausts.

Second Reading Treatise Against Heresies by St. Irenaeus

So that they would be rescued, God demanded of these men of ancient times faith, obedience, and virtue, not sacrifices and holocausts. God expressed his will when he taught them in the words of Hosea, “I want mercy more than sacrifices, and the knowledge of God more than holocausts.” Our Master’s warning to them was the same: “If you had known what was meant by the words, ‘I want mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would never have condemned people who were not guilty.” he gave evidence that the prophets had spoken the truth; he also brought home to his listeners the stupidity of their own sin.

In addition, he instructed his students to offer to God the firstfruits of creation, not because God had any need, but so that they would not be unproductive and ungrateful themselves. This is why he took bread, a part of his creation, expressed gratitude and said, "This is my body." In the same way he declared that the cup, an element of the same creation as ourselves, was his blood; he taught them that this was the new sacrifice of the new Treaty. The Church has received this sacrifice from the Emissaries; through the world she offers to God, who feeds us, the firstfruits of his own gifts, under the new Treaty. It was foretold by Malachi, one of the twelve prophets, in the words, "I take no pleasure in you, says the Omnipotent Master, and I will accept no sacrifice from your hands; because from the rising of the sun to its setting, the Gentiles give glory to my name, and in every place incense and spotless sacrifice are offered to my name; my name is great among the Gentiles, says the Omnipotent Master."

But what name is glorified among the Gentiles if not that of our Master, through whom glory is given both to the Father and to man. And since this name belongs to his only Son, who became man by the Father's will, the Father calls this name his own. If a king were to paint a picture of his son, he could claim it as his own on two counts: because it is his son's picture, and because he made it himself. In the same way, the Father declares that the name of Prince Jesus, which is glorified in the Church throughout the world, is his own, because it is his Son's name and because he wrote it to save mankind.

And so, since the Son's name belongs to the Father, and since the Church makes its offerings through Prince Jesus to the Omnipotent God, for these two reasons the prophet is right when he says, "In every place incense and a pure sacrifice are offered to my name." In the Book of Revelation, John speaks of incense as "the prayer of the sacred people."

"This is my body which will be given up for you; this is the blood of the new Treaty, which will be shed for you, says the Master. "Whenever you receive them, do this in memory of me."

"Come, eat my bread and drink the wine I have mixed for you. Whenever you receive them, do this in memory of me."

Prayer

Dear Father of eternal goodness, our source and guide, please be close to us, listen to the prayers of everyone who praises you, forgive our sins, restore us to life, and keep us safe in your love. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading

Hosea 11.1-11

This is what is said by YHWH:

“When Israel was a child, I loved him;

I called my son out of Egypt.

But the more I called them,

the farther they went from me,

sacrificing to the Baals

and burning incense to idols.

And yet, I was the one who taught Ephraim to walk,

who took them in my arms;

I drew them to me with human cords,

with bands of love;

I nurtured them like one

who raises an infant to his cheeks;

yet, though I stooped to feed my child,

they did not know that I was the one who healed them.

He will return to the land of Egypt,

and Assyria will be his king;

Swords will begin attacking his cities

and end by consuming his open spaces.

Because they refused to change heart,

their own advice will eat them up.

His people are in suspense about returning to him;

and God will not lift them up,

though they call out to him in unison.

How could I give you up, Ephraim,

or hand you over, Israel?
 How could I treat you like Admah
 or make you into Zeboiim?
 My heart is overwhelmed;
 my pity is awakened;
 I will not give vent to my blazing anger;
 I will not destroy Ephraim again;
 because I am God, not a man,
 the Holy One who is there among you;
 I will not let the flames consume you.
 They will follow YHWH
 who is roaring like a lion;
 and when he roars
 his sons will come in trepidation from the west;
 they will come out of Egypt, trembling like sparrows,
 and from the land of Assyria, like doves;
 and I will resettle them in their homes,”
 says YHWH.

My heart recoils inside me; my whole being trembles with pity. I will not give vent to my fierce anger, because I am God, not a man.

I loved you with an everlasting love; I drew you to myself in mercy. I will not give vent to my fierce anger, because I am God, not a man.

Second Reading

*A Dialogue on Divine Providence
by St. Catherine of Siena*

My sweet Master, please look with mercy upon your people and especially on the mystical body of your Church. Greater glory is given to your name for pardoning a great many of your creatures than if I alone were pardoned for my great sins against your majesty. It would be no consolation for me to enjoy your life if your holy people remained in death; because I see that sin darkens the life of your bride the Church—my sin and the sins of others.

It is a special grace I ask for, this pardon for the creatures you have made in your image and likeness. When you created man, you were moved by love to make him in your own image. Surely only love could dignify your creatures in this way. But I know very well that man lost the

dignity you gave him; he deserved to lose it, since he had committed sin.

Because you were prompted by love and wanted to bring the human race into conformity to yourself, you gave us the only Son you ever fathered. He became our liaison with you and our virtue by taking on all our vice and sin out of obedience to your will, eternal Father, just as you willed that he take on our human nature. What an immeasurably profound love! Your Son went down from the heights of his divinity to the depths of our humanity. Can anyone's heart remain closed and hardened after this?

We reflect your divinity, but you reflect our humanity in that union of the two which you have wrought in a man. You have veiled the divinity in a cloud, in the clay of our humanity. Only your love could dignify the flesh of Adam in this way. And so, by reason of this immeasurable love, I beg you, with all the strength of my soul, that you freely extend your mercy to all your miserable creatures.

I will sing of kindness of virtue; I will sing to you, Master; I will persevere in the way that is blameless.

When will you come to me? I will walk with purity of heart within my house; I will persevere in the way that is blameless.

Prayer

Omnipotent, eternally living God, since your Spirit made us your children, with the confidence to call you Father, please increase your Spirit within us and bring us to our promised inheritance. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

This is what is said by YHWH:
 "Return, Israel, to your God YHWH;

Hoshea 14.2-10

you have collapsed through your guilt.
 Take words with you
 and return to YHWH;
 tell him, 'Please forgive all our disobedience,
 and accept what is good, so that we can make
 offerings of the young bulls from our stalls.
 Assyria will not save us,
 and we will have no horses to mount;
 We will no longer say, "Our god"
 to what our hands have made;
 because you are the one who pities orphans.'
 I will heal their repudiation of me;
 I will love them freely;
 because my anger is turned away from them.
 I will be like dew for Israel;
 he will blossom like a lily;
 he will send down roots like cedars on Lebanon,
 and sprout up again.
 His splendor will be like an olive tree,
 and his fragrance like a Lebanon cedar.
 People will live in his shade again
 and raise their grain;
 they will blossom like vines,
 and he will be as famous as Lebanon wine.
 As to Ephraim, what more does he have to do with idols?
 I have humbled him, but I will make him prosper.
 "I am like a green cypress,"
 but you bear fruit because of me.
 Wise men should understand all this;
 it is for men of good judgment to know them.
 YHWH's paths are straight,
 and honest people walk in them,
 but there is where sinners stumble.

I will heal their unfaithfulness; I will love them with all my heart, because
 my anger is turned away from them.
 I will avenge their blood; the guilty will not go unpunished, and the

Master will make his home in Zion, because my anger is turned away from them.

Second Reading

*A Treatise on the Master's Incarnation
by Theodoret of Cyr*

Jesus ran of his own free will to meet those sufferings that were foretold in the Scriptures about him. He had forewarned his students about them several times; he had reprimanded Peter for being reluctant to accept the announcement of his suffering, and had made it clear that it was through his suffering that the world's rescue was to be effected.

This was why he stepped forward and presented himself to those in search of him, when he said, "I am the one you are looking for." For the same reason, he made no reply when he was accused, and refused to hide when he could have done so, although in the past he had slipped away on more than one occasion when they had tried to arrest him.

Jesus also wept over Jerusalem, because by her unwillingness to believe, she was bent on her own ruin, and he passed the sentence of total destruction on the Temple, which once was so famous. He put up patiently with being slapped in the face by a man who was a slave twice over: in body and in spirit. He allowed himself to be punched, spat upon, insulted, tortured, whipped, and finally crucified. He accepted two robbers as his companions in punishment, on his right and his left. He endured being categorized with murderers and criminals. He drank the vinegar and bitter gall produced by the unfaithful vineyard of Israel. He submitted to crowning with thorns instead of vine twigs and grapes; he was ridiculed with the purple cloak, holes were dug in his hands and feet, and in the end, he was carried to the grave.

All this is what he endured in working out our rescue; because, since those who were enslaved to sin were answerable to the penalties of sin, he himself, though he was exempt from sin and walked along the path of perfect virtue, underwent the punishment of sinners. By his cross, he erased the decree of the ancient curse; because, as Paul says, "The Prince redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us, because it is written, 'Everyone who is hanged on a tree is accursed.'" And by his crown of thorns, he put an end to that punishment meted out to Adam, who after his sin heard the sentence, "Because of you the ground is cursed; it will bring up thorns and thistles for you."

In tasting the gall, Jesus took on himself the bitterness and labor of man's mortal, painful life. By drinking the vinegar, he made his own the degradation men had suffered, and in the same act gave us the grace to better our condition. By the purple robe, he signified his royalty, by the stick, he hinted at the weakness and rottenness of the devil's power; by taking the slap in the face and suffering in this way the violence, corrections and blows that were due to us, he announced our freedom.

His side was pierced as Adam's was; and yet there came out, not a woman, who in her deception was to be the death-bearer, but a spring of life that regenerates the world by its two streams: one to renew us in the font of the Bath and dress us in the robe of immortality, the other to feed us after being reborn at God's dinner, just as infants are nourished with milk.

He was pierced for our infractions; he was crushed for our sins. The punishment that gives us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

The Prince took our sins upon his own body, and was nailed to the cross so that we could die to sin and live for holiness, and by his wounds we are healed.

Prayer

Omnipotent, eternally living God, since your Spirit made us your children, with the confidence to call you Father, please increase your Spirit within us and bring us to our promised inheritance. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Listen to me, leaders of Jacob,
 those of you in charge of the house of Israel:
 Is it not your duty to know what is right?
 You hate what is good and love evil;

Micah 3.1-12

you tear the skin from the people
and the meat off their bones!
They eat the meat of my people
and flay off their skin
and break their bones.
They chop them in pieces like fish in a kettle
or meat in a pot.
When they cry to YHWH,
he will not answer them;
he will hide his face away from them then
because of the evil they have done.
This is what YHWH says about the prophets
who are leading my people astray—
those who, when their teeth have something to chew
proclaim peace,
but when someone puts nothing into their mouths
announce war against him.
“For this reason you will have night, not sight,
darkness, not visions”;
The sun will go down on the prophets,
and the day will be dark for them.
The visionaries will then be disgraced
and the diviners befuddled;
they will put their hands over their lips—all of them—
because there is no answer from God.
But *I* am filled with power,
with YHWH’s Spirit,
with authority and might;
power to tell Jacob his crimes
and to inform Israel of his sins.
Listen to this, leaders of the house of Jacob,
those of you in charge of the house of Israel:
You detest what is virtuous
and pervert everything that is right;
you build up Zion with bloodshed
and construct Jerusalem with immorality.
Her leaders hand down verdicts for a bribe;

her priests take wages to make decisions;
 her prophets make predictions for money—
 and yet they rely on YHWH, and say,
 “Is not YHWH among us?
 No harm can come to us!”
 This is why, because of you
 Zion will be plowed like a field,
 and Jerusalem be reduced to rubble,
 and the mountain of the Temple
 will become a forest ridge.

My God, the pagans have invaded your domain; they have desecrated your holy Temple and left Jerusalem in ruins! Please do not disappoint us, and in your great mercy deal gently with us.

We have sinned and disobeyed by deserting you. Please do not disappoint us, and in your great mercy deal gently with us.

Second Reading

*A Treatise on the Master's Incarnation
by Theodoret of Cyr*

Our Savior's suffering is a healing remedy for us, as the prophet teaches when he cries, “He is carrying our sins and suffering pain for us, and we thought of him as cursed, struck by God, and miserable. But it was for our sins that he was wounded, and he was bruised for our immorality; the chastisement of our peace was upon him. We had all gone astray like sheep,” and that is why “he was led like a lamb to slaughter, and was as dumb as a sheep before its shearer.”

When a shepherd sees that his sheep have scattered, he keeps one of them on a leash and leads it to the pastures he chooses, and in this way he draws the other sheep back to him by this one. And so it was when God saw that the human race had gone astray; he “took the form of a slave” and united it to himself, and by it won over the whole race of men to him, luring back the sheep that were grazing in bad pastures and exposed to wolves, and leading them to God's pastures.

This was the purpose for which our Savior took on our nature, and this was why our Prince and Master accepted the sufferings that brought rescue to us, and was sent to his death and committed to the tomb. He broke the grip of age-old tyranny and promised incorruptibility to those

who were prisoners of decay; because when he rebuilt the temple that had been destroyed and raised it up again, he gave trustworthy, firm promises by this to those who had died and were waiting for his return to life.

Jesus tells us, “Just as my human nature, which I took from you, has won its return to life in virtue of the divinity that had its home in it and with which it was united, just as this nature has shed decay and suffering and passed over to incorruptibility and immortality; in that same way you will be set free too from the agonizing slavery of death; you will also throw off your corruptible nature and your sufferings and will be dressed in unchangeability.”

And for this purpose, he imparted the gift of the Bath to all mankind through his Emissaries. “Go,” he said, “make students of every nation, and bathe them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” The Bath is a kind of symbol and precursor of the Master’s death, which is why Paul says, “If we have shared with God’s Son a death like his, we will surely share in his return to life.”

I am giving up my life for my sheep; no one is taking it from me; I am giving it up of my own free will.

I left my house and abandoned my inheritance; I handed my dearest possession over into the hands of its enemies; I am giving it up of my own free will.

Prayer

Omnipotent, eternally living God, since your Spirit made us your children, with the confidence to call you Father, please increase your Spirit within us and bring us to our promised inheritance. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



Wednesday

First Reading

This is what is said by YHWH:

Micah 4.1-7

“In days to come,
 the mountain of YHWH’s house
 will be set up higher than the other mountains;
 it will soar above the hills,
 and peoples will stream to it;
 many nations will come and say,
 ‘Come, let us climb YHWH’s mountain
 to the house of the God of Jacob,
 so that he will teach us his ways
 for us to walk in his paths.’
 Because teaching will go out from Zion
 and God’s utterances will come from Jerusalem.”
 YHWH will judge cases between many peoples
 and impose terms on strong and distant nations;
 they will beat their swords into plowshares
 and their spears into pruning hooks;
 one nation will not take up swords against another,
 and they will not train for wars again.
 Every man will sit under his own vine
 or under his own fig tree, undisturbed;
 because YHWH’s mouth has spoken this.
 You see, each people walks
 in the name of its god;
 but we will walk in YHWH’s name
 the name of our God, forever and ever.
 “On that day,” says YHWH,
 “I will gather the lame together,
 and I will assemble the outcasts
 and those I have tormented;
 I will make a remnant of the lame
 and I will make a strong nation of those driven into exile;
 and YHWH will be king over them on Mount Zion
 from now on forever.”

Come, let us go up to the Master’s mountain to the house of the God
 of Jacob. He will teach us his ways and we will walk in his paths.
 The Messiah, who is called the Prince, is coming, and when he comes

he will teach us everything. He will teach us his ways and we will walk in his paths.

Second Reading

Discourse on the Psalms by St. Augustine

“We have seen what we heard about.” You, my Church, have really been blessed; you have both heard and seen. You heard the promises, and you see their fulfillment; you heard about it in prophesy, and you see it in the Good News. Yes, all that has now been brought to completion was prophesied in times past. Look up, then and cast your gaze around the world; see God’s people, your heritage, spread to the ends of the earth. See the Scripture now fulfilled: “All the kings of the earth will adore him, and all the nations will serve him.”

See fulfilled what has been said, “Rise up above the heavens, my God, and lift your glory up above the earth.” See the one whose hands and feet were pierced by nails, whose bones were counted as they hung upon the wood, and for whose clothes they played at dice. See reigning the one whom they saw hanging on the cross; see enthroned in heaven the one they despised when he walked on the earth. “All the ends of the earth will turn to the Master, and all the nations will worship in his presence.” See all this and shout with joy, “We have seen what we have heard.”

It is right, then, for the Church to be itself called from among the Gentiles and told: “Listen, my daughter, and see, and forget your people and your father’s house.” Listen and see. First you hear what you do not see; later, you will see what you have heard; because he says, “A people I did not know became my slaves; as soon as they heard me they obeyed.” If they “obeyed as soon as they heard,” it follows that they did not see.

But then what of the passage, “Those who were not told of him will see, and those who have not heard will understand?” Those to whom the prophets were not sent were the first to hear and understand the prophets, while those who at first did not hear them were astonished when they heard them later. Those to whom the prophets were sent remained behind; they possessed the books of Scripture, but did not understand the truth; they had the tablets of the Law but did not keep their inheritance. “We have heard what we have seen” also applies to us.

“In the city of the Master of armies; in the city of our God”; that is

where we heard it; and there is where we have seen it. “God has made this city firm forever.” No one should say with pride, “See, the Prince is here; see, he is there.” Such a claim only leads to factions. But God has promised unity. The kings were assembled in unity, not scattered by schisms. Yet will it be perhaps that that city which has gained possession of the world will at some time be overthrown? No, “God has made it firm forever.” If God has made its foundation firm forever, how can you be afraid that this foundation will collapse?

I will set up my home among you and will not reject you; I will walk among you; I will be your God and you will be my people.

You are the Temple of the living God, as God himself has said; I will walk among you; I will be your God and you will be my people.

Prayer

Omnipotent, eternally living God, since your Spirit made us your children, with the confidence to call you Father, please increase your Spirit within us and bring us to our promised inheritance. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Micah 4.14-5.7

This is what is said by YHWH:

“Now fence yourself in, Bat-gader.

‘They have besieged us!’

They have taken a rod and struck the cheek
of the ruler of Israel.

But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah,
too small to be among the clans of Judah:

From you will come forward for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel;
one whose origin is from the far past,
from ancient times.”

That is why YHWH will give them up, until the time
when the one who is to give birth has given birth
and the rest of his brothers and sisters return
to the children of Israel.

“He will stand firm and shepherd his flock
by YHWH’s strength,
in the majestic name of his God YHWH;
and they will remain, because his greatness will now
reach to the ends of the earth;
he will be peace.

If Assyria invades our country
and sets foot on our land,
we will bring forward against it seven shepherds,
eight men of royal rank;
and they will tend the land of Assyria with swords,
and the land of Nimrod with drawn sabers;
and we will be rescued from Assyria
if it invades our land
and sets foot within our borders.

The remnant of Jacob will exist
in the midst of many peoples,
like dew coming from YHWH,
like raindrops on the grass,
which wait for no one
and do not linger for mere human beings.

And the remnant of Jacob will be there among the nations,
in the midst of many peoples,
like a lion among the beasts in the forest,
like a lion cub among flocks of sheep;
when it passes through, it tramples and tears
and there is no one to come to the rescue.

Bethlehem, city of the Supreme God, from you will come a ruler for
Israel whose origin will go back to the distant past, to ancient times; his
greatness will reach to the ends of the earth, and he will be peace.

He will proclaim peace to the nations; his authority will extend from
sea to sea; and he will be peace.

*Second Reading**A Treatise on Christian Perfection
by St. Gregory of Nyssa*

“He is our peace, because he has made both one thing.” Since we think of the Prince as our peace, we can call ourselves true Christians only if our lives express the Prince by our own peace. As the Emissary says, “He has put enmity to death.” We must never allow it to be revived in us in any way; we must declare that it is absolutely dead. God has gloriously slaughtered enmity, to save us; we ought never to risk the life of our souls by being resentful or bearing grudges. We must not awaken that enmity or call it back to life by our immorality, because it is better left dead.

No, since we possess the Prince who is peace, we must put an end to enmity and live as we believe he lived. He broke down the separating wall, uniting what was divided, bringing about peace by reconciling in his single person those who disagreed. In the same way, we must be brought into harmony not only with those who attack us from outside, but even with those who stir up discord within; matter will then not be opposed to the spirit, or the spirit to matter. Once we subject the wisdom of matter to God’s law, we will be re-created as one single man at peace. Then, after we have become a unit instead of a duality, we will have peace within ourselves.

Now peace is defined as harmony among those who are divided; and so when we end that civil war within our nature and cultivate peace within ourselves, we become peace. By this peace, we demonstrate that the name of the Prince, which we bear, is authentic and appropriate.

When we consider that the Prince is the real light that has nothing in common with deceit, we learn that our own life also must shine with the rays of that true light. Now these rays of the Sun of Virtue are the virtues which pour out to illuminate us so that “we will take off the deeds of darkness and walk honorably as in broad daylight.” When we reject the deeds of darkness and do everything in the light of day, we become light and, as light should, we give light to others by our actions.

If we really think of the Prince as our source of holiness, we will hold back from anything immoral or impure in thought or action, and in this way show ourselves to be fit bearers of his name; because the quality of holiness is not shown in what we say, but in what we do in life.

The dawn from above will break upon us to guide our feet into the path of peace.

It will shine on those who live in darkness and the shadow of death to guide our feet into the path of peace.

Prayer

Omnipotent, eternally living God, since your Spirit made us your children, with the confidence to call you Father, please increase your Spirit within us and bring us to our promised inheritance. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Micah 6.1-15

Listen now to what YHWH says:

“Come forward, plead your case to the mountains
and let the hills hear your voice.

Listen, mountains, to YHWH’s case,
and you also, earth’s firm foundations,
because YHWH has a complaint against his people
and he will bring a suit against Israel.

My people, what have I done to you?
How have I annoyed you?
Answer me!

I brought you out of the land of Egypt,
I released you from slavery,
and I set Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to lead you.

My people, remember now
what the King of Moab Balak planned
and what Balaam son of Beor answered
from Shittim to Gilgal,
so you will know YHWH’s virtue.”

What am I to take with me to YHWH
as I bow before the Supreme God?

108 Nineteenth Week in ORDINARY TIME

Shall I come before him with holocausts
of year-old calves?
Will YHWH be pleased with thousands of rams
or millions of rivers of oil?
Shall I give him my first-born for my crime?
Shall I give my own body's harvest for the sin of my soul?
He has shown you, mortal man, what is good;
what does YHWH ask of you
except to act virtuously
to love mercy,
and to behave humbly before your God?
Listen! YHWH's voice is calling to the city,
and wisdom will pay attention to your name.
"Pay attention, authorities
and those set up as leaders!
Are there still ill-gotten treasures
in houses full of corruption,
and short measures that are a disgrace?
Am I to call pure these tampered, short weights?
No, her rich are full of violence;
those who live there are liars
with tongues full of deception.
And so I will strike you with disease
and wipe you out because of your sins.
You will eat without being satisfied,
and hunger will be all around you.
You may rescue a bit, but you will not keep it,
and what you glean looters will take.
You will plant and not reap;
you will trample the olives, but not rub the oil on yourselves;
you will make sweet wine, but never drink it.

The Master told you, mortal man, what is good, and this is what he expects of you: to do what is right, to love goodness, and to behave humbly before your God.

Trust in the Master and do good, and you will own the land, and this is what he expects of you: to do what is right, to love goodness, and to

behave humbly before your God.

Second Reading

A Sermon on the Bath by St. Pacian

Adam's sin had come into every man. The Emissary says, "Sin entered through one man, and death entered through sin." And so, the Prince's virtue must enter men; and in the same way as the old Adam destroyed his descendants through sin, the Prince must bring new life to every man through virtue. The Emissary stresses this theme when he says, "Since through the disobedience of one man, many, many people became sinners, through the obedience of one man, many, many people were made virtuous. And in the same way sin brought death to the offender, the gift given through virtue brings birth to eternal life."

But someone may tell me, "But it is reasonable for Adam's sin to be transmitted to his posterity, because they were descended from him. But since we are not the Prince's descendants, then how can we be saved because of him?" Do not think about "descent" in physical terms, and then you will see how the Prince is our father. In these times of rescue, the Prince received his body and soul from Mary; he came to save this soul, not to leave it in the land of the dead. He united it with his spirit and made it his own; and this is the Master's marriage: the union of two in one physical body, so that, consistently with that great mystery, two—the Prince and his Church—become one body.

It is from this marriage that Christian people are born, by the descent of the Master's Spirit. The essential nature of the soul, sired by heavenly sperm, grows in the womb of our mother, the Church, and at birth is given life by the Prince. And so the Emissary says, "The first Adam was a living soul, the new Adam a life-giving spirit." In this way, the Prince remains in the Church through his priests, as that same Emissary says, "I have become your sire in the Prince." Hence, the sperm of the Prince, that is, the Spirit of God, generates the new man, nourished in the womb of his mother, welcomed at his birth at the font through the hands of the priests, while faith presides over the ceremony.

The Prince, therefore, must be received in order to father; because the Emissary John says, "To everyone who did accept him, he gave the power to become a child of God." But this cannot be achieved except by the sacrament of the font, the ointment, and the priest; that is, sin is washed off by the water in the font; the Holy Spirit is poured out in the

ointment; and we receive both of these gifts through the hands and mouth of the priest. And in this way, the whole man is reborn and renewed in the Prince. “In the same way as the Prince came back to life, we will conduct ourselves in the newness of our lives”; that is, we will put away the errors of our old lives and follow the new way through the spirit in the Prince.

In the same way as by one man’s disobedience many, many people became sinners, by one man’s obedience many, many people will be made virtuous. Just as sin was king through death, so grace will be king to bring us to eternal life through Prince Jesus.

God sent his only Son as an offering for our sins. Just as sin was king through death, so grace will be king to bring us to eternal life through Prince Jesus.

Prayer

Omnipotent, eternally living God, since your Spirit made us your children, with the confidence to call you Father, please increase your Spirit within us and bring us to our promised inheritance. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Micah 7.7-20

And so I will look to YHWH,
 and I will wait for the God of my rescue;
 my God will listen to me.
 Do not gloat over me, my enemy.
 When I fall down, I will get up again;
 when I sit in darkness,
 YHWH will be my light.
 I will put up with YHWH’s exasperation
 because I have sinned against him—
 until he takes up my case

and restores my rights.
He will bring me out into the light,
and I will see his virtue.
Then the woman who is my enemy will see this,
and chagrin will cover the one who told me,
“Where is your God YHWH?”
My eyes will see her
as she is trampled down
like mud in the streets.
On the day your walls are to be built,
the orders will go far and wide.
On that day Assyria and Egypt
will come to you,
and people will come from Tyre to the River
from sea to sea,
from mountain to mountain.
But the land will be abandoned
because of its inhabitants,
as the result of what it has done.
Shepherd your people with your crook;
take care of the flock you inherited:
those who live alone in the woods
on the slopes of Carmel;
pasture them in Bashan and Gilead
as they did in olden times.
“I will show them wonders,
as I did when you came out of the land of Egypt.:
The Gentiles will see this to their chagrin, in spite of their strength;
they will put their hands over their mouths;
their ears will be deaf
and they will lick the dust like a serpent.
They will crawl from their holes like snakes out of the ground
and they will be afraid of our God YHWH,
and be in awe of you.
Is there any God like you,
pardoning wrongs
and ignoring the disobedience of what remains of his inheritance?

He does not keep his anger forever
 because his pleasure is in mercy;
 and he will have pity on us once again
 and will trample our evil deeds.

You will throw all our sins
 into the depths of the ocean.

You will give truth to Jacob
 and mercy to Abraham,
 as you swore to our ancestors
 from ancient times.

The one who is to come will come; he will not delay. There will be no more fear in our land, because he is our savior.

He will wash off our guilt and throw all our sins into the depths of the ocean, because he is our savior.

Second Reading

A Sermon on the Bath by St. Pacian

“Just as we carry the image of the earthly man, we will carry the image of the one who is from heaven; since the first man who came from earth is earthly, the one who came from heaven is heavenly.” And so, my dear friends, we will not die any more. Even if we fall asleep in this body, we will be alive in the Prince, as he said, “Anyone who believes in me will be alive even if he is dead.”

And because the Master is our witness, we are certain that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all God’s saints are alive; because the Master says about them, “They are all alive, because God is a God of the living, not of corpses.” And the Emissary says of himself, “For me, to live is the Prince, and to die is a benefit. I would rather die and be with the Prince.” And again, “But while we are still in this body we are away from God, because we are guided by faith and not sight.” This is what we believe, my brothers that I love.

And for the rest, “If we place our hope in this world, we are the sorriest human beings there are.” Life in this world, whether it is that of wild or tame animals or birds, as you yourselves see, is either like ours or even more painful. What is peculiar to man, and what the Prince gives through his Spirit, is eternal life—but only if we do not commit sin any longer. And so, death is gained by sin and avoided by right living; life is

lost through sin and preserved by right living. “The wages of sin is death; the gift of God is eternal life through our Master Prince Jesus.”

It is the Prince who redeemed us, as the Emissary says: “By forgiving all our sins and destroying what was recorded against us by disobedience, he carried our burden in public view, fixed it on the cross, stripped them in himself.” He unlocked our shackles and destroyed our chains, as David had said: “The Master lifts up what has been thrown down; the Master frees those in shackles; the Master gives light to the blind.” And again, “You have destroyed my chains; I will offer sacrifice to you with praise.” And so when we come to the sign of the Master in the sacrament of the Bath, we are freed from these chains and emancipated by the blood of the Prince and by his name.

And so, my friends, we are washed clean only once; we are freed only once; we are accepted into the immortal kingdom once and for all. Once and for all “have those whose sins are forgiven and whose stains are erased received a blessing.” Hold fast to what you have received; preserve it with joy, and do not sin any longer. Keep yourselves as children washed clean by that sacrament and made spotless for the Master’s day.

The first man was formed from the dirt of the earth; the second man is from heaven; and just as we resemble the dirty man, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

You have stripped your old self off and become a new man; and you advance toward true knowledge the more you are formed again in the image of your Creator; and just as we resemble the dirty man, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Prayer

Omnipotent and eternally living God, since your Spirit made us your children, with the confidence to call you Father, please increase your Spirit within us and bring us to our promised inheritance. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading

Isaiah 6.1-13

In the year King Uzziah died, I saw YHWH seated on a very high throne, far up in the air, with the train of his robe filling the Temple. Above it stood seraphim, each with six wings, two of which covered his face, two his feet, and two which he used to fly. One cried to the other, “Holy! Holy! Holy! YHWH, commander of armies! The whole earth is full of his glory!” And the doorposts were shaken with the sound of his cry, and the Temple filled with smoke. And I said, “No! No! I am doomed!

Because I am a man whose lips are defiled,
and I live among people with unclean lips;
and my eyes have seen the King,
YHWH, the commander of armies!”

Then one of the seraphim flew down to me, carrying in his hand a live coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. He touched my mouth with it, and said,

“Now that this has touched your lips,
your defilement is removed
and your sin is purged.”

I also heard YHWH’s voice say,
“Who is the one I shall send?
Who is to go for us?”

I answered, “I am here; send me.” And he said, “Go, and tell the people,
Keep listening, but understand nothing;
keep seeing and perceive nothing.
Make the hearts of this people stupid,

their ears heavy,
 and close their eyes,
 to keep them from seeing with their eyes
 and hearing with their ears
 and understanding with their hearts
 and returning to be healed.”
 Then I said, “How long is this to be?” And he answered,
 “Until the cities are demolished and uninhabited,
 the houses are without a man,
 and the land utterly barren,
 YHWH has sent everyone into exile
 and the empty places increase more and more.
 If there will still remain a tenth,
 it too will be left to be burnt up,
 in the way a terebinth or oak
 leaves behind a stump when it is cut down;
 the descendants of the sacred people will be its stump.”

Holy! Holy! Holy! The Master, the Omnipotent God, the one who is, who was, and who is coming; the whole earth is full of his glory!

The Seraphim cried out to each other, “Holy! Holy! Holy! The Master of armies! The whole earth is full of his glory!”

Second Reading A Homily on Matthew by St. John Chrysostom

“You are salt for the earth.” It is for the world’s sake, he says, that what Jesus says is entrusted to you, not for yours. I am not sending you into only two cities or ten or twenty, and not even to a single nation, as I sent the prophets in ancient times; I am sending you across land and sea to the whole world. And that world is in a miserable condition.

That is, when he says, “you are salt for the earth,” he is indicating that all mankind had lost its taste and become rotten because of sin. And so he asks of these men those virtues which are specially useful and even necessary if they are to bear the burdens of so many. A man who is kindly, modest, merciful, and virtuous will not keep his good deeds to himself; he will see to it that these admirable fountains send out their streams for the good of others. Again, a man whose heart is clean, a peacemaker and one who is on fire for the truth will arrange his life so as

to contribute to the common good.

Do not think, he says, that you are destined for easy skirmishes or unimportant tasks. “You are salt for the earth.” What do these words imply? Did the students restore what had already turned rotten? Not at all. Salt cannot help what is already decaying. That is not what they did; but what had first been renewed and freed from decay and then turned over to them, they salted and preserved it in the newness the Master had bestowed. It took the Prince’s power to free men from the decay caused by sin, but it was the task of the Emissaries to keep that decay from returning by their strenuous labor.

Have you noticed how, bit by bit, the Prince shows them how to be greater than the prophets? He says they are to be teachers for the whole world, not simply Palestine. Do not be surprised, then, he says, that I speak to you apart from the others and involve you in such a dangerous undertaking. Consider the many large cities, peoples, and nations I will be sending you to govern; this is why I would have you give others good judgment, as well as having good judgment yourselves. Unless you can do that, you will not be able to survive.

If others go rotten, then your service will help them regain it; but if you suffer that loss yourselves, you will drag others down with you. And so, the greater the undertakings entrusted to you, the more zealous you must be. This is why he says, “But if the salt goes rotten, what will restore it? It is good for nothing now but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.”

When the Emissaries hear the words, “When they curse you and oppress you and accuse you of every evil,” they may be afraid to come forward, and so he says, “Unless you are prepared for that sort of thing, my choosing you was a waste of time. Curses will necessarily be your fate, but they will not harm you, and will simply give evidence of your fidelity. If, however, you fail through fear to show the forcefulness your mission demands, your fate will be much worse, because everyone will speak badly of you and despise you. That is what being trampled underfoot means.”

Then he passes on to a higher comparison. “You are the world’s light.” Once again, “the world’s,” not that of one nation or twenty cities, the light of the whole world. The light he means is an intelligible light, far superior to the rays of the sun we see, just as the salt is spiritual

salt. First salt, then light, so that you will learn how beneficial sharp words can be and how useful serious teaching is. Teaching like this holds dissipation in check and prevents it; it leads to virtue and sharpens the mind's eye. "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, and people do not light a lamp and put it under a basket." Here again he is urging them to adopt a careful manner of life and teaching them to be alert, because they live under the eyes of everyone and have the whole world as the arena of their contest.

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be witnesses to me to the ends of the earth.

Your light must shine in front of others so that they will see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. And you will be witnesses to me to the ends of the earth.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, may we love you in everything and above everything, and reach the joy you have prepared for us that is beyond all imagining. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

And now YHWH, the Master of armies
 removes from Jerusalem and Judah
 its support and prop:
 its whole supply of bread and water—
 its heroes and warriors,
 its judges and prophets,
 its seers and elders,
 its authorities and nobles,
 its advisors and artisans
 and its expert in charms.
 "I will make children their authorities,

Isaiah 3.1-15

and babies will rule them.
 The people will be oppressed
 by each other and by their neighbors.
 Children will disrespect their elders
 and commoners their nobles.”
 When a man grasps his brother
 in his father’s house and says,
 “You have clothes;
 you rule over us,
 and take control of these ruins,”
 the brother will protest on that day,
 “I cannot cure what is wrong with you;
 there is no food and no clothes in my house;
 do not make me a ruler over the people.”
 Jerusalem is crumbling,
 and Judah has been torn down,
 because their tongues and their actions
 have been against YHWH,
 to taunt his majesty as he looked on.
 The look on their faces is evidence against them,
 and they are as proud of their sins as Sodom was;
 they do not bother to hide them.
 Their souls are doomed!
 They have brought the harm on themselves.
 Tell the virtuous that they will prosper
 and will eat the produce of their own work.
 But evil people are doomed; they will suffer,
 because what their hands deserve is what they will be given.
 And as for my people, children are their oppressors,
 and women rule them.
 My people, my people! Your leaders are making you sin,
 they are destroying the paths you should follow!
 And YHWH rises to indict the people
 and stands as their judge.
 YHWH will pass sentence on them
 with the elders of his people
 and the authorities he appointed:

“You are the ones who consumed the vineyard,
and loot from the poor is in your houses.
What do you mean by crushing my people
and grinding down the faces of the poor?”
Says YHWH, commander of armies.

It is a blessing to be a virtuous man; everything goes well with him, because he will enjoy the produce his hands have made. But evil men are doomed, and will suffer, because they will be repaid for the harm they have done.

The Master rises from his throne and stands to pass sentence on his people. Evil men are doomed, and will suffer, because they will be repaid for the harm they have done.

Second Reading *Moral Reflections on Job by St. Gregory the Great*

Holy men who are suffering hardships must endure the assaults of those who use violence and verbal attack. They stand up to the first with the shield of patience, but they launch the sharp arrows of true teaching against the second. They win in both types of fighting because of the marvelous skill that virtue gives them, because they teach the wandering opponents with their wisdom while they show a courageous scorn for outward hostility.

They set straying sheep on the right path by their teaching, and they suffer and so win against those who attack them. They have nothing but patient scorn for an enemy who moves against them, but they sympathize with their weaker fellows and bring them back to the safe way, while they stand up against the first kind to keep them from leading others astray and out of fear for the second kind to keep them from completely losing sight of a really honest life.

Let us look at how a soldier in God’s camp fights against both types of enemy. Paul says, “Conflict on the outside, fear on the inside.” He lists the attacks he has to endure from the outside: “Dangers from floods, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, dangers from pagans, the kind of dangers you find in the city, dangers in the desert, dangers on the ocean, and dangers from false brothers.” He also tells us what weapons he uses against his enemies in this war: “Work and hardship, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, often going without

food altogether, cold, and nakedness.”

When he is plagued by so many struggles, he guards the camp, he tells us, with heightened alertness. And he adds at once, “Besides these external difficulties, there is that weight on me every day of my anxiety for all the communities.” In this way, he fights courageously and devotes himself sympathetically to protecting his neighbors. He tells us of the bad things he endures, but he also speaks of the blessings he brings to others.

And so we should reflect on how hard it is at the same time to put up with attacks from outside and to protect the weak from within. He endures the attacks from outside in suffering whipping and chains; but he experiences fear with himself, since he is afraid that his sufferings might be an obstacle to his students rather than himself. This is why he writes to them, “No one should be shaken by these hardships, because you know that they are our fate.” In the midst of his own sufferings, it was the fall of others he was afraid of, that when the students saw him whipped for the faith, they might refuse to acknowledge their own faith.

What an immensely loving heart! He thinks nothing of what he is suffering himself, and is only concerned that his students are not led astray within themselves. He scorns his own physical wounds and brings healing to the inner wounds of others. It is characteristic of holy men that their own painful trials do not make them lose their concern for the well-being of others; they are in pain because of the reverses they must go through, but they look out for others and teach them necessary lessons; they are like skilled physicians who catch the disease themselves and become sick; they suffer wounds themselves, but bring others the medicine that restores their health.

Master, please do not hide your face away from me; take off the weight of your hand, and do not let my fear of you incapacitate me.

Dear God, reprimand me gently, and not with anger, because your anger will annihilate me; and do not let my fear of you incapacitate me.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, may we love you in everything and above everything, and reach the joy you have prepared for us that is beyond all our imagining. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one

God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Isaiah 7.1-17

During the days of King Ahaz of Judah, son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah of Israel, son of Remaliah, went up to attack Jerusalem, but they were not able to conquer it.

When word came to the house of David that Aram was encamped in Ephraim, the heart of the king and the heart of the people shook like trees in the forest shaking in the wind. Then YHWH said to Isaiah, “Go out to meet Ahaz with your son Shear-jashub at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway of the fuller’s field, and tell him this:

‘Be careful to stay calm and do not be afraid; do not let your courage fail before these two stumps of smouldering brands, the flaming anger of Rezin and the Arameans, and the son of Remaliah, because of the mischief that Aram, Ephraim and the son of Remaliah plot against you, as they say, “let us go and tear Judah apart, gain control of it by force, and appoint the son of Tabeel king there.”’”

This is what is said by YHWH:

“This will not stand; it will not happen.

Damascus is the capital of Aram,

and Rezin is the head of Damascus;

Samaria is the capital of Ephraim,

and Remaliah’s son the head of Samaria.

But within sixty years and five more,

Ephraim will be crushed, and no longer a nation.

Unless your faith is firm,

you will not be firm yourself.”

Again YHWH spoke to Ahaz: “Ask for a sign from your God YHWH; it may be deep as the land below the earth or high as the sky.”

“I will not ask for anything,” answered Ahaz. “I will not try to manipulate YHWH.”

Then he said, “Listen, then, house of David! Is it not enough for you to exhaust men, must you also weary your God? This is why YHWH will give you a sign himself: a virgin will be pregnant, and bear a son, and will

call him Immanuel. He will live on curds and honey by the time he learns to reject evil and choose good; because before the child learns to reject evil and choose good, the land of those two kings you dread will be deserted.

“YHWH will bring on you and your people and your father’s house days worse than any since Ephraim seceded from Judah. (This refers to the king of Assyria.)”

A virgin will become pregnant and bear a son and will name him Immanuel, because God is with us.

Do not be afraid, Mary; now you will become pregnant and bear a son and will name him Immanuel, because God is with us.

Second Reading

*A Homily in Praise of the Virgin Mother
by St. Bernard*

It was appropriate for the Virgin to give birth only to God; and it was also appropriate for God to be born only from the Virgin. And so the Creator of mankind, in order to become a man by being born of a human being, had to search out from among all mankind and select as his mother a woman he knew would be worthy of him and pleasing to him. Therefore, he chose a sinless virgin, so that he could be born sinless and free of every stain. He chose a humble virgin from whom he could emerge meek and with a humble heart, to provide a necessary and salutary model of these virtues for all mankind. In this way, he allowed to become pregnant a virgin in whom he had earlier inspired a vow of virginity, and demanded of her the virtue of humility.

Otherwise, how could the angel pronounce her full of grace afterward, if she had the slightest good quality which did not come from grace? In this way the one who was to conceive and give birth to the holiest of the holy had to be sanctified physically; and so she received the gift of virginity; and so that she would be sanctified spiritually, she received the gift of humility.

The Virgin, then, adorned like a queen with the jewels of virtue, shone with glory of body and soul; and when she was seen on high as radiantly beautiful, she attracted the inhabitants of heaven so much that she moved the heart of the King with desire for her and brought down

from above the heavenly message. Scripture says, “The angel was sent to a virgin.” That is, she was truly virgin in body and virgin in mind; a virgin by her special calling, sanctified, as the Emissary reminds us, in both mind and body. This came about by no unforeseen or accidental circumstance; she was chosen from eternity, foreknown and prepared by the Supreme Being for himself, guarded by the angels, prefigured by the patriarchs, and promised by the prophets.

The Holy Spirit will come down upon you, Mary, and the power of the Supreme Being will cover you with his shadow. This holy child to be born from you will be called the Son of God.

Listen, my daughter, and consider this: the King will desire your beauty. This holy child to be born from you will be called the Son of God.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, may we love you in everything and above everything, and reach the joy you have prepared for us that is beyond all our imagining. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Isaiah 9.7-10.4

YHWH has sent word against Jacob
 which falls upon Israel,
 and everyone knows it,
 including Ephraim and those who live in Samaria,
 the ones who say in arrogance and the pride of their hearts,
 “Bricks may have fallen,
 but we will replace them with stonework;
 sycamores have been felled,
 and we will replace them with cedars.”
 But YHWH is bringing their enemies forward against them,

and rousing to action those who hate them:
Aram on the east and the Philistines on the west
are eating Israel up with their mouths gaping open.
And despite all this, his anger is not turned away,
and his fist is still clenched.
But the people do not turn to the one who struck them
or look for YHWH, leader of armies;
So YHWH is cutting Israel's head and tail off,
its palm branch and stem in one day.
The elders and nobles are the head
and the prophet teaching falsehood is the tail.
The leaders of this people are misleading them,
and those who are being led have been drowned;
and this is why YHWH is not sparing their young men
and has no pity for their orphans and widows.
They are totally profane and sinful,
and every mouth spouts stupidity.
It is for all of this that his anger is not turned away
and his fist is still clenched.
You see, immorality burns like fire
that eats up briars and thorns;
it kindles the forest thickets,
which go up in columns of smoke.
The earth quakes before YHWH, leader of armies,
and the people are tinder for the fire;
no one spares his brother;
everyone devours the meat of his neighbor's body.
Though they butcher on their right, they stay hungry,
and though they eat on the left, they are not filled.
Manasseh is devouring Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh;
and both together turn on Judah.
For all this, his anger is not turned away,
and his fist is still clenched.
Those who pass unjust laws are doomed,
as are those who write oppressive regulations,
depriving the needy of verdicts
and robbing my people's poor of their rights;

looting their widows
 and preying on their orphans.
 What will you do on the day punishment comes,
 when ruin rushes on you from far off?
 Who will you run to for help?
 Where will you leave your wealth
 to keep it from sinking under the captives
 or falling beneath those killed?
 For all this, his anger is not turned away,
 and his fist is still clenched.

What darkness the Master has brought on Zion in his anger; he has flung
 Israel's glory down from heaven to earth.

In the day of his rage, he has forgotten his footstool Zion; he has
 flung Israel's glory down from heaven to earth.

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Augustine

Whenever we suffer some hardship, we should look on it as both a
 punishment and a correction. Our holy Scriptures themselves do not
 promise us peace, security, and rest; in fact, the Good News makes no
 secret of the troubles and hardships that are waiting for us; but it also
 says that "the one who persists to the end will be saved." What good has
 there ever been in this life since the time when the first man received the
 just sentence of death and the curse from which our Master the Prince
 set us free?

So we must not complain, my brothers and sisters; because, as the
 Emissary says, "Some of them complained and were destroyed by
 snakes." Is there any hardship now endured by mankind that was not
 endured by our ancestors before us? What sufferings of ours even bear
 comparison with what we know of their sufferings? And yet you hear
 people complaining about this present day and age, because things were
 so much better in the old days. I wonder what would happen if they
 could be taken back to the time of their ancestors; would we not still
 hear them complaining? You may think past ages were good, but it is
 only because you are not living in them.

It amazes me that those of you who have now been set free from the
 curse, who have believed in the Son of God, and who have been

instructed in the holy Scriptures can think the days of Adam were good. And your ancestors bore the curse of Adam—of that Adam to whom were addressed the words, “You will eat your bread by the sweat of your brow; you will farm the earth from which you were taken, and it will grow thorns and thistles.” This is what he deserved, and what he had to suffer; this is the punishment meted out to him by the just judgment of God.

Then how can you think that past ages were better than your own? From the time of that first Adam to the time of his descendants today, man’s lot has been labor and sweat, thorns and thistles. Have we forgotten the flood and the calamitous times of famine and war whose history has been recorded precisely to keep us from complaining to God about our own times? Just think what those past ages were like! Is there one of us who does not shudder to read of them? Far from justifying complaints about our own time, they teach us how much we have to be thankful for.

I ponder the ancient times; I remember years long past; all night long I meditated in my heart, and cried, “My God, please show pity for me!”

I looked for God on the day of my suffering; I held out my hands to him the whole night through, and cried, “My God, please show pity for me!”

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, may we love you in everything and above everything, and reach the joy you have prepared for us that is beyond all our imagining. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

This is what is said by YHWH:

“A shoot will sprout from Jesse’s stump,
and a bud will blossom out of his root;

Isaiah 11.1-16

YHWH's Spirit will rest upon him:
a spirit of wisdom and understanding,
a spirit of good advice and strength,
a spirit of knowledge and respect for YHWH;
and his pleasure will lie in his respect for YHWH.
He will not judge by appearance,
and will not make his verdicts based on hearsay.
No, he will judge the poor with justice
and make the right decisions for those imposed on in the land.
He will strike the ruthless with the rod that is his mouth
and will slaughter the evil with the breath from his lips.
Justice will be the belt around his waist,
and fidelity a sash over his hips.
Then wolves will be guests of lambs,
and leopards will sleep with kids;
calves and young lions will forage together
with a little child to guide them.
Cows and bears will be neighbors,
with their young lying down together;
and lions will eat hay like oxen.
Babies will play beside cobras' dens
and children will lay their hands on adders' burrows;
there will be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain,
because the earth will be filled with knowledge of YHWH,
in the same way that water covers the ocean.
On that day, the Gentiles will search out
the root of Jesse,
which will be set up as a signal for the nations;
because his home will be glorious.
YHWH will again undertake on that day
to reclaim the remnant of his people
that is left from Assyria and Egypt,
Pathros, Ethiopia, and Elam,
Shinar, Hamath, and the shores of the ocean.
He will raise a signal to the nations
and collect Israel's outcasts;
he will assemble those scattered from Judah

from the four corners of the earth.
 Ephraim's envy will disappear,
 and Judah's rivalry will be removed;
 Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah,
 and Judah will not be an enemy to Ephraim.
 They will swoop down on the foothills
 of the Philistines to the west;
 and they will loot the Kedemites together;
 Edom and Moab will be owned by them,
 and the Ammonites will be their subjects.
 YHWH will dry up the tongue of Egypt's sea,
 and wave his hand over the Euphrates in his fierce rage
 and shatter it into seven streamlets
 so that it can be crossed in sandals.
 There will be a highway for the remnant of his people
 that is left from Assyria,
 as there was for Israel
 when he came up out of Egypt's land."

You will leave with joy; you will be led away in peace; mountains and hills will break into joyful song before you, and all the trees in the forest will burst into applause.

There will be a highway for the remnant of my people, as there was for Israel when he came up out of Egypt's land; mountains and hills will break into joyful song before you, and all the trees in the forest will burst into applause.

Second Reading

*A Treatise on the Hail Mary
by Baldwin of Canterbury*

Every day we devoutly salute the supremely admirable Virgin Mary with the angel's greeting, and we usually add, "and the child you bore is also remarkable." After she was greeted by the Virgin, Elizabeth added this phrase as if she were echoing the angel's greeting: "You are the most remarkable woman in the world, and the child you are carrying is also amazing." This is the fruit Isaiah was speaking of: "On that day, the sprout of the Master will be splendid and radiant; it will be the sublime fruit of the earth." What is this fruit but the Holy One of Israel, the

descendant of Abraham, the sprout of the Master, the flower rising from the root of Jesse, the fruit of life, whom we have shared?

The Prince, the seed of Abraham, obviously remarkable in the seed, remarkable in the shoot, remarkable in the flower, remarkable in the gift, and finally remarkable in gratitude and praise, was produced from the yield of David into flesh.

He alone among human beings is found to be complete in every good quality, so that he alone could complete every virtue; because his virtue is enough for all the nations, as the Scriptures attest. "In the way in which the earth produces its buds, and in the way in which a garden germinates its own seeds, the Master God will produce virtue and praise in the presence of all the nations." That is, this is the sprout of virtue, which the flower of glory embellishes with its blessings when it has grown. But how great is this glory? How can anyone think of anything more glorious—or rather, how can anyone conceive of this at all? Because the flower rises from Jesse's root. You ask, "How far?" Clearly, it rises up to the very highest place, because "Prince Jesus is in the glory of God the Father." His magnificence is elevated above the heavens, so that he, the offspring of the Master, is splendid and glorious, the sublime fruit of the earth.

But what is our benefit from this fruit? What other benefit than the fruit of blessing from the blessed fruit? From this seed, this sprout, and this flower, surely the fruit of blessing is produced. It has come even to us; first it is planted as a seed through the grace of pardon, then germinated with the increase of perfection, and finally flowers in the hope or the attainment of glory; because the fruit was blessed by God, and in God, so that God would be glorified through it. But the fruit was blessed for us, too, so that we will be blessed by God and glorified in him through the promise spoken to Abraham. God made the fruit a blessing for all the nations.

The root of Jesse will appear and will come forward to rule the nations; and the nations will put their trust in him; may his name be praised for ever.

In his days, virtue will flourish and peace will overflow; may his name be praised for ever.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, may we love you in everything and above everything, and reach the joy you have prepared for us that is beyond all our imagining. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Isaiah 30.1-18

“Woe to the rebellious children,”
says YHWH,
“who carry out plans that are not mine,
who weave cloths that are not inspired by me,
and add one sin atop another.
They go down to Egypt,
but they do not ask advice from me.
They find their strength in Pharaoh’s protection
and take refuge in Egypt’s shadow;
Pharaoh’s protection will be your disgrace,
and refuge in Egypt’s shadow your shame.
When their authorities are at Zoan
and their messengers reach Hanes,
all of them will be ashamed
of a people that gain them nothing—
neither help nor benefit;
only disgrace and criticism.
An oracle on the Beasts of the Negeb:
Through the plagued and troubled land
of lionesses and roaring lions,
of vipers and flying saraphs,
they carry their riches on donkeys’ backs
and their treasures on camels’ humps
to a people good for nothing—
to Egypt, whose help is futile and useless.
And that is why I call her

‘Rahab quelled.’
Now come, write it on a tablet that they can keep;
inscribe it into a record,
so that in future days
it will be eternal evidence against them.
This is rebellious people,
they are deceitful children,
children who refuse
to obey YHWH’s law.
They say to seers, ‘Have no visions,’
to prophets, ‘Do not destroy what is right for us;
flatter us, conjure up illusions.
Get out of our way! Get off our path!
Let us hear no more
about Israel’s Holy One.’”
And so this is what Israel’s Holy One says:
“Because you reject this utterance of his
and put your trust in what is crooked and devious
and depend on it,
this guilt of yours will be
like a crack coming down,
bulging out in a high wall,
whose crash comes all of a sudden, in an eyeblink.
It shatters like a potter’s jar,
smashed beyond rescue,
and among its fragments, there can be found
no shard to scoop fire from the ground
or dip water from a cistern.”
Because this is what is said by God YHWH,
the Holy One of Israel:
“You will be saved by waiting and calm;
your strength lies in quiet and trust.
But that is not what you wanted.
‘No!’ you said.
‘We will escape on horseback!’
Very well, run away.
‘We will ride off on swift animals!’

Not as swift as those after you.
 A thousand will be in terror at a single one's threat;
 if five threaten you, you will flee from them
 until you are left like a flagstaff on a mountaintop,
 like a banner on a hill.
 And yet YHWH is waiting to show you favor,
 and he is coming forward to pity you,
 because YHWH is a god of justice,
 and is a blessing to anyone who waits for him."

Turn back, be at peace and you will be saved. Your strength will lie in quiet and trust.

The Master is waiting to show you his favor and is a blessing to anyone who waits for him. Your strength will lie in quiet and trust.

Second Reading

Explanations of the Psalms by St. Ambrose

"A brother cannot redeem a brother; but a man will redeem human beings. No one can give God the ransom for himself or the price of his soul's emancipation." The Prince is saying, "What do I have to be afraid of in hard times?" What can do me harm if I do not need a redeemer and in fact am myself the redeemer of all mankind? Shall I free others and be afraid for myself? Yes, I will make everything new, so that I will surpass even the love and devotion of brothers. Where a brother, born from the same womb, cannot redeem his brother, since he suffers from the same weakness of a common nature, still, a man will redeem men: that man of whom it is written, "The Master will send them a man who will save them;" the man who said of himself, "You are trying to kill me, and all I did was tell you the truth."

He is a man, but who will recognize him? And why will no one recognize him? Because, just as there is only one God, there is only "one link and liaison between God and men, the man Jesus, the Prince." He is the only one to redeem man and show even greater love than brothers have. He poured his blood out for strangers, something no one is able to do for a brother. He did not spare his own body in redeeming us from sin; he "gave himself as the redemption of everyone," and the Emissary Paul is a true witness to him: "I am telling you the truth; this is no lie I am telling."

But why will this man be the only redeemer? Because no one can equal him in the love he showed in giving up his life for his own poor slaves. Nor can anyone equal him in sinlessness, because every human being is ruled by sin, and all of them are victims of the fall of the first Adam. He is the only one who is chosen to redeem us, because he alone cannot be subject to that age-old sin. So let us understand by “the man” the one who took on himself the condition of man in order to crucify in his own flesh the sin of everyone, and to cancel in his own blood the debt owed by everyone: Master Jesus.

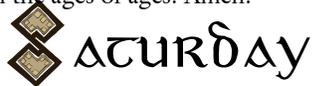
You may ask, “but how can we say that a brother cannot redeem a brother when the man we are talking about said, “I will announce your name to my brothers”? But it was not as our brother, but as the man Jesus the Prince, in whom God has his home, that he forgave our sins. That is, it is written that “God was in the Prince, bringing the world into harmony to himself.” God was in the man Jesus the Prince, of whom alone it was said, “the Word became flesh and made his home among us.” It was not, therefore, *as* a brother, but as the Master that he lived among us in the flesh.

He surrendered himself to death and was included among the evil people; he carried the crimes of many, many others and prayed constantly for sinners.

Jesus prayed, “Father, please forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.” He carried the crimes of many, many others and prayed constantly for sinners.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, may we love you in everything and above everything, and reach the joy you have prepared for us that is beyond all our imagining. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Isaiah 37.21-35

Isaiah, son of Amoz, sent this message to Hezekiah: “This is what is

said by YHWH, the God of Israel: ‘In answer to your prayer for help against the King of Assyria Sennacherib, this is the statement YHWH has made about him:

“The virgin daughter Zion
 despises you, ridicules you;
 the daughter Jerusalem
 tosses her head behind you.
 Who is the one you insulted and blasphemed
 and raised your voice against
 and lifted up your eyes to the sky?
 You did it to the Holy One of Israel.
 Through your slaves, you insulted YHWH;
 You said, ‘I climbed the mountain heights
 with my many chariots;
 I scaled the recesses of Lebanon;
 I cut down its tall cedars
 and its choice cypresses;
 I reached the most remote heights
 in its forest park.
 I dug wells and drank water in foreign countries;
 I dried up all the rivers of Egypt with the soles of my feet.’
 Have you not heard?
 I prepared it long ago;
 I planned it from ancient times,
 and now I have brought it about:
 that you would reduce foreign cities
 into heaps of rubble,
 while their inhabitants, stripped of power,
 are confused and disgraced,
 and become like plants in the fields,
 like green growth,
 like scorched grass on the housetops.
 I am aware of whether you are standing or sitting;
 I know whether you are coming or going;
 and I also know your rage against me.
 Because of your rage against me
 and your fury, which has reached my ears,

I will put my hook in your nose
 and my bit in your mouth
 and make you return the way you came.
 This will be a sign for you:
 This year you will eat the aftergrowth;
 next year, what grows by itself.
 But in the third year, plant and reap;
 plant vineyards and reap their fruit.
 The remaining survivors of the house of Judah
 will again strike root into the earth
 and bear fruit above it;
 because out of Jerusalem will come a remnant,
 and survivors will emerge from Mount Zion.
 The zeal of YHWH, leader of armies, will do this.””
 The Master has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem, and
 all the ends of the earth will see the saving power of God.
 The Master has bared his holy arm in the sight of all the nations; and
 all the ends of the earth will see the saving power of God.

*Second Reading**Explanations of the Psalms by St. Ambrose*

In bringing the world into harmony with God, the Prince stood in no need of harmonization himself. What sin of his was there to atone for, since he was sinless? When he was asked for the Temple-tax, a sin-offering imposed by the Law, he said to Peter, “Simon, who do the earth’s kings receive tributes and taxes from? From their sons or from foreigners? Peter answered, “From foreigners.” The Master said to him, “Then the sons are exempt. But to avoid shocking them, cast a hook into the water and take the first fish that comes; open its mouth, and you will find a shekel. Take it, and give it to them for me and you.”

The Prince shows that he does not need to atone for sin on his own behalf; he is no slave of sin, but as Son of God is free from all sin. The Son sets people free; a slave remains in his sin. The Prince is therefore free of all sin, and does not pay the price of his own redemption. His blood could pay the ransom for all the sins of the whole world; the one who has no debt to pay for himself is the right person to set others free.

It is not only that the Prince has no ransom to pay or atonement to make for his own sins; if we apply his words to every individual man, they

can be taken to mean that individuals do not need to make atonement for themselves, because the Prince is the atonement for everyone, everyone's redemption.

Is any man's blood fit to redeem him, seeing that it was the Prince who shed his blood for the redemption of everyone? Is anyone's blood comparable to the Prince's? Is anyone great enough to make atonement for himself over and above the atonement the Prince has offered in himself—the Prince, who is the only one to bring the world into harmony with God by his blood? What greater victim, what more excellent sacrifice, or what better patron can there be than the one who became the restitution for the sins of everyone, and gave his life for our redemption?

We do not need, then, to look for an atonement or redemption made by each individual, because the price paid for everyone is the blood of the Prince, that blood by which Master Jesus has redeemed us, and he is the only one to bring us into harmony with the Father. He has labored even to the end, and took our burden upon himself. "Come to me," he says, "all of you who are laboring, and I will give you respite."

Once you were estranged from God, at enmity with him in heart and mind, and your deeds were evil; but now, by the Prince's death in his mortal body, God has brought you into harmony with himself so that he could welcome you into his presence as saints, without the slightest impurity or imperfection.

God made the Prince's sacrificial death the means of expiating the sins of all believers. God has brought you into harmony with himself so that he could welcome you into his presence as saints, without the slightest impurity or imperfection.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, may we love you in everything and above everything, and reach the joy you have prepared for us that is beyond all our imagining. We make this request through our Master, Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading

Zephaniah 1.1-7, 14, 2.3

This is the utterance of YHWH which came to Zephaniah, son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, during the days of Josiah, son of Amon, king of Judah:

“I will completely sweep everything away
from the face of the earth,” says YHWH.

“I will sweep away man and beast;
I will sweep the birds out of the sky,
and the fish out of the sea.

I will overthrow evil people;
I will destroy mankind
from the face of the earth,” says YHWH.

“I will strike Judah with my fist,
as well as all the inhabitants of Jerusalem;

I will destroy from this place the last vestige of Baal,
and the very names of his priests,

as well as those who worship the stars in the heaven on their roofs;
along with those who worship YHWH
but swear by Milcom,

together with those who have fallen away from YHWH
and those who do not look for YHWH.”

Silence in the presence of God YHWH!

Because YHWH’s day is near.

Yes, YHWH has prepared a slaughter-feast;
he has made his guests sacred.

YHWH’s great day is near—

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near and coming swiftly;
Listen! There is YHWH's day!
The warrior's cry is a bitter one then.
That day is a day of rage,
a day of anguish and torment,
a day of destruction and devastation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of thick black clouds,
a day of trumpet-blasts and battle alarms
against fortified cities,
and against battlements up above them.
I will hem men in
till they walk like the blind,
because they have sinned against YHWH;
and their blood will be poured out like dust,
and their brains like excrement.
Neither their silver nor their gold
will be any use to save them
on the day of YHWH's rage,
when in the fire of his jealousy
the whole earth will be burnt up;
because he will make an end—yes, a sudden end—
to everyone who lives on the earth.
Gather yourselves, assemble together,
nation that knows no shame,
before you are driven off
like chaff that blows by;
before there comes on you
the blazing anger of YHWH;
before there comes on you
the day of YHWH's rage.
Look for YHWH, all of earth's little people
who have observed his law;
look for virtue; look for humility;
perhaps you will find shelter
on the day of YHWH's rage.

Look for the Master, all of earth's little people who obey his law; look for virtue; look for humility.

It is a blessing for you to be poor, because then you belong to the Kingdom of heaven; look for virtue; look for humility.

Second Reading *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church
in the Modern World by the Second Vatican Council*

We do not know the time when earth and humanity will reach their completing, nor do we know the way in which the universe will be transformed. The world as we see it, disfigured by sin, is going to go out of existence; but we are assured that God is preparing a new place for us to live, and a new earth. In this new earth, virtue is to make its home, and happiness will satisfy—and more than satisfy—all the yearnings for peace that arise in human hearts. On that day, when death is conquered, the sons of God will be brought back to life in the Prince; what was planted as something weak and perishable will be dressed in incorruption. Love and the beneficial effects of love will remain, and the whole of creation, made by God for man, will be set free from the frustration that enslaves it.

We are, in fact, warned that a man gains nothing if he wins the whole world at the cost of his soul; yet our hope in a new earth should stimulate our concern for developing this earth, not weaken it, because on it there is growing up the body of a new human family, a body even now able to provide some foreshadowing of the new age. Hence, though earthly progress is to be carefully distinguished from the growth of the Prince's kingdom, yet insofar as it can help toward the better regulation of human society, it is of great importance to the kingdom of God.

The blessings of human dignity, brotherly communion, and freedom—all the good harvest on earth of man's cooperation with nature in the Spirit of the Master and in accordance with his command—will be found again in the world to come, but purified of every stain, resplendent and transfigured, when the Prince hands over to the Father an eternal and universal kingdom: “a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of virtue, love and peace.” On this earth, the kingdom is already present in symbol; when the Master comes, it will reach its completion.

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Be glad, heavens, and celebrate, earth; shout praises, mountains, because the Master is coming. He will show pity for the poor.

In his days, virtue will flourish, and peace will overflow. He will show pity for the poor.

Prayer

Dear Father, please help us search out the values that will bring us lasting joy in this changing world, and in our desire for what you promise, please make us one in mind and heart. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Zephaniah 3.8-20

“Wait for me,” says YHWH,
“till the day when I come forward as prosecutor;
because it is my decision to assemble the nations
and gather the kingdoms,
to pour my rage over them,
to pour out all my blazing anger;
because the whole earth will be burnt up
in the fire of my jealousy.
And then I will change and purify
the lips of the peoples,
so that all of them will be able to call upon YHWH’s name,
and serve him with one accord;
from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia
and as far as the recesses of the north
they will bring me offerings.
On that day
you will not need to be ashamed
of all your deeds,
the actions by which you rebelled against me;
because then I will remove from among you
the arrogant braggarts,

and you will no longer glorify yourself
on my holy mountain.
But I will leave as a remnant among you
a people who are humble and insignificant
who will take refuge in YHWH's name;
the remnant of Israel.
They will do no wrong
and speak no lies;
and in their mouths there will not be found
any deceitful tongue;
they will feed and rest their flocks
with no one to disturb them.
Shout for joy, daughter Zion,
Sing in your happiness, Israel!
Be triumphant and ecstatic, with all your heart,
daughter Jerusalem!
YHWH has removed the sentence against you;
he has turned your enemies away;
YHWH, the king of Israel, is among you;
you have no more calamities to fear!
On that day, Jerusalem will be told,
'Do not be afraid, Zion; do not be discouraged.
Your God YHWH is among you,
and he is a mighty savior;
He will take pleasure in you in his joy
and renew you in his love;
he will sing in delight because of you
in the way people sing at festivals.'
I will remove disaster from among you,
so that no one will tell of your disgrace.
Yes, at that time, I will deal
with all those who oppress you;
I will save the lame
and assemble the outcasts;
I will give them praise and fame
all over the earth, when I bring about their restoration.
At that time, I will bring you home,

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and at that time I will assemble you,
because I will give you fame and praise
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I bring about your restoration
before your very eyes," says YHWH.

I will leave a humble, insignificant people in your midst, and the remnant in Israel will take refuge in the Master's name.

I will purify the lips of the peoples, so that all of them will be able to call on the Master's name, and the remnant in Israel will take refuge in the Master's name.

Second Reading An Exposition on John by St. Thomas Aquinas

"I am a good shepherd." Surely it is appropriate for the Prince to be a shepherd, since just as a flock is guided and fed by a shepherd, the faithful are fed by the Prince with spiritual food and with his own body and blood. The Emissary said, "You were once like sheep without a shepherd, but now you have returned to the guardian and ruler of your souls." The Prophet has said, "He feeds his flock like a shepherd."

The Prince said that the shepherd enters through the gate, and that he is himself the gate as well as the shepherd. Then it is necessary for him to enter through himself. By so doing, he reveals himself, and through himself he knows the Father. But we enter through him, because we find happiness through him.

Notice this: no one is the gate but the Prince. Others reflect his light, but no one else is the true light. John the Bather "was not the light; he was a witness to the light." It is said of the Prince, however, "He was the true light which shines on every man." For this reason, no one says that he is the gate; this title is the Prince's own. However, he has made others shepherds and given that office to parts of his body, because Peter was a shepherd, and so were the other Emissaries and all the good bishops after them. Scripture says, "I will give you shepherds that are in conformity with my own heart." Although the bishops of the Church, who are her sons, are all shepherds, it is still true that the Prince refers to only one person when he says, "I am the Good Shepherd," because he wants to emphasize the virtue of love. Thus, no one can be a good shepherd unless he is united with the Prince in love. Through this, we

become cells in the body of the one true shepherd.

The duty of a good shepherd is love; and that is why the Prince said, “A good shepherd gives up his life for his sheep.” Know the difference between a good and bad shepherd: the good shepherd cares for the welfare of his flock, and the bad shepherd cares only for his own welfare.

A good shepherd does not demand that shepherds give up their lives for a real flock of sheep; but every spiritual shepherd must endure the loss of bodily life for the rescue of the flock, since the spiritual good of the flock is more important than the bodily life of the shepherd, when danger threatens the safety of the flock. This is why the Master says, “A good shepherd gives up his life,” that is, his physical life, “for his sheep”; and he does this because of his authority and love. Both, in fact, are required: that they be ruled by him, and that he love them. The first without the second is not enough.

The Prince stands out for us as the example of this teaching: “If the Prince gave up his life for us, we ought also to give up our lives for our brothers.”

I will search out my sheep; I will rescue them from every place where they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark.

My sheep will never be lost, and no one will take them from my hands; I will rescue them from every place where they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark.

Prayer

Dear Father, please help us search out the values that will bring us lasting joy in this changing world, and in our desire for what you promise, please make us one in mind and heart. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Tuesday

First Reading

Jeremiah 1.1-19

The words of Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, from a priestly family in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. YHWH's message first came to him

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in the thirteenth year of the reign in Judah of King Josiah, son of Amon, of Judah, and communication from him continued through the reign of the son of Josiah, King Jehoiakim of Judah, and until the downfall and exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, son of King Josiah of Judah.

This was the message of YHWH which came to me:

“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you;

I dedicated you before you were born;

I designated you to be a prophet to the nations.”

“Ah, Master YHWH,” I said,

“I do not know how to speak; I am too young!”

But YHWH answered me,

“Do not say, ‘I am too young.’

You will go to anyone I send you to,

and you will say whatever I command you.

Have no fear as you face them,

because I am with you to rescue you,” says YHWH.

Then YHWH extended his hand and touched my mouth, as he said,

“Now I am placing words in your mouth.

This is the day I am placing you

over nations and over kingdoms,

to root up and tear down,

to destroy and demolish,

and to build and plant.”

YHWH’s message came to me with the question, “What do you see, Jeremiah?” and I answered, “I see a branch of the watching-tree.” Then YHWH told me, “You have good eyes, because I am watching to fulfill what I have said.”

A second time, YHWH’s message came to me with the question, “What do you see?” I answered, “I see a boiling cauldron that appears from the north.” “And it is from the north,” YHWH told me, “that harm will boil over on everyone who lives in the land.

Now I am summoning

all the kingdoms of the earth,” says YHWH;

“each king will come and set up his throne

at the gateways of Jerusalem,

opposite her walls all round her,

and opposite all the cities of Judah.
 I will pronounce my sentence against them
 for all their immorality in abandoning me
 and in burning incense to foreign gods
 and worshiping their own artifacts.
 But you, fasten on your belt;
 stand up and tell them
 all that I command you to say.
 Do not be crushed for their sake,
 as though I would leave you crushed in their presence;
 because I am the one who on this day
 has made you a fortified city,
 a pillar of iron, a wall of brass
 against the whole land,
 against Judah's kings and authorities,
 against its priests and people.
 They will fight against you, but will not overcome you,
 because I am with you to rescue you," says YHWH.

Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; I consecrated you before you were born; I put my words in your mouth.

I, the Master, have called you to serve the cause of virtue; I have designated you as a treaty to all peoples, as a light to all the nations; I put my words in your mouth.

Second Reading

A homily by St. John Chrysostom

Would you like me also to list the paths of the change of heart? There are many of them, and they are quite varied; but all of them lead to heaven.

The first path of change of heart is the condemnation of your own sins. "Be the first to admit your sins, and you will become virtuous." This is also the reason the prophet wrote, "I said, 'I will accuse myself of my sins to the Master,' and you forgave the depravity of my heart." And so you should condemn your own sins too; that will be enough reason for the Master to forgive you, because a man who condemns his own sins is slower to commit them again. Rouse your conscience to accuse you within your own house, or it might become your prosecutor before the

Master's bench.

That, then, is one very good path of change of heart. Another and no less valuable one is to put out of our minds the harm done us by our enemies, so that we can master our anger, and to forgive our fellow slaves' sins against us. Then our own sins against the Master will be forgiven. Here you have another way to atone for sin, "because if you forgive your debtors, your heavenly Father will forgive you."

Would you like to know of a third path? It consists of prayer that is fervent, careful, and comes from the heart.

If you want to hear of a fourth, I will mention giving charity, something whose power is great and far-reaching.

If in addition a man lives a modest, humble life, that—no less than the other things I mentioned—takes sin away. Proof of this is the tax-collector who had no good deeds to mention, but offered his humility instead, and was relieved of the heavy burden of his sins.

And so I have shown you five paths of change of heart: condemnation of your own sins, forgiveness of your neighbor's sins against you, prayer, charitable giving, and humility.

Do not be lazy, then; walk in these paths every day; they are easy, and you cannot plead your poverty, because, even if you live your life in great neediness, you can always put aside your anger, be humble, pray earnestly, and condemn your own sins; poverty is no hindrance. Poverty is not an obstacle in carrying out the Master's bidding, even when it comes to that path of change of heart that involves money; I am referring to charitable giving. The widow proved that when she put her two copper coins into the box.

Now that we have learned how to heal these wounds of ours, let us apply the cures. Then, when we have regained genuine health, we can approach the holy table with confidence, and go gloriously to meet the Prince, the king of glory, and attain the eternal blessings through the grace, mercy, and kindness of our Master Prince Jesus.

Prayer accompanied by fasting and giving to the poor is good; it is better to give to the poor than to store up gold, because giving to the poor makes amends for every sin.

Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and you will receive gifts; because giving to the poor makes amends for every sin.

Prayer

Dear Father, please help us search out the values that will bring us lasting joy in this changing world, and in our desire for what you promise, please make us one in mind and heart. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

 Wednesday
*First Reading**Jeremiah 2.1-13, 20-25*

YHWH's message came to me: "Go shout this announcement for Jerusalem to hear:

I remember the devotion of your young years,
 how you loved me as a bride,
 and followed me in the desert,
 in an unknown land.

Israel was sacred to YHWH,
 the firstfruits of his harvest;
 and if anyone presumed to eat them,
 harm would come upon him," says YHWH.

Listen to what YHWH says, house of Jacob,
 and all you clans of the house of Israel.

This is what is said by YHWH:

"What fault did your ancestors find with me
 to make them draw away from me
 and go after vacuous idols,
 making them hollow themselves?
 They did not ask, 'Where is YHWH
 who brought us up from the land of Egypt,
 led us through the desert,
 through a land of devastation and gullies,
 a land of drought and darkness,
 a land which no one crosses
 and where no man lives?'

When I brought you into the land of gardens
 to eat its delicious fruit,

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you went in and defiled my land;
you made my heritage loathsome.
The priests did not ask,
‘Where is YHWH?’
Those who dealt with the Law did not know me;
the shepherds rebelled against me.
The prophets prophesied by Baal
and went after futile idols.
And so I will still accuse you,” says YHWH,
and I will even accuse your children’s children.
Pass over to the shore of the Kittim and look;
send to Kedar and ask carefully,
Where has anything like this been done?
Does any other nation change its gods?—
and they are not gods at all!
But my people have changed their glory
for things that have no use.
Be amazed at this, heavens,
and shudder in sheer horror,” says YHWH.
My people have committed two wrongs:
They have abandoned me, the source of living water,
and have dug cisterns for themselves—
broken cisterns that hold no water.
Long ago you broke off your yoke,
and tore off your bonds.
‘I will not be a slave!’ you said.
On every high hill, under every green tree
you abandoned yourself to prostitution.
I had planted you, a choice vine
of fully tested stock;
how could you turn out loathsome to me,
a bogus vine?
Though you scour it with soap
and use a great deal of lye,
the stain of your guilt is still before me,”
says God YHWH.
“How can you say, ‘I am not defiled,

I have not gone after Baals?
 Consider your conduct in the Valley;
 recall what you have done:
 A she-camel in heat, ranging near and far,
 breaking away toward the desert,
 snuffling the wind in her lust—
 who can curb her passion?
 No beasts need to tire themselves looking for her;
 they will meet her when her month comes.
 Stop wearing out your shoes
 and parching your throat.
 But you say, 'It's no use! No!
 I love these foreigners,
 and I must go after them!'"

I planted you, a choice vine, sprung from the soundest stock; and now you have turned into a bogus vine that is loathsome to me. So the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce a rich harvest.

I looked for virtue and I saw only bloodshed; I wanted honesty, and I heard only a cry of anguish. So the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce a rich harvest.

Second Reading

An Instruction by St. Columban

My dear brothers and sisters, please listen to what I have to say; you are going to hear something that must be said. You quench your thirst by drinking from the divine fountain; and this is what I want to speak to you about. Refresh yourself, but do not get rid of your thirst. I am telling you to drink without fully quenching your thirst, because the fountain of life and the fountain of love calls us to him, and says, "If anyone is thirsty, he should come to me and drink."

Understand clearly what you are drinking. Jeremiah would tell us, and the fountain of life himself would tell us, "Because they abandoned me, the fountain of living water, says the Master." That very Master, our God Prince Jesus, is the fountain of life, and for that reason he invites us to himself as if it were to a fountain for us to drink from. Anyone who loves him is drinking from him; and a person is drinking if he is filled

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with the Word of God; a person is drinking if he loves him fully and really desires him. A person is drinking if he is on fire with the love of wisdom.

Consider the source of the fountain; bread comes down to us from the same place, since the same one is the bread and the fountain, the only Son God ever fathered, our God the Master Jesus, for whom we should always be hungry. We may even eat him out of love for him, and devour him out of desire, in our eager longing for him. Let us drink from him as if he were a fountain, full of love. Let us drink him with total desire, and take pleasure in his sweetness and flavor.

Because the Master *is* sweet and pleasant-tasting; and so it is appropriate for us to eat and drink him, and yet stay always hungry and thirsty, since he is our food and drink, but can never be completely eaten or consumed. Though he can be eaten, he is not consumed; one can drink from him and he is not any less, because our bread is eternal and our fountain is fresh and everlasting. This is why the prophet says, "Those of you who are thirsty, go to the fountain." He is the fountain for those who are thirsty but are never fully satisfied; and so he calls to himself the hungry whom he blessed elsewhere. They were never satisfied in drinking; the more they drank, the greater was their thirst.

It is right, brothers and sisters, for us always to be longing for, looking for, and loving the Word of God in heaven, the fountain of wisdom. As the Emissary said, "All of the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in him," and he calls the thirsty to drink.

If you are thirsty, drink from the fountain of life; if you are hungry, eat the bread of life. It is a blessing to be hungry for this bread and thirsty for this fountain, because those who are so will constantly desire always to eat and drink them; because what they eat and drink is extremely sweet, and their thirst and appetite for more is never satisfied. Though it is always tasted, it is always desired more. This is why the prophet-king says, "Taste and see how sweet, how pleasant the Master is."

Jesus stood up and cried, "If anyone is thirsty, he should come to me and drink.

Streams of living water will flow from the heart of anyone who believes in me; if anyone is thirsty, he should come to me and drink.

Prayer

Dear Father, please help us search out the values that will bring us lasting joy in this changing world, and in our desire for what you promise, please make us one in mind and heart. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.


 THURSDAY
*First Reading**Jeremiah 3.1-5,19-4.4*

YHWH's message came to me:

“If a man divorces his wife
 and after leaving him,
 she marries another man,
 does the first husband come back to her?
 Would not the land be completely defiled?
 But you have sinned with many loves,
 and yet you would return to me!” says YHWH.
 “Lift your eyes to the high places, and look;
 is there anywhere where men have not had sex with you?
 You were waiting for them by the roadsides
 like an Arab in the desert.
 You defiled the land
 with your evil prostitution.
 And that is why the showers were held back
 and the spring rain failed.
 But because you have a prostitute's face,
 you refused to blush.
 Even now, do you not call me, ‘My Father,
 the bridegroom of my youth?’
 ‘Will he keep his anger forever;
 will he hold his grudge to the end?’
 This is what you say; yet you do
 all the evil you are capable of.
 I had thought
 how I would like to treat you like sons

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and give you a pleasant land,
a heritage that was the most beautiful among the nations.
You would call me, 'my Father,' I thought,
and never give up following me.
But like a woman who is faithless to the one who loves her
you have also been faithless to me,
house of Israel," says YHWH.
"A cry is heard in the high places:
the pathetic weeping of Israel's children,
because they have perverted their conduct
and forgotten their God YHWH.
Return, rebellious children,
and I will cure you of your revolt.
'Here we are; we are coming to you now,
because you are our God YHWH.
The hills are really liars,
those mountains crowding around;
Israel's rescue
is in our God YHWH alone.
The god of shame has eaten up
our fathers' labor from our youth:
their sheep and cattle,
and their sons and daughters.
We should lie down in shame,
and bury ourselves in grief,
because we have sinned against our God YHWH.
From our youth until the present day, neither we nor our fathers
have listened to the voice of our God YHWH.'
If you want to return, Israel," says YHWH,
"return to me.
If you put your detestable things out of my sight
and do not wander off,
then you can swear, 'As surely as YHWH is living,'
truthfully, with reason and virtue."
Then the nations will use his name in blessing,
and take pride in him.
Because this is what YHWH says to the men of Judah and Jerusalem:

“Cultivate your untilled ground;
do not plant among thorns.
For YHWH’s sake, be circumcised;
cut off the foreskin of your hearts,
men of Judah and citizens of Jerusalem;
or my anger will break out like a fire
and burn until no one can quench it,
because of your immoral actions.”

Though our sins give evidence against us, please act, Master for your own name’s sake. We have been disloyal many times and sinned against you.

If you, Master, were to keep records of our disobedience, who could bear up under it, Master? We have been disloyal many times and sinned against you.

Second Reading

An Instruction by St. Columban

My brothers and sisters, let us follow that vocation by which we are called from life to the fountain of life. He is the fountain, not only of living water, but of eternal life. He is the fountain of light and spiritual illumination, because it is from him that all these things come: wisdom, life, and eternal light. The source of life is the fountain of life; the creator of light is the fountain of spiritual illumination; and so we should look for the fountain of light and life and the living water by despising what we see, by leaving the world, and by living in the highest heaven. We should search out these things, and like rational, clever fish, we ought to drink the living water “which gushes up to eternal life.”

Merciful God, good Master, I wish that you would unite me to that fountain, so that I can drink there from the living spring of the water of life with those others who are thirsty for you. May I always live there in that heavenly region, and take pleasure in the abundance of sweetness, and say, “How sweet is the fountain of living water which never runs dry, the water gushing up to eternal life!”

My God, you are yourself that fountain always and ever to be desired, always and ever to be consumed. Master Prince, please give us this water always to be for us the “source of the living water which gushes up to eternal life.” I ask you for your great benefits. Is there anyone who does

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not know it? You, my King of glory, know how to give great gifts, and you have promised them; there is nothing greater than you, and you bestowed yourself on us; you gave yourself for us.

And that is why we ask to be able to know what we love, since we ask nothing other than what you give us yourself; because you are everything to us: our life, our light, our rescue, our food and drink, our God. Please inspire our hearts, I beg you, Jesus, with that breath of your Spirit; wound our souls with your love, so that the soul of each and every one of us will be able to say truthfully, “Show me my soul’s desire,” because I am wounded by your love.

These are the wounds I wish for, Master. It is a privilege for a soul to be so wounded by love; that sort of soul searches for the fountain of life and drinks from it, though it continues to be thirsty, and its thirst grows ever greater even while it is drinking. And so, the more the soul loves, the more it desires to love, and the greater its suffering, the greater its healing. In this same way may our God and Master Prince Jesus, the good, saving physician, wound the depths of our souls with a healing wound—that same Prince Jesus who is reigning in unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit through all the ages of ages. Amen.

If anyone drinks the water I give him, he will never be thirsty again; the water I give you will become a spring of water inside you gushing up to eternal life.

Master, please give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty any more. The water I give you will become a spring of water inside you gushing up to eternal life.

Prayer

Dear Father, please help us search out the values that will bring us lasting joy in this changing world, and in our desire for what you promise, please make us one in mind and heart. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.


*First Reading**Jeremiah 4.5-8,13-28*

This is what is said by YHWH:

“Announce this in Judah,

and make it heard in Jerusalem:

Blow a trumpet through the land,

and call up the recruits!

Say, ‘Fall in! We are to march

against the fortified cities!’

Carry the standard to Zion,

and seek refuge without delay;

I am bringing harm from the north

and enormous destruction.

The lion is coming out of his den;

the destroyer of nations has set out;

he has left his place

to turn your land into rubble

until your cities are demolished and empty.

So wrap sackcloth around yourselves,

and mourn and wail:

‘The blazing fury of YHWH

has not turned away from us!

There he is coming like storm clouds,

with his chariots like a hurricane;

his horses are swifter than eagles.

We are doomed! We are ruined!’

Wash your heart clean of evil, Jerusalem

if you want to be saved.

How long are your pernicious thoughts

to find lodging inside you?

Listen: they are proclaiming it from Dan,

and announcing the destruction from Mount Ephraim:

‘Make this known to the nations;

announce it in Jerusalem:

The besiegers are coming from a far-off land,

shouting the war-cry against the cities of Judah!
 They are surrounding her like watchmen in the fields,
 because she has rebelled against me," says YHWH.
 "Your conduct, your misdeeds, have done this to you;
 and how bitter is this calamity of yours;
 how it reaches to your very heart!
 'My breast! My breast! I am suffering so much!
 The walls of my heart!
 My heart is beating frantically;
 I cannot be still,
 because I have heard the sound of a trumpet
 and the alarm of war.
 Ruin after ruin is reported;
 the whole earth is demolished.
 In an instant, my tents are ravaged;
 my shelters are gone in a flash!
 How long must I see that signal
 and hear that trumpet blast?'
 My people are fools;
 they do not know me.
 They are senseless children
 without any understanding;
 but they are wise in evil,
 though they do not know how to do good."
 I looked at the earth, but it was empty and vacant;
 I looked at the sky, and its lights had gone out;
 I looked at the mountains, and they were shaking,
 and all the hills were crumbling!
 I looked, and now there was not a man,
 and even the birds in the air had flown away!
 I looked, and now the garden was a desert,
 with all its cities destroyed
 before YHWH, before his blazing fury
 because this is what YHWH says:
 "The whole land will be barren;
 but I will not completely destroy it.
 Because of this, the earth will mourn

and the sky above will turn dark;
 I have spoken; I will not change my mind;
 I have made my decision; I will not turn back.”

My God, before your blazing anger the whole earth shook with fear;
 please have mercy on us, Master, and do not destroy us.

Please restore us again, my God, with your saving power, and do not
 be angry with us and do not destroy us.

Second Reading

A Commentary on Joel by St. Jerome

“Return to me with all your heart” and show a spirit of change of heart “with fasting, weeping, and mourning”; so that while you fast now, you will be satisfied later, and while you weep now you will laugh later, and while you mourn now you will enjoy consolation some day. It is customary for those in sorrow or suffering hardship to tear their clothes; the Good News records that the high priest did this to exaggerate the charge against our Master and Savior; and we read that Paul and Barnabas did it when they heard words of blasphemy.

I would ask you not to tear your clothes, but “rip open your hearts” which are burdened with sin. Like wine skins, unless they are cut open they will burst spontaneously. After you have done this, return to the Master, your God, from whom you had been estranged because of your sins; do not despair of his mercy, no matter how great your sins, because great mercy will remove great sins.

That is, the Master is “gracious and merciful” and prefers the change of heart of a sinner to his death. Since he is patient and generous in his mercy, he does not give in to human impatience, and is willing to wait a long time for our change of heart. In fact, so extraordinary is the Master’s mercy in the face of evil, that if we change heart from our sins, he thinks better of his own threat and does not carry out the sanctions he had threatened. So by the changing of our attitude, he is changed himself; but in this passage, we should interpret “evil” to mean punishment, not the opposite of virtue, as we read in another place, “One day’s evils are enough for that one day,” and also, “If there is evil in the city, God did not create it.”

In the same way, given all that we have said above—that God is kind and merciful, patient, generous with his forgiveness, and extraordinary

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in his mercy toward evil—then to prevent the magnitude of his lenience from making us lax and negligent, he adds this sentence through his prophet: “Who knows, but he might change and think better of it and leave behind him a blessing?” In other words, he says, “I encourage you to change your attitude, because it is my duty, and I know that God is inexhaustibly merciful, as David says, “Have mercy on me, my God, in your great generosity, and in the depths of your kindness, erase my wrongdoing.”

But since we cannot know the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, I will qualify my statement, expressing a wish rather than taking anything for granted, and I will say, “Who knows, but he might change and think better of it?” Since he says “Who,” it must be understood that it is impossible or difficult to know for sure.

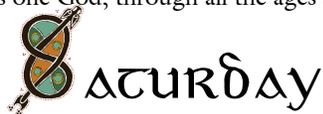
The prophet adds this to these words: “Offerings and libations for our Master God.” What he is saying to us in other words is that, once God has blessed us and forgiven our sins, we will then be able to offer sacrifice to God.

Everyone should turn back to God and be pure in heart and mind, and love him without deceit, so that the record of your sins will be erased.

Tear your hearts apart, not your clothes, and return to the Master, your God, so that the record of your sins will be erased.

Prayer

Dear Father, please help us search out the values that will bring us lasting joy in this changing world, and in our desire for what you promise, please make us one in mind and heart. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Jeremiah 7.1-20

The following message came to Jeremiah from YHWH: Stand at the gate of YHWH’s house and make this announcement there: “Listen to what YHWH says, all those of you from Judah who enter these gates to

worship YHWH:

“This is what is said by YHWH, leader of armies, the God of Israel: ‘Reform your conduct and your actions, so that I can stay with you in this place. Do not put your trust in the deceitful words, “This is YHWH’s Temple! YHWH’s Temple! YHWH’s Temple!” Only if you completely reform your ways and your actions; if each of you treats his neighbor justly; if you no longer oppress resident aliens, orphans, and widows; if you no longer shed innocent blood in this place, or follow foreign gods to your own harm, will I remain with you in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors long ago and forever.

“‘But here you are, putting your trust in deceitful words, to your own loss! Are you to steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal, go after foreign gods you do not know, and yet come to stand before me in this house which bears my name, and say, “We are safe; we can commit all these monstrous acts again”? Has this house which bears my name become a den of thieves in your eyes? I see what is being done too,’ says YHWH.

“‘You may go to Shiloh, which I made my home in the beginning. See what I did to it because of the depravity of my people Israel. And now, because you have committed all these infractions,’ says YHWH, ‘because you did not listen, though I spoke to you tirelessly; because you did not answer, though I called you, I will do to this house named after me, in which you trust, and to this place which I gave you and your fathers, the same thing I did to Shiloh. I will throw you away from me, as I threw away all your brothers and sisters, all the offspring of Ephraim.

“‘And you, now; do not intervene for this people; do not raise a pleading prayer on their behalf! Do not urge me, because I will not listen to you. Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, their fathers light the fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for the “queen of heaven,” while libations are poured out to foreign “gods” to spite me. Am I the one they are hurting?’ says YHWH. ‘Is it not in fact themselves, to their own consternation? See now,’ says God YHWH, ‘my anger and rage will pour over this place, on man and beast, on the trees in the field and the harvest of the earth; it will burn without being quenched.’”

Have you made this house which bears my name a den of thieves? My

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house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations.

Do not turn my Father's house into a market! My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations.

Second Reading *A Homily on Matthew by St. John Chrysostom*

Do you want to show respect for the Prince's body? Then do not despise him in his nakedness, or give him respect here in the church with silk clothes while you neglect him outside where he is cold and naked; because the one who said, "This is my body," and made it so by his words, also said, "You saw me hungry and did not feed me," and "to the extent that you did not do it for one of these most insignificant of my brothers or sisters, you did not do it for me." What we do here in the church needs a pure heart, not special clothes; what we do outside needs great dedication.

So we should learn to be men of wisdom and to show the Prince the respect he desires; because a person who is shown respect finds the greatest pleasure in the respect he wants, not in the respect we think best. Peter thought he was showing respect for the Prince when he refused to let him wash his feet; but what Peter wanted was not really respect; it was the exact opposite. Give him the respect prescribed in his law by giving your riches to the poor; because God does not want golden utensils; he wants golden hearts.

Now in saying this, I am not forbidding you to make this sort of gift; I am only demanding that along with gifts like this and prior to them you make charitable donations. He accepts the one, but he is much more pleased with the other; in the first case, only the giver benefits; in the second case, the recipient does too. A gift to the church may be taken as a form of ostentation, but a charitable donation is pure kindness.

What use is it to weigh down the Prince's table with golden cups, when he is himself dying of hunger? First, fill him when he is hungry, and then use the means you have left to decorate his table. Will you have a golden cup made and not give a cup of water? What is the use of providing the table with cloths made of gold thread and not providing the Prince himself with the clothes he needs? What benefit is there in that? Tell me: if you were to see him without the necessary food and were to leave him in that condition and simply surround his table with gold, would he be grateful to you? Would he not be angry instead? What

if you were to see him dressed in worn-out rags and stiff from the cold, and were to forget about dressing him and instead were to set up golden columns for him, saying that you were doing this in his honor? Would he not think he was being made fun of and severely insulted?

Apply this to the Prince also when he comes along the roads as a pilgrim, looking for shelter. You do not take him in as your guest, but you decorate the floor and walls and the capitals of the pillars. You provide silver chains for the lamps, but you cannot bear even to look at him as he lies chained in prison. Once again, I am not forbidding you to supply these decorations; I am urging you to provide these other things as well, and in fact to provide them first. No one has ever been prosecuted for not providing ornaments; but for those who neglect their neighbors a hell is waiting with an inextinguishable fire and torment in the company of demons. And so do not adorn the church and ignore your tormented brother, because he is the most valuable temple of all.

I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was homeless and you took me in. Now I tell you this: when you did this for the most neglected of my brothers and sisters, you did it for me.

Anyone who is kind to the poor is lending to the Master. Now I tell you this: when you did this for the most neglected of my brothers and sisters, you did it for me.

Prayer

Dear Father, please help us search out the values that will bring us lasting joy in this changing world, and in our desire for what you promise, please make us one in mind and heart. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading

Jeremiah 11.18-20, 12.1-13

I knew this because YHWH informed me; at that time you showed me, YHWH, what they were doing.
You would be on the right side, YHWH
if I were to disagree with you;
but even so, I must discuss the case with you.
Why do godless people succeed?
Why do all the traitors live contented lives?
You planted them; they have taken root;
and they keep growing and bearing fruit.
You are on their lips
but far from the thoughts deep inside them.
You know me, YHWH; you see me;
you have found that at heart I am with you.
Pick them out like sheep to be slaughtered;
set them aside for the days of carnage.
How long must the earth mourn,
and the greenery of the countryside wither?
Because of the immorality of those who live there,
beasts and birds disappear,
and it is because they keep saying, "God does not see what we do."
If running against men has made you tired,
how will you race against horses?
And if you fall on your faces in a land of peace,
what will you do in the thickets of the Jordan?
Because even your own brothers, the members of your father's

family, are betraying you; they have recruited a force against you. Do not believe them, even if they are friendly to you in what they say.

Yet, like a trusting lamb led to slaughter, I had not realized that they were hatching plots against me; “We should cut down the tree in its vigor; let us take him out of the land of the living, so that his name will never be spoken again.”

But you, YHWH, leader of armies, just Judge,
who search through minds and hearts,
let me be a witness of the vengeance you take on them,
because I have put my case into your hands.

I am abandoning my house,
and throwing away my inheritance;

I am handing over my soul's beloved
into the clutches of her enemies.

My inheritance has turned on me
like a lion in the jungle;
and because she has roared at me,
I treat her as an enemy.

My inheritance is a prey for hyenas;
it is surrounded by vultures;
come here, gather here, all you animals in the fields;
come and eat!

Many shepherds have ravaged my vineyard,
and have trodden my inheritance underfoot;
the allotment that gave me pleasure they have turned
into a desert wasteland.

They have made it a mournful badland,
and it lies there in front of me desolate—
the whole land is desolate
because no one has any concern for it.

Robbers have come up
upon every desert height;
YHWH has a sword which consumes
the land from end to end;
there is no peace for all mankind.

They have planted wheat and reaped thorns;
they have worn themselves out for nothing;

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they recoil from their harvest,
which is the flaming anger of YHWH.

Now my soul is in turmoil, and what should I say? “Father, rescue me from this moment?” But I came for this very moment! Father show how great your name is!

Why are you so sad, my soul? Why are you sobbing there inside me? Father, show how great your name is!

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Augustine

It is a blessing for us to perform the actions we have heard and sung about. Our hearing them means having them planted in us, while our doing them shows that the seed has borne fruit. By saying this, I want to caution you, my friends, not to enter the Church fruitless, satisfied with merely hearing about these mighty blessings and failing to do good deeds. True, “we have been saved by his grace,” says the Emissary, “and not by our actions, to prevent anyone from bragging; because it is by his grace that we have been saved.”

It is not as if a good life of some sort came first, and that subsequently God showed his love and regard for it from on high, and said, “Let us come to the aid of these men and help them quickly because they are living a good life.” No, our life was displeasing to him; whatever we did by ourselves was displeasing to him; but what he did in us was not displeasing to him. And so he will condemn what we have done, but he will save what he has done himself in us.

We were not good, but God had pity on us and sent his Son to die for bad men, not good ones, for evil ones, not the virtuous. Yes, “the Prince died for those without God.” Notice what is written next, “It is hard enough for a person to die for a virtuous man, even though it is possible for someone to dare even to die for a good man.” It may be that someone can be found who will dare to die for a good man; but who would be willing to die for a vicious man, for an immoral one, for a sinner except only the Prince, who is so virtuous that he makes virtuous even the vicious?

And so, my brothers and sisters, we *had* no good actions, because all our actions were evil. Yet although men’s actions were like this, God in his mercy did not abandon men. He sent his Son to redeem us, not with

gold or silver, but at the price of his blood spilled for us. The Prince, the spotless lamb, became the sacrificial victim, led to the slaughter for the sheep that were blemished—if, in fact, we can say that they were blemished and not totally corrupt. This is the grace we have received. We should live to be worthy of that great grace and not do injury to it. The physician who has come to us is so powerful that he has healed all our sins; if we choose to be sick once again, we will not only harm ourselves, we will show ingratitude to the physician as well.

So let us follow the Prince's paths, which he has revealed to us, and above all the path of humility, which he himself became for us. He showed us that path by his teachings, and he followed it himself by his suffering on our behalf. In order to die for us—because as God he could not die—"the Word became flesh and made his home among us." The Immortal One took on mortality so that he could die for us, and by dying put to death our death.

This is what the Master did, and this is the gift he bestowed on us. The Mighty One was brought down, and the Lowly One was slaughtered; and after he was slaughtered, he came back to life again and was raised high; because he did not intend to leave us dead in hell, but to lift up in the return to life from the dead those whom he had already lifted up and made virtuous by the faith and praise they gave him. Yes, he gave us the path of humility. If we keep on it, we will acknowledge our belief in the Master and have good reason to sing, "We will praise you, our God; we will praise you and call on your name."

I will show my gratitude to you, Master, my God, with all my heart, because your mercy toward me is great.

You are my God; I thank you; my God, and I praise you, because your mercy toward me is great.

Prayer

Omnipotent God, since every good thing comes from you, please fill our hearts with love for you, increase our faith, and by your constant care protect the good you have given us. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Monday

First Reading

Jeremiah 19.1-5,10-20.6

This is what is said by YHWH: “Go, buy a potter’s clay flask. Take along some of the elders of the people and priests, and go out toward the Valley of Benhinnom, at the entrance of the Potsherd Gate; and there make the announcement I will speak to you:

“Listen to what is said by YHWH, kings of Judah and citizens of Jerusalem: This is what is said by YHWH, leader of armies, the God of Israel: “I am going to bring such ruin on this place that everyone who hears of it will feel his ears tingle. This is because they have abandoned me and estranged this place by burning incense to foreign gods in it, gods which neither they nor their ancestors knew; and the kings of Judah have filled this place with the blood of the innocent. They have built high places for Baal to sacrifice their sons in fire as holocausts to Baal—which is something I did not command or even speak of, something that did not enter my mind.””

“Then you are to break the flask in the sight of the men who went with you, and tell them, “This is what is said by YHWH, leader of armies: “I will smash this people and this city in this way, in the way a person smashes a clay pot so that it cannot be repaired. And Topheth will be a cemetery, for lack of a place elsewhere to bury people. This is what I will do to this place and to those who live in it,” says YHWH; “I will make this city like Topheth, with all the houses whose roofs were used to burn incense to the whole army of heaven and pour out libations to foreign gods.””

when Jeremiah returned from Topheth, where YHWH had sent him to prophesy, he stood in the court of God’s house and said to all the people, “This is what is said by YHWH, leader of armies, the God of Israel: ‘I will be sure to bring on this city all the ruin I threatened it with, because they have stiffened their necks and have not obeyed what I have told them.’”

Jeremiah was heard prophesying all this by the priest Pashhur, son of Immer, who was chief officer in YHWH’s house; so he had the prophet whipped and placed in the stocks at the upper Gate of Benjamin in YHWH’s house. The next morning, after Pashhur had released Jeremiah

from the stocks, the prophet said to him, “YHWH will name you, instead of Pashhur, ‘Terror all around,’ because this is what YHWH says: ‘Oh yes, I will hand you over to terror, and all your friends with you. Your own eyes will see them fall to sword-thrusts from their enemies. I will hand all Judah over to the king of Babylon, who will take them captive to Babylon or slaughter them with his sword. All the wealth of this city, all it has sweated for and holds dear, all the treasures of the kings of Judah will be given by me as loot into the hands of their antagonists, who will seize it and carry it away to Babylon. You, Pashhur, and all the members of your household will go into exile; you will go to Babylon, and all your friends with you; and there you will die and be buried, because you have prophesied lies to them.’”

Jerusalem, the one who kills prophets and stones those who are sent to you, I have yearned so often to gather your children in the way a hen gathers her brood under her wings—but you would not come.

You have stubbornly turned your heads so that you would not hear what I say; I have yearned so often to gather your children in the way a hen gathers her brood under her wings—but you would not come.

Second Reading

*The Imitation of Christ
by Thomas à Kempis*

“My son,” says the Master, “listen to what I say, words that are the most appealing of all words, words which surpass all the knowledge of the philosophers and wise men of this world. “What I say is spirit and life” and cannot be comprehended by human senses alone.

These words are not to be interpreted in such a way as to agree with the empty pleasure of the listener; they must be listened to in silence and accepted with humility and great affection.

And I said, “It is such a privilege to be the man whom you teach, Master, and the one to whom you give lessons in your law; you soften the blow of the evil day for him” and you do not desert him on the earth.

The Master says, “I have been teaching my prophets from the beginning, and even to the present time I have not stopped speaking to every man; but many are deaf and obstinate in response.

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“Many listen to the world more easily than they listen to God; they follow their material desires more willingly than the pleasure of God.

“The world promises rewards that are temporal and insignificant, and these are pursued with great fervor; I promise rewards that are eternal and unsurpassable; yet the hearts of mortals are sluggish to respond.

“Is there anyone who serves and obeys me in every way with as much care as the world and its princes are served?

“Blush, then, you lazy, complaining servant, because men are better prepared for deeds that lead to death than you are for the deeds that belong to life; they take more joy in futility than you do in truth.

“Yet they are often deceived in their hope, while my promise deceives no one, and leaves no one who confides in me empty-handed. I will give what I have promised, and I will fulfill what I have said for any man who remains faithful in my love to the very end. I am the rewarder of all good men, the one who rigorously challenges the devoted.

“Write what I say in your heart and study it attentively, because it will be absolutely necessary in the time of temptation. Whatever you fail to understand in reading my words will become clear to you on the day I visit you.

“I usually visit my chosen ones in two ways: with temptation and consolation. And I read two lessons to them every day: one to reprimand them for their faults, and the other to urge them on to increase their virtue.

“One who possesses what I say and despises it earns his own condemnation on the last day.”

My son, surrender your heart to me and keep your eyes on my footsteps; and then I will place a crown of grace on your head.

My son, open your heart to my wisdom and listen to what I say; and then I will place a crown of grace on your head.

Prayer

Omnipotent God, since every good thing comes from you, please fill our hearts with love for you, increase our faith, and by your constant care protect the good you have given us. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

*First Reading**Jeremiah 20.7-18*

You misled me, YHWH, and I let myself be misled;
 you were too strong for me, and you won.
 All day long I am someone people laugh at;
 everyone makes fun of me.
 Whenever I speak, I must shout;
 violence and outrage is my message;
 YHWH's words have brought me
 ridicule and condemnation all day long.
 I tell myself that I will not mention him,
 I will speak in his name no more;
 but then it becomes like a fire burning in my heart,
 imprisoned in my bones;
 I grow exhausted with holding it in;
 I cannot stand it.
 Yes, I can hear many people whispering,
 "Terror all around!"
 Denounce him! Let us denounce him!"
 All those who were my friends
 are on the lookout for any misstep I make.
 "Maybe he will be trapped; then we can win
 and take our vengeance on him!"
 But YHWH is with me, like a strong champion;
 my persecutors will trip and will not win.
 In their failure, they will be completely disgraced
 and be in lingering, unforgettable consternation.
 YHWH, leader of armies, who challenge the virtuous
 and test minds and hearts,
 please let me see the vengeance you take on them,
 because I have committed my case to your care.
 Sing to YHWH,
 praise YHWH,
 because he has rescued the life of the poor
 from the power of evil men.

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Cursed be the day
I was born!
May the day my mother gave me birth
never be blessed!
Cursed be the man who brought the news
to my father, and said,
“A child, a son, has been born to you!”
And filled him with great happiness.
That man should be like the cities
which YHWH relentlessly toppled;
he should hear war cries in the morning
alarms of battle at noon,
because he did not do away with me in the womb!
Then my mother would have been my grave,
with her womb imprisoning me forever.
Why did I come out of that womb
to see sorrow and pain
and to end my days in disgrace?

I hear the whispered threats of those who were my friends, and see how they are watching for my downfall and saying, “Maybe we can cheat him and then we will have him in our power and take our revenge.” But you, Master, are a mighty warrior always at my side.

I hear the whisperings of the crowd, and the threats from every side as they plot to take my life. But you, Master, are a mighty warrior always at my side.

Second Reading

*The Imitation of Christ
by Thomas à Kempis*

You thunder your verdicts upon me, my Master; you shake all my bones with fear and dread, and my soul is panic-stricken. I am in consternation when I realize that “not even the heavens are pure in your sight.”

“If you discovered evil in the angels” and did not spare them, what will become of me? The stars fell from heaven, and what should I, mere dirt, expect? Those whose deeds seemed praiseworthy fell into the depths, and I have seen those who were once fed with the bread of

angels finding their pleasure in husks for pigs.

There is no holiness where you have withdrawn your hand, Master; there is no beneficial wisdom if you stop ruling over it; because if you abandon us, we sink down and die, but if you visit us, we rise and live again. We are unstable, but you make us firm; we grow cool, but you kindle us into flame.

All superficial good reputation has been swallowed in the depths of your verdict upon me.

What is everything material in your sight? "Can clay brag against its Maker?"

How can anyone be stimulated by empty talk if his heart is subject to the truth in God?

The whole world cannot make a man subject to the truth swell with pride; and he will not be influenced by the flattery of all his admirers if he has God as the foundation of his trust.

That is, those who do all the talking amount to nothing; they fail with their cacophony of words, but "the Master's truth endures forever."

Master, you are my refuge and my shield; I put my hope in what you have said. Leave me, you scoundrels, and I will observe the commandments of my God.

I hate a divided heart; I love your law. Leave me, you scoundrels, and I will observe the commandments of my God.

Prayer

Omnipotent God, since every good thing comes from you, please fill our hearts with love for you, increase our faith, and by your constant care protect the good you have given us. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

ednesday

First Reading

Jeremiah 26.1-15

In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah, this message came from YHWH:

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“This is what is said by YHWH: ‘Stand in the court of YHWH’s house and speak to the people of all the cities of Judah who come to worship in YHWH’s house; tell them whatever I command you, and leave nothing out. It may be that they will listen and each of them will turn back from his evil conduct, so that I can change my mind from the harm I have planned to inflict on them for their immoral actions.’

“Tell them, ‘This is what is said by YHWH: ‘If you disobey me and do not live in accordance with the Law I placed before you, and do not listen to what is said by my slaves the prophets, whom I constantly send you even though you do not obey them, I will treat this house like Shiloh, and make this the city which all the nations of the earth use when they are cursing each other.’”

Now the priest, prophets, and the whole people heard Jeremiah say all this in YHWH’s house. When Jeremiah finished speaking all that YHWH told him to say to the people, the priests and prophets laid hold of him, and cried, “You deserve to be put to death! Why are you prophesying in YHWH’s name and saying this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be abandoned and deserted?” And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in YHWH’s house.

When the authorities in Judah were informed of all this, they came up from the king’s palace to YHWH’s house and held court at the New Gate of YHWH’s house. The priests and prophets said to the authorities and all the people, “This man deserves death; he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears.”

Jeremiah gave this answer to the authorities and all the people: “It was YHWH who sent me to prophesy against this house and city all that you have heard. So now reform your conduct and what you are doing; listen to the voice of your God YHWH, so that YHWH will think better of the harm he threatens you with. As for me, I am in your hands; do with me what you think good and right. But take careful notice of this: if you put me to death, it is innocent blood you bring on yourselves, on this city, and on its citizens; because it really was YHWH who sent me to you, to say all of this for you to hear.”

Take this to heart: if you kill me, you and your city must bear the guilt of innocent blood.

Pilate washed his hands before the crowd, and said, “I am innocent

of the blood of this virtuous man.” You and your city must bear the guilt of innocent blood.

Second Reading

A Commentary on John by Origen

“Destroy this temple and in three days I will rebuild it.” It seems to me that Jesus meant the Judeans in this episode to stand for sensual men and those desirous of material, sensual things. These Judeans were angry at his expulsion of the people who were turning his Father’s house into a market; so they asked for a sign to justify these actions, a sign that would show that the Word of God, whom they refused to accept, was acting properly. The Savior’s reply combines a statement about the Temple with a prophesy about his own body, because in answer to their question, “What sign can you give to justify your conduct?” he says, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will rebuild it.”

In fact, I think that both the Temple and the body of Jesus can be seen with a single focus as a forerunner of the Church; because the Church is being built out of living stones; it is in the process of becoming “a spiritual home for a holy priesthood, raised on the foundations of Emissaries and prophets, with the Prince as its main cornerstone.” And that is why it bears the name “Temple.” On the other hand, it is written, “You are the Prince’s body, and each of you is a cell in it.” So even if the symmetrical alignment of stones would seem to be destroyed and broken up, and, as described in the twenty-first psalm, all the bones which go to make up the Prince’s body would seem to be scattered by insidious attacks in persecutions or times of trouble, still the temple will be rebuilt and the body will come back to life on the third day, after the day of calamity that threatens it and the day of fulfillment which follows.

That is, the third day will dawn upon a new heaven and a new earth when these bones that form the whole house of Israel are brought to life on that great day of the Master, when death has been defeated. So the return to life of the Prince, which was achieved after his suffering on the cross, embraces the mystery of the return to life of his whole body.

You see, just as the physical body of the Prince was crucified and buried, and afterward brought back to life, so in the same way the whole body of the Prince’s sacred people has been crucified and lives no longer with its own life; because each cell in it, like Paul, takes pride in the fact

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of nothing else but the cross of our Master Prince Jesus, by which he has been crucified himself to the world, and the world to him. But each Christian has not only been crucified with the Prince and crucified to the world; he has been buried with the Prince too, as Paul tells us: "We have been buried with the Prince." But as though already in possession of some pledge of a return to life, Paul goes on to say, "And we have come back to life with him."

Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is living inside you, and whom God has given you. You are not your own any more; you were bought, and the price was a huge one. You should show respect for God in your body.

You are not to defile yourselves; you are to be holy, because I am holy. You should show respect for God in your body.

Prayer

Omnipotent God, since every good thing comes from you, please fill our hearts with love for you, increase our faith, and by your constant care protect the good you have given us. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Jeremiah 29.1-14

This is the contents of a letter which the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, the priests, the prophets, and all the people who were exiled by Nebuchadnezzar from Jerusalem to Babylon. This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the courtiers, the authorities of Judah and Jerusalem, and the artisans and skilled workmen had left Jerusalem. It was delivered in Babylon by Elasah, son of Shaphan, and by Gemariah, son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah, King of Judah, sent to the King of Babylon. The letter read as follows:

"This is what is said by YHWH, leader of armies, the God of Israel, to all the exiles I drove from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses to live

in; plant gardens and eat their produce; take wives and produce sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters husbands, so that they will be able to have sons and daughters; you are to increase your numbers there, not decrease them. Promote the welfare of the city into which I have exiled you; pray for it to YHWH, because your own welfare depends on it.

This is what is said by YHWH, commander of armies, the God of Israel: Do not let yourselves be deceived by the prophets and diviners among you; do not listen to those among you who dream dreams, because they are prophesying lies to you in my name; I did not send them, says YHWH.

This is what is said by YHWH: Only after seventy years have elapsed will I visit you and fulfill my promise to you to bring you back to this place; because I am well aware of the plans I have in mind for you, says YHWH: plans for your welfare, not for your misery; plans to give you a future full of hope. When you call me, when you go to pray to me, I will listen to you. When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you search me out with all your heart, you will find me with you, says YHWH, and I will change your condition; I will collect you from all the nations and places I have banished you to, says YHWH, and bring you back to the place from which I exiled you.

Show gratitude to the Master and call on his name; look for the Master and his strength; search for his presence at all times.

Consider this: Has anyone put his trust in the Master and been disappointed? Look for the Master and his strength; search for his presence at all times.

Second Reading A Sermon on the Beatitudes by St. Leo the Great

My dear friends, when our Master Prince Jesus was reporting the Good News of the Kingdom and healing various illnesses through the whole of Galilee, the fame of his mighty deeds spread into all of Syria, and great crowds from all parts of Judea flocked to the heavenly physician. Because human ignorance is slow to believe what it does not see, and equally slow to hope for what it does not know, those who were to be educated with the divine teaching had to be motivated first by material benefits and visible miracles so that, once they had experienced

his kindly power, they would no longer doubt the healthy effect of his instruction.

And so, to transform external healings into internal remedies, and to cure people's souls now that he had healed their bodies, our Master took himself apart from the surrounding crowds, climbed to the loneliness of a neighboring mountain, and called the Emissaries over to him. From the height of this mystical location, he then imparted to them the most elevated instructions, suggesting both by the very nature of the place and by what he was doing that he was the one who had honored Moses long ago by speaking to him.

At that time, what he said revealed a terrifying justice; but now they show a sacred kindness and sympathy, to fulfill what was promised in the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "Yes, the days are coming, says the Master, when I will enter into a new Treaty with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. After those days, says the Master, I will put my laws inside them and write them on their hearts."

And so it was that the one who had spoken to Moses also spoke to the Emissaries; and as he wrote in the hearts of his students, the swift hand of the Word composed the regulations of the new Treaty. And this was not done as it was before, in the midst of dense clouds, with terrifying sounds and lightning, so that the people were frightened away from approaching the mountain. No, there was a calm lecture which clearly reached the ears of everyone who stood nearby, so that the harshness of the Law would be softened by the gentleness of grace, and the spirit of adoption would drive out the terror of slavery.

As to the contents of the Prince's teaching, his own sacred words give evidence of it; and in this way, anyone who longs to attain eternal bliss can now recognize the steps that lead to that high happiness. "It is a blessing," he says, "for people to be poor in spirit, because they are members of the Kingdom of Heaven." It might have been unclear about which poor he was referring to, if he had not added anything after, "It is a blessing for people to be poor," about the kind of poor he had in mind—because then the poverty that many people suffer because of serious, harsh necessity might seem to be enough to earn them the Kingdom of Heaven. But when he says, "It is a blessing for people to be poor in spirit," he shows that the Kingdom of Heaven is to be given to those who are distinguished by the humility of soul rather than their lack

of worldly goods.

Listen, my people, to my teaching; pay attention to what I am saying.

I will speak to you in an analogy; I will unfold for you the mysteries of past ages; pay attention to what I am saying.

Prayer

Omnipotent God, since every good thing comes from you, please fill our hearts with love for you, increase our faith, and by your constant care protect the good you have given us. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Jeremiah 30.18-31.9

This is what is said by YHWH:

“Yes, I will restore Jacob’s tents;

I will have pity on his homes;

Cities will be rebuilt on hills,

and palaces restored as they were.

From them songs of praise will ring,

and happy laughter.

I will make them many, not few;

they will not be tiny, because I will glorify them.

Their children will be as they were in olden times,

and their assembly will stand firm before me;

I will punish all their oppressors.

Their leader will come from his own people,

and his rulers will be his own relatives.

When I send for him, he will approach me—

how else would anyone take the deadly risk

of coming near me?” says YHWH.

“You will be my people,

and I will be your God.

Here is YHWH’s storm!

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His rage breaks out
in a whirling tornado
that bursts over the heads of immoral people.
YHWH's anger will not let up
until he has done and fulfilled
what he planned in his heart.
When the time comes,
you will understand fully;
at that time," says YHWH,
"I will be the God of all the tribes of Israel,
and they will be my people."
This is what is said by YHWH:
"The people that escaped sword-thrusts
have found favor in the desert.
As Israel comes forward to be given his rest,
YHWH appears to him from far off;
I have loved you with a love from ancient times,
and so I have kept my mercy for you.
I will restore you, and you will be rebuilt,
virgin Israel;
you will go out to dance with the people celebrating,
carrying the tambourines you use on festal days.
You will plant your vineyards again
on the mountains of Samaria;
and those who plant them will enjoy their fruit.
Yes, a day will come when the watchmen
will call on Mount Ephraim,
'Come forward; let us go to Zion
to our God YHWH.'"
Because this is what is said by YHWH:
"Shout with joy for Jacob,
hold a celebration at the head of the nations;
call out your praise, and say,
'YHWH has set his people free!
He has rescued the remnant of Israel!'
Yes, I will bring them back
from the land in the north;

I will gather them from the ends of the world,
 with the blind and the lame among them,
 and mothers and those who are pregnant;
 they will return as an immense throng.
 They left here in tears,
 but I will comfort them and guide them;
 I will lead them to brooks for water
 on a level road, so that no one will stumble,
 because I am a father to Israel,
 and Ephraim is my firstborn.

The day is coming when the watchmen will shout, “Come forward, let us go to Zion, to the Master, our God.”

Come, house of Jacob, let us walk in the Master’s light. Come forward, let us go to Zion, to the Master, our God.

Second Reading *A Sermon on the Beatitudes by St. Leo the Great*

There can be no doubt that the poor can achieve the blessing of humility more easily than those who are rich. In the case of the poor, the lack of worldly goods is often accompanied by a quiet gentleness, while the rich are more prone to arrogance. Still, many wealthy people have a tendency to use their abundance to perform works of benevolence and not to swell their own pride; they consider their greatest gain to be what they spend to alleviate the hardship of others.

This virtue is open to everyone, no matter what class or condition, because everyone can be equal in willingness to give, however unequal they may be in earthly fortune. In fact, their inequality in worldly means is unimportant, provided they are found to be equal in spiritual possessions; and so it is a blessing to have that poverty which is not trapped by the love of temporal things and does not try to be enriched by worldly wealth and instead desires to grow rich in heavenly goods.

The Emissaries were the first after the Master himself to provide us with an example of this generous poverty, when they all equally left their belongings at the call of the heavenly Master. By an immediate conversion, they were turned from the catching of fish to become fishers of human beings; and by their example, they won many others to the imitation of their own faith.

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In these first sons of the Church, there was only one heart and one soul among all those who believed; they abandoned all their worldly property and possessions in their dedicated poverty, and were enriched with eternal goods; and in accordance with the apostolic preaching, they were happy to have nothing from this world and to possess everything in the Prince.

And so, when the Emissary Peter was on his way up to the Temple and was asked for a charitable donation by the lame man, he answered, “I have no silver or gold; but I will give you what I do have. In the name of Prince Jesus of Nazareth, stand up and walk.” What is more sublime than this humility? What could be richer than this poverty? Though Peter cannot help the man out with money, he can confer gifts of nature. With a word, Peter brought healing to the man who had been lame from birth; a man who did not give a coin with the emperor’s image refashioned the image of Jesus in this person.

And by the riches of this treasure, not only did he help the man who recovered the power to walk, he helped the five thousand others who believed the preaching of the Emissary because of this miraculous cure. In this way, Peter, who in his poverty had no money to give the beggar, bestowed such an abundance of divine grace that in restoring to health the feet of one man, he healed the hearts of many thousands of believers. He had found all of them lame; but he made them leap for joy in the Prince.

The students came to Jesus and he taught them in these words: It is a blessing for people to be poor in spirit, because they are members of the Kingdom of Heaven.

My eyes will rest upon a humble and remorseful man who is in fear at what I say. It is a blessing for people to be poor in spirit, because they are members of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Prayer

Omnipotent God, since every good thing comes from you, please fill our hearts with love for you, increase our faith, and by your constant care protect the good you have given us. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.


 SATURDAY
*First Reading**Jeremiah 31.15-22, 27-34*

The sound of sobbing is heard in Ramah;
 bitter weeping.
 Rachel is grieving for her children
 and refuses comfort,
 because her children exist no longer.
 This is what YHWH says:
 “Stop your grieving cries
 and wipe the tears from your eyes.
 The sorrow you have shown will have its reward,”
 says YHWH;
 “they will return from the enemy’s territory.
 There is hope for the future,” says YHWH;
 “your sons will return to your borders.”
 I hear Ephraim pleading; I hear it:
 “You punished me, and I am cowed;
 I was an untamed calf.
 If you let me, I will come back,
 because you are YHWH, my God.
 I am turning back in repentance;
 I have come to my senses; I strike my breast;
 I am blushing with shame;
 as I carry the disgrace of my youth.”
 Is Ephraim not my favorite son,
 the child I find my pleasure in?
 As often as I reprimand him,
 I still remember him with favor;
 my heart stirs for him;
 I must show him mercy,” says YHWH.
 Set up milestones;
 put up guideposts;
 turn your attention to the highway
 and to the road you came on.
 Turn back, virgin Israel;

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turn back to these cities.
How long will you keep straying,
rebellious daughter?

YHWH has created something new on earth:

“the woman must embrace the man with devotion.”

“The days are coming,” says YHWH, “when I will plant the house of Israel and the house of Judah with human seeds and animal seeds. As I once watched over them to uproot and tear down, to destroy, ruin, and damage, I will watch over them to build and plant,” says YHWH.

“In those days, they will no longer say,
‘The fathers ate sour grapes,
and it was the children’s teeth that were set on edge’;
a person will die only because of his own fault; it will be the teeth of the one who eats the green grapes that will be set on edge.

“The days are coming,” says YHWH, “when I will make a new Treaty with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the Treaty I made with their ancestors on the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, because they violated my Treaty, and I had to show myself their master,” says YHWH.

“But this is the Treaty I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” says YHWH. “I will place my Law inside them, and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they need to teach their friends and relatives how to know YHWH; all of them, from the least to the greatest, will know me,” says YHWH, “because I will forgive their wrongdoing and no longer remember their sin.”

Please create a clean heart for me, my God, and put a new, unwavering spirit inside me.

Please turn away your face from my guilt, my God, and erase all my sins; and put a new, unwavering spirit inside me.

Second Reading A Sermon on the Beatitudes by St. Leo the Great

After declaring the blessings of poverty, the Master went on to say, “It is a blessing for people to suffer, because they will be comforted.” But the suffering for which he promises eternal comfort, my dear friends, has nothing to do with ordinary worldly grief; because the tears which have

their origin in the sorrow common to all mankind are no blessing for anyone. There is another cause for the saints' sobs, and another reason why their tears are a blessing. Religious grief mourns over sins, one's own or someone else's; it does not grieve because of what happens as a result of God's justice, but because of what is done by human malice. In fact, the one who does wrong is more to be grieved over than the one who suffers it, because his immorality plunges the sinner into punishment, while endurance can raise a virtuous man to glory.

Next, the Master says, "It is a blessing for people not to be self-assertive, because they will inherit the land." He promises the inheritance of the earth to the meek and gentle, the insignificant and humble, and to everyone who is ready to put up with any injury. And this inheritance is not to be called small or insignificant, as though it were distinct from our heavenly home, because we know that it is the Kingdom of Heaven that is promised to the meek. The earth that is promised to the meek and that will be given to those who do not assert themselves is nothing else than the bodies of the saints. Through what they earned by their humility, their bodies will be transformed by a joyous return to life and dressed in the glory of immortality. And since they are no longer opposed in any way to their spirits, their bodies will remain in perfect harmony and unity with the will of the soul; and then, the outer man will really be the peaceful and unblemished possession of the inner man.

Then those who do not assert themselves will really inherit the earth in perpetual peace, and nothing will be removed from their rights; because "this nature, subject to decay, will put on what is imperishable, and this mortal nature will put on immortality." Their risk will turn into reward; what was a burden will have become an honor.

It is a blessing for people to suffer, because they will be comforted; it is a blessing for people to be hungry and thirsty for virtue, because they will be satisfied.

It is a blessing for people not to assert themselves, because they will inherit the land; it is a blessing for people to be hungry and thirsty for virtue, because they will be satisfied.

Prayer

Omnipotent God, since every good thing comes from you, please fill our

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hearts with love for you, increase our faith, and by your constant care protect the good you have given us. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading

Jeremiah 37.21, 38.14-28

King Zedekiah gave orders for Jeremiah to be imprisoned in the guards' quarters, and to be given a roll of bread every day from the bakers' shop until all the bread of the city was eaten; and so Jeremiah remained in the guards' quarters.

Once, King Zedekiah had a meeting with the prophet Jeremiah at the third entrance of YHWH's house. "I have a question to ask you," said the King to Jeremiah; "do not hide anything from me."

"If I tell you anything," Jeremiah answered, "you will have me killed, will you not? And if I give you advice, you will not listen to it."

But King Zedekiah swore privately to Jeremiah, "As surely as YHWH, who gave us the breath of life, is alive himself, I will not kill you or hand you over to the ones who are after your life."

At this, Jeremiah told Zedekiah, "This is what is said by YHWH, the leader of armies, the God of Israel: 'If you surrender to the authorities under Babylon's king, you will save your life. This city will not be burned down, and you and your family will survive. But if you do not surrender to the authorities under Babylon's king, this city will fall under the control of the Chaldeans, who will destroy it with fire, and you will not escape their clutches.'"

But then King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "I am afraid of the men of Judah who have deserted to the Chaldeans; I may be handed over to them, and they will abuse me."

"You will not be handed over," answered Jeremiah. "Please obey YHWH's voice and do as I tell you, and then you will be successful, and your life will be spared. But if you refuse to surrender, this is what

YHWH shows me: All the women left in the house of Judah's king will be brought out to the authorities under Babylon's king, and they will insult you in this way:

“Your good friends

betrayed you, outclassed you!

Now that your feet are stuck in the mud,

they are crawling away.”

“All your wives and sons will be taken out to the Chaldeans, and you will not escape their hands yourself; you will be turned over to the King of Babylon, and this city will be burned to the ground.

Then Zedekiah told Jeremiah, “Do not let anyone know of this conversation, or you will die. If the authorities hear I spoke to you, and if they come and ask you, ‘Tell us what you said to the King; do not hide it from us or we will kill you,’ or ‘What did the King say to you?’ give them this answer: ‘I pleaded with the King not to send me back to Jonathan's house to die there.’”

When all the authorities came to Jeremiah, they questioned him, and he answered them in the very words the King had commanded. They said no more to him, because nothing had been heard of the earlier conversation. And so Jeremiah stayed in the guards' quarters until the day Jerusalem was taken.

Let us prove that we are God's servants by patient endurance of hardship in times of trouble and suffering, and when we are whipped or imprisoned.

Those who remained faithful no matter what they suffered won God's favor in times of trouble and suffering, and when they were whipped or imprisoned.

Second Reading A Sermon on the Beatitudes by St. Leo the Great

The Master then goes on to say, “It is a blessing for people to be hungry and thirsty for virtue, because they will be satisfied.” This hunger is not for any material food, and this thirst is not for any earthly drink; it is a longing to be blessed with virtue, and, by penetrating the secret of all the mysteries, to be filled with the Master himself.

It is a privilege for a soul to long for the food of virtue and to be thirsty for this kind of drink; it would not try to find such things if it had

not already tasted their enjoyment. When the soul hears the voice of the Spirit saying to it through the prophet, "Taste and see that the Master is good," it has already received a share in God's goodness, and is on fire with love, the love that gives joy of consummate purity. It considers everything that belongs to time to be nothing; it is completely eaten up with desire to eat and drink the food of virtue. The soul grasps the true meaning of the first and great commandment: "You are to love the Master God with your whole heart, your whole mind, and your whole strength," because to love God is nothing but loving virtue.

Finally, just as concern for one's neighbor is added to love of God, the virtue of mercy is added to the desire for virtue, as it says, "It is a blessing for people to be merciful, because God will be merciful to them."

Remember, Christian, the priceless wisdom that is yours. Keep in mind the kind of school in which you are to learn your skills, and the rewards to which you are called. Mercy itself wants you to be merciful, virtue itself wants you to be virtuous, so that the Creator will shine out of his creature and the image of God will be reflected in the mirror of the human heart as it imitates his qualities. The faith of those who live their faith is a serene faith. What you long for will be given to you; what you love will be yours forever.

Since it is by making charitable donations that everything is pure for you, you will also receive that blessing which is promised next by the Master: "It is a blessing for people to be pure in heart, because they will see God." Dear friends, the happiness of those for whom this kind of reward is prepared is a great one. And who are the clean of heart if not those who are struggling to acquire those virtues we were speaking of above? What mind can conceive the great happiness of seeing God? What words can express it? Yet human nature will achieve this when it has been transformed so that it sees the Divinity "no longer in a mirror, but face to face": the Divinity that no man has been able to see. In the inexpressible joy of this eternal vision, human nature will possess "what no eye has seen and no ear has heard, what no man's heart has conceived."

Master, how great is the goodness you have stored up for those who hold you in respect; and you lavish this goodness on everyone who puts his hope in you.

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No eye has seen and no ear heard, and no man's heart has conceived this goodness you lavish on everyone who puts his hope in you.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since you have redeemed us and made us your children in the Prince, please look upon us, give us true freedom, and bring us to the inheritance you promised. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Monday

First Reading

Jeremiah 42.1-16, 43.4-7

All the army's commanders, Johanan son of Kareah, Azariah son of Hoshaiah, and all the people, high and low, approached the prophet Jeremiah, and said, "Please grant this request: please pray for this whole remnant to your God YHWH. There are only a few of us, though once there were many, as you can see clearly. Have your God YHWH show us what path we should take, and what we should do."

"Very well," answered the prophet Jeremiah, "I will pray to your God YHWH as you want me to; and I will tell you whatever answer YHWH gives you; I will keep nothing back from you."

"May YHWH be our witness," they said to Jeremiah: "We will truly and faithfully follow all the instructions your God YHWH sends us; whether it is pleasant or hard, we will obey the command of our God YHWH, to whom we are sending you, so that we will prosper by obeying the command of our God YHWH."

Ten days passed before a message came from YHWH to Jeremiah. Then he called over Johanan son of Kareah, his army commanders, and all the people, high and low, and told them, "This is what is said by God YHWH of Israel, to whom you sent me to offer your prayer: 'If you remain quietly in this land, I will build you up and not tear you down; I will plant you and not uproot you; because I think better of the harm I have done to you. Do not be afraid of the King of Babylon, by whom you are now intimidated; do not be afraid of him,' says YHWH, 'because I am with you to save you, to rescue you from his power. I will grant you

mercy, so that he will feel sorry for you and let you return to your land.

“But if you disobey the voice of your God YHWH and decide not to remain in this land, and say, “No, we will go to Egypt, where we will not see any more war, or hear trumpet alarms, or be hungry for bread; we will live there;” then listen to what is said by YHWH, remnant of Judah: This is what is said by YHWH, leader of armies, the God of Israel: “If you are determined to go to Egypt, then when you arrive there to stay, the sword you are afraid of will reach you in the land of Egypt; the hunger you dread will cling to you no less in Egypt, and you will die there.””

Johanan son of Kareah and the rest of the leaders and the people did not obey YHWH’s command to stay in the land of Judah; instead, Johanan son of Kareah and all the commanders of the army took along the whole remnant of Judah that had been scattered among the nations and had returned from there to live in the land of Judah: its men, women, and children, the princesses and everyone whom the captain of the bodyguard, Nebuzaradan, had entrusted to Gedaliah son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan—along with the prophet Jeremiah and Baruch son of Neriah. Against YHWH’s command, they went to Egypt and arrived at Tahpanhes.

Please pray to your God the Master for us and for all this remnant; there are few of us now, though once there were many.

We have become orphans and are fatherless; our mothers are like widows; there are few of us now, though once there were many.

Second Reading *A Sermon on the Beatitudes by St. Leo the Great*

The blessing of seeing God is appropriately promised to the pure of heart, because an eye that is unclean would not be able to see the brightness of the true light, and what would be happiness to clear minds would be a torment to those that are defiled. And so the mists of empty worldly show should be dispelled and one’s inner eye should be washed clean of all the filth of immorality, so that the soul’s gaze can feast serenely on the great vision of God.

The next words refer to the attainment of this goal: “It is a blessing for people to make peace, because they will be called children of God.” This blessing, my dear friends, does not derive from any casual agree-

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ment or from any and every kind of harmony; it deals with what the Emissary says: “Be at peace before the Master,” and to the words of the prophet, “Those who love your Law will enjoy abundant peace; for them it is no obstacle in their way.”

Even the most intimate bonds of friendship and the closest similarity of minds cannot really lay claim to this peace if they are not in agreement with the will of God; alliances based on evil desires; contracts of crime and pacts of vice all lie outside the scope of this peace. Love of the world cannot be reconciled with love of God; and the man who does not separate himself from the children of this age cannot join the company of the sons of God; but those who always keep God in their hearts, and are “anxious to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” never dissent from the eternal law as they speak the prayer of faith. “Have your way on earth just as you do in heaven.”

These, then, are the peacemakers; they are bound together in holy concord, and are appropriately given the heavenly title of “children of God, coheirs with the Prince.” And this is the reward they will receive for their love of God and neighbor: when their struggle with all temptation is finally over, there will be no further difficulties to suffer or bad influence to be afraid of; they will rest in the peace of God undisturbed, through our Master who is alive and reigning with the Father and the Holy Spirit through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Let us live in the presence of our Master God with a sincere heart, so that we will be able to walk in his paths and keep his commandments.

God made his love perfect in us so that we will be able to walk in his paths and keep his commandments.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since you have redeemed us and made us your children in the Prince, please look upon us, give us true freedom, and bring us to the inheritance you promised. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

*First Reading**Habakkuk 1.1-2.4*

The oracle which the prophet Habakkuk received in a vision:
 How long is it to be, YHWH? I am crying for help,
 but you do not listen!
 I am calling out to you, "Violence!"
 but you do not intervene.
 Why do you let me see this ruin?
 Why must I look at misery?
 Destruction and violence are there in front of me;
 there is conflict and noisy discord.
 This is why the Law has become numb
 and verdicts are never handed down;
 because evil people circumvent the honest ones;
 and this is why justice comes out perverted.
 Look over the nations and see them,
 and be completely astounded!
 A deed is being done in your days
 that you would not have believed if you were told of it;
 because now I am bringing forward Chaldea,
 that bitter, unruly people
 that marches over the broad back of the land
 to take homes that are not their own.
 And he is fearsome and horrible;
 his law and majesty come from himself.
 His horses are swifter than leopards
 and keener than wolves at evening.
 His horses prance,
 and their riders come from far off;
 they are flying like eagles hurrying to eat;
 each of them comes for the carcasses;
 the attack of all together is like a tornado
 that heaps up captives like sand.
 He sneers at kings
 and authorities are his ridicule;

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he laughs at any fortress;
 he heaps up a ramp and conquers it.
Then he turns aside like the wind, and is gone;
 this criminal makes his own strength his god.
But are you not there from eternity, YHWH,
 my holy immortal God?
YHWH, you have singled him out for sentencing;
 my Rock, you have prepared him for punishment.
Your eyes are too pure to look on evil,
 and you cannot endure the sight of misery.
But then why do you gaze on these faithless people in silence,
 while immoral men devour
 people more virtuous than he?
You have made man like the fish in the ocean,
 like crawling things, without a ruler.
He brings them all up with his hook;
 he hauls them away in his net;
he collects them in his seine,
 and so he gloats and carouses,
because thanks to them, his share is generous
 and his meal is sumptuous.
But then will he keep waving his sword about
 to slaughter people without mercy?
I will stand at my guard post
 and station myself on the rampart
and keep watch to see what he will say to me,
 and what answer he will give to my complaint.
Then YHWH answered me, and said,
 “Write down the vision
clearly, upon tablets,
 so that it can be easily read.
Because the vision still has its time,
 it is hurrying to fulfillment, and will not fail;
if it delays, wait for it;
 it will be certain to come; it will not be late.
A rash man has no integrity,
 but a virtuous man will live because of his faith.”

A little while longer, a very little while and the one who was promised will come. He will not delay; my virtuous man will live by faith.

We are not people who cringe and are lost; we live by faith so that we will be saved; my virtuous man will live by faith.

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Bernard

We read in the Good news that when the Master was teaching his students and encouraging them to share in his suffering by the mystery of eating his body, some said, "This is a hard saying"; and from then on, they did not follow him any longer. When he asked the students whether they wanted to go away also, they answered, "Master, who would we go to? What you say is eternal life."

I assure you, my brothers and sisters, that even to this day it is clear to some people that the words which Jesus speaks are "spirit and life," and this is why they follow him. To others, these words seem hard, and so they look somewhere else for some pathetic consolation. Yet wisdom cries out in the streets, and in the broad, roomy highway that leads to death, to call back those who take this path.

Finally, he says, "For forty years I have been close to this crowd, and I said, 'They have always been fainthearted.'" You also read in another psalm, "God has spoken once." Yes, once, because forever. He is a single, uninterrupted utterance, because it is continuous and unending.

He calls on sinners to return to their true spirit, and reprimands them when their hearts have gone astray; because it is in true hearts that he lives, and there is where he speaks, in fulfillment of what he taught through the prophet, "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem."

You see, my brothers and sisters, how the prophet warns us for our benefit: "If you hear his voice today, do not make your hearts hard." You can read almost the same words in the Good News and in the prophet; in the Good News, the Master says, "My sheep listen to my voice," and in the psalm, blessed David says, "You are his people (meaning, of course, the Master's) and the sheep in his pasture. If you hear his voice today, do not harden your hearts."

Listen also to the prophet Habakkuk. Far from hiding the Master's reprimands, he dwells on them with attentive and anxious care. He says, "I will stand on my watchtower and take up my post on the rampart, and keep watch to see what he will say to me and what answer I will make to

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those who argue against me.” I beg you, my brothers and sisters, to stand on our watchtower, because now is the time for battle. All our dealings should be in our hearts, where the Prince is living, in correct judgments and wise guidance, but in such a way as to place no confidence in those dealings or reliance on our fragile defenses.

The Master’s laws are all before me, and I have not failed to keep his regulations. The Master’s orders are right and bring joy to the heart; the Master’s rules are clear and give light to the eyes.

The love of God reaches perfection in those who are obedient to what he says. The Master’s orders are right and bring joy to the heart; the Master’s rules are clear and give light to the eyes.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since you have redeemed us and made us your children in the Prince, please look upon us, give us true freedom, and bring us to the inheritance you promised. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

ednesday

First Reading

Habakkuk 2.5-20

Wealth, too, is treacherous;
 consider the proud, unstable man
who opens his throat as wide as the world below the ground
 and is as insatiable as death,
who collects for himself all the nations
 and rallies all peoples to himself;
will not all of them make fun of him,
 write satire and epigrams against him, and say,
“A man who stores up what is not his is doomed!
 How long can it last?
 He is loading himself down with debts.”
And will not your creditors come forward all of a sudden?
 Will not those who strike terror into you wake up?

You will become their spoils.
Because you despoiled many, many peoples,
all the rest of the nations will despoil you;
because of men's blood shed
and violence inflicted on the land,
the city, and everyone who lives in it.
A man who goes after evil gain for his family is doomed!
He puts his nest up high
to escape the reach of calamity.
What you have fashioned is shame for your family,
cutting off many peoples, and forfeiting your own life;
because the stones in the wall will cry out,
and the beams in the woodwork answer them.
A man who builds a city by bloodshed is doomed,
as he is if he founds a town in immorality!
It not this what comes from YHWH, leader of armies:
peoples labor for the flames,
and nations tire themselves out for nothing.
But the earth will be filled
with the knowledge of YHWH's glory
in the way water covers the ocean.
You are doomed if you give your neighbors
a flood of your rage to drink
and make them drunk, until their nakedness can be seen.
You are filled with disgrace instead of glory;
you drink too, and stagger!
The cup from YHWH's right hand will turn back on you,
and total shame will cover your glory;
because the violence done to Lebanon will bury you,
and the ruin brought by the beasts will terrify you;
because of men's blood shed
and violence done to the land,
to the city, and those who live in it.
You are doomed if you say to wood, "Waken!"
and to dumb stone, "Stand up!"
Can a thing like that give oracles?
Yes, it is overlaid with gold and silver,

but there is no life breath in it.
What use is a carved image
for its maker to bother carving it?
Or what good is a molten image and lying oracle
for its very maker to put his trust in it
and make dumb idols?
But YHWH is in his holy Temple;
be silent before him, all the earth.

Sinners who were not under the law will meet their ruin outside the law; sinners subject to the law will be judged in accordance with it. Everyone has sinned and been deprived of God's glory.

God has imprisoned all their disobedience, so that he could show mercy to everyone. Everyone has sinned and been deprived of God's glory.

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Bernard

Let us take our stand on solid ground, leaning with all our strength on the Prince, who is the most firm of rocks, as it says, "He set my feet on a rock and guided my steps." Once we are firmly established in this way, let us begin to contemplate and see what he is saying to us and what answer we ought to make to his charges.

The first stage of contemplation, my dear brothers and sisters, is constantly to consider what God wants, what is pleasing to him, and what is acceptable in his eyes. "We all commit many offenses"; our strength cannot match the rectitude of God's will, since it is neither one and the same as his will nor completely in agreement with it; so we should humble ourselves "under the powerful hand of the Supreme God" and be concerned to show how little we deserve anything before his merciful gaze, and say, "Please cure me, Master, and I will be cured; save me and I will be saved." And again, "Master, have mercy on me; please heal my soul, because I have sinned against you."

Once the soul's eye has been purified by considerations like this, we no longer stay confined in our own spirit in a sense of sorrow, but instead live in the Spirit of God with great pleasure. No longer do we consider what the will of God is for us, but what it is in itself; because "our life is in his will." In this way, we are convinced that what is in

accordance with his will is in every way more beneficial and proper for us; and so, since we are concerned to preserve the life of our soul, we should be equally concerned, as far as we can, not to wander from his will.

Once we have, in doing this, made some progress in our spiritual exercise under the guidance of the Spirit who examines the depths of God, let us reflect on how appealing the Master is, and how good he is in himself; in the words of the prophet, let us pray to see God's will; and we will spend our time in his Temple, not in our own hearts. At the same time, we will say, "My soul is subdued within me; and so I will keep you in my mind."

The whole of the spiritual life consists in these two elements; when we think of ourselves, we are disturbed and filled with a salutary sorrow; and when we think of the Master, we are revived and find consolation in the joy of the Holy Spirit. From the first, we derive fear and humility; from the second, hope and love.

The fear of the Master is the beginning of wisdom; everyone who practices it is wise. His praise will last forever.

Those who love wisdom keep its law; because all wisdom is fear of the Master. His praise will last forever.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since you have redeemed us and made us your children in the Prince, please look upon us, give us true freedom, and bring us to the inheritance you promised. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

THURSDAY

First Reading

Lamentations 1.1-12, 18-20

Ah, how lonely she is now,
the once-crowded city!
The one who was mistress over nations
has been widowed;
the princess among the provinces

has become a slave!
Bitterly she weeps in the night;
 her tears are on her cheeks.
 Among all her lovers,
 there is no one to comfort her;
 all her friends have betrayed her;
 they have turned into her enemies.
Captivity has become Judah's fate,
 under great hardship and cruel slavery;
 she lives among the nations
 and finds no rest;
 all her oppressors come upon her
 where she is hemmed in.
Down the road to Zion, there is mourning,
 because no one is coming to the festivals;
 all her gates are desolate;
 her priests are sobbing,
 her virgins, weeping,
 and she is filled with bitter grief.
Enemies have become her masters;
 her antagonists have succeeded,
 since YHWH has deserted her
 because of the great number of her crimes
 her children have left her,
 captured by those who hate her.
From the daughter of Zion
 all the glory has gone;
 her princes have become like deer
 that find no pasture,
 that run off with no strength
 before the hunters.
Guilty, Jerusalem remembers all the days
 of her miserable homelessness,
 when her people fell into enemy hands
 and she had no one to help her;
 when her antagonists gloated over her
 and laughed at her ruin.

Huge was the sin which she committed,
and which defiled Jerusalem;
everyone who respected her thinks her vile,
now that they see her naked;
and she sobs
and turns away.

Is not her filth upon her skirt?
She gave no thought to how she would end.
Her downfall is astonishing,
and there is no one to console her.
Look, YHWH, on her misery,
because the enemy has triumphed!

Just now, her antagonists have reached out their hands
to seize all her treasures;
she has seen enter the sanctuary
those nations—those nations
whom you forbade to come
into your community.

Keenly do all her people groan
as they search for bread;
they give their treasures for food,
to keep in the breath of life.
“Look at me, YHWH, and see
how worthless I have become!

Look, all of you passing by the road; come
and look and see
whether there is any sorrow like the sorrow
which has been inflicted on me,
when YHWH tormented me
on the day of his blazing fury.

Righteous is YHWH,
because I had defied his command.
Listen all you peoples
and see my suffering;
my maidens and young men
are all gone into captivity.

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So I called out to my lovers,
but they failed me.
My priests and my elders
died there in the city;
where they were looking for food for themselves,
they could not find it.

Turn your eyes to my pain, please, YHWH
everything inside me is in turmoil.
My heart is shrinking within me
from my monstrous rebellion.
Outside, swords are taking our loved ones;
at home, it is like being dead.

My eyes are growing dim from my crying, because my comfort is far
from me. Listen, all you peoples; is there any sorrow like my sorrow?

All you people passing by, look and see. Is there any sorrow like my
sorrow?

Second Reading

A Discourse on the Psalms by St. Bruno

“How beautiful your tents are! My soul is longing to reach the courts
of the Master,” the fullness of the heavenly Jerusalem, the Master’s city.
The psalmist then explains why he desires to enter the Master’s courts;
it is because “it is a blessing for a person to live in your house,” the
heavenly Jerusalem, Master, God of the heavenly powers, my King and
my God. It is as if he were to say, “Can anyone not long to enter your
courts since you are God, the Creator and King and Master of armies,
and everyone “who lives in your house has received a blessing”? For him,
courts and house are the same. When he says, “a blessing,” he means
that these people enjoy as much happiness as can be conceived. Clearly,
this is a blessing, because out of their devoted love “they will praise you
forever,” that is, for all eternity; because they would not offer praise for
all eternity unless the blessing lasted for all eternity.

Now even though we may have faith, hope, and love, none of us can
attain this state of happiness by ourselves; no, “it is a blessing for a
man”—he is the only one to attain happiness—“to have his help from
you” in rising to the heights of happiness on which he has set his heart.
In other words, the only one who can be said to receive the true blessing

is the one who, once he has resolved in his heart to rise to this state of happiness by the many stages of the virtues and good deeds, receives the help of your grace. No one can rise up there by himself, as the Master testified: “No one goes up into heaven,” by his own power, “except the Son of Man, who is in heaven.”

In this way, he contemplates his journey, even if he is living in a “valley of tears,” because this life is degraded and full of tears and sorrow. The life of heaven, by contrast, is called a mountain full of joy.

But since the psalmist said, “It is a blessing for a man to have his help from you,” someone might ask, “Does God really help us in this?” And the answer is that God does help those who have received the blessing; because our lawgiver the Prince, who gave us the law, is now giving and will keep giving his blessings, the abundant gifts of grace, by which he will bless his own—that is, raise them to bliss. It is by these blessings, then, they will rise “from strength to real strength.” One day in the heavenly Zion, they will see the Prince as the God of all gods; as the one who, since he is God, will deify his own people. Or again, those who are to be the new Zion will see the Spirit of the God of all gods: the Trinity. In other words, then their minds will see God, who cannot be seen in this life. For them God will be “everything in everything.”

We are already God’s children; what we will be has not yet been revealed to us. We know that when he appears, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is.

Everyone who puts his hope in him must purify himself in the way the Prince is pure. We know that when he appears, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since you have redeemed us and made us your children in the Prince, please look upon us, give us true freedom, and bring us to the inheritance you promised. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

FRIDAY

First Reading

Lamentations 3.1-33

Ah, but I am a man who knows hardship
from the rod of his anger,
one he has dragged after him and forced to walk
in darkness, not light;

I am the only one he has raised his hand against
time and time again throughout the day.

Besides, he has worn away my flesh and skin;
he has broken my bones;

he has surrounded me
with poverty and weariness;
he has left me to live in the dark
like a corpse long dead.

Caught, he hemmed me in with no escape
and weighed me down with chains;
even when I call out for help,

he stops my prayer;
he has blocked my path with a wall of stones,
and turned aside the road I travel.

Did he not become a lurking bear to me?
He is a lion in ambush.

He turned my trail aside, sent me astray,
and left me forsaken.

He bent his bow, and stood me up
to be his arrows' target.

Every side of mine has been pierced
with arrows from his quiver.

I have become a mockery for all the nations,
ridicule for them all day long;

he has filled me up with bitter food
and made me drink wormwood.

From gravel he has broken my teeth
and pressed my face into the dirt;
my soul is bereft of peace;

I have forgotten what happiness is;
 I tell myself my future is lost,
 as is everything I hoped for from YHWH.

Gall and wormwood is the thought
 of my homeless poverty;
 remembering it over and over again
 leaves my soul sinking.

But I will still recall it
 as my reason to have hope.

Have hope! YHWH's favors are not exhausted;
 his mercies are not depleted;
 they are renewed every morning,
 because his faithfulness is that great.

What I am allotted is YHWH, says my soul,
 and so I will put my hope in him.

Is not YHWH good to those who wait for him,
 to souls that are searching for him?

It is good to hope in silence
 for YHWH's saving help;
 it is good for a man to wear
 the harness from his youth.

Just let him sit alone, in silence
 when it is buckled on him;
 let him put his mouth to the dirt;
 there may still be hope.

Let him offer his cheek to be slapped,
 let him be filled with disgrace.

Kee in mind that YHWH's rejection
 does not last forever;
 though he punishes, he takes pity
 in the abundance of his mercies;
 he has no joy in tormenting
 or causing pain to mere mortal men.

My enemies hated me for no reason; I said that I was lost; I called for
 help, Master, and you heard my prayer. You said, "Do not be afraid";
 you took my case and redeemed my life.

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For the sake of Master Jesus' name, I am ready not only for imprisonment, but even death. You said, "Do not be afraid"; you took my case and redeemed my life.

Second Reading

A Sermon by Blessed Isaac of Stella

The prerogative of hearing the confession of sins and the power to forgive sins are two things that belong properly to God alone. We must confess our sins to him and look to him for forgiveness; since only he has the power to forgive sins, it is to him that we must make our confession. But when the Omnipotent, the Supreme Being, married a bride who was weak and low-class, he made that servant a queen. He took her from her place behind him, at his feet, and enthroned her at his side; she had been born from his side, and that is why he betrothed her to himself. And, since everything that belongs to the Father belongs to the Son because by nature they are one and the same, so the bridegroom gave all he had to the bride, and he shared in all that was hers. He made her one thing both with himself and with the Father; as he prayed for his bride, the Son said to the Father, "I want them to be one thing with us, in the same way as you and I are one thing."

And so the bridegroom is one and the same as the Father and one and the same as the bride. Whatever he found in his bride foreign to his own nature he took from her and nailed it to his cross when he took her sins on his back and destroyed them on the tree. He received from her what was hers by nature and dressed himself in it, and gave her what belonged to him as God. He destroyed what was diabolical, took to himself what was human, and conferred on her what was divine. So all that belonged to the bride was shared in by the bridegroom, and the one who had done no wrong and on whose lips was found no deceit could say, "Have pity on me, Master, because I am weak." And in this way, since he shared in the bride's weakness, he bridegroom made his own her cries of anguish, and give his bride all that was his. Therefore, she too has the prerogative of hearing the confession of sins and the power to forgive sins, which is the reason for the command, "Go, show yourself to the priest."

The Church is incapable of forgiving any sin without the Prince, and the Prince is not willing to forgive any sin without the Church; the Church cannot forgive the sins of a person who has not repented, who

has not been touched by the Prince; the Prince will not forgive the sins of one who despises the Church. “Man must not separate what God has joined. This is a great mystery, but I understand it as referring to the Prince and the Church.”

Do not destroy the whole Prince by separating head from body, because the Prince is not complete without the Church, nor is the Church complete without the Prince. The whole and complete Prince is the head and body; and this is why he said, “No one has ever gone up to heaven except the Son of Man, whose home is in heaven.” He is the only man who can forgive sins.

I pray for them all to be one thing, just exactly as you, Father, are one thing in me and I am one thing in you. I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they will be one thing in the same way as we are one.

I have sent them into the world as you sent me into the world, so that they will be one thing in the same way as we are one.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since you have redeemed us and made us your children in the Prince, please look upon us, give us true freedom, and bring us to the inheritance you promised. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Lamentations 5.1-22

Please remember, Master, what has happened to us;

look and see our disgrace:

The land we inherited has been turned over to foreigners,
and our homes now belong to aliens.

We have become orphans, without fathers;
our mothers are widows.

We must buy the water we drink,
we must pay for our own wood.

The yoke of those who are driving us is on our necks;

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we are worn out, but not allowed to rest.
We submitted to Egypt
and to Assyria, to fill our need of bread.
Our fathers, who sinned, exist no more;
but we bear their guilt.
Slaves rule over us;
there is no one to rescue us from their clutches.
We bring in our food at the peril of our lives,
in the face of the desert heat;
our skin is shriveled, as though we were in a furnace
with its searing blasts of flame.
Zion's wives were raped by the enemy,
as were the maidens in Judah;
princes were hanged by them,
and elders shown no deference.
The young men carry the millstones;
boys stagger under their loads of wood;
the old men have abandoned the gate,
and the young men have left their music.
The joy of our hearts has ended;
our dance has turned into mourning;
the garlands have fallen from our heads;
and we are doomed because we sinned.
Our hearts are sick over this,
our eyes grow dim because of it:
that Mount Zion should be deserted,
with jackals roaming there!
You, YHWH, are on your throne forever;
your throne stands from age to age.
Then why should you forget us
and abandon us for so long?
Please lead us back to you, YHWH, for us to be restored;
give us again the days we had in olden times;
because now you have rejected us,
and turned the full force of your wrath against us.

You are enthroned forever, Master; then why should you forget us

forever? Please lead us back to you, and we will be renewed.

Please save us, Master, or we will die. Please lead us back to you, and we will be renewed.

Second Reading

A Sermon by St. Athanasius

God, the Word of the totally good Father, did not disregard the human race, his own creation, when it was sinking back into corruption; by the offering of his own body he destroyed the death men had incurred, and by his teaching he corrected their negligence. So he restored by his power all that belongs to man's condition in life.

Anyone can find confirmation for this from the Savior's own students who spoke of him, because in their writings, one reads, "The love of the Prince reins us in as we consider that if one person died on behalf of everyone, then everyone died; and he died for everyone so that we could live no longer for ourselves but for the one who died for us and came back to life again," our Master Prince Jesus. And again, "We see Jesus, who for a little while became lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by God's favor he would taste death for everyone."

Then the writer goes on to show why it had to be God the Word and no one else who became man: "Actually, it was appropriate that in bringing many sons to glory, God, for whom and through whom everything exists, would make perfect the one who leads them to rescue." By this he means that the task of bringing men back from the corruption into which they had fallen belonged to no one else but God The Word, who had made them in the beginning. Further, Scripture shows that the Word assumed a body for the purpose of offering it in sacrifice on behalf of other bodies like his own, since the writer continues, "Since the children have blood and flesh in common, he in a similar way shared in them himself so that by his own death, he would destroy the one who had power over death—that is, the devil—and would set free those who all their life long were enslaved by fear of death."

That is, by the sacrifice of his own body, he both put an end to the law that stood against us and made a new beginning of life for us by giving us the hope of a return to life. Hence, Paul, the Christbearer, asserts, "Since death came through a man, the return to life again has come through a man; that is, just as everyone dies in Adam, it is also true

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that in the Prince everyone will be made to live.”

So we no longer die as people condemned, but as men being raised even now, as we wait for the general return to life of everyone, which God, whose work and gift it is, “will reveal at the designated time.”

Everyone has sinned and is deprived of God’s glory; we become virtuous through the free gift of his grace and through the redemption in Jesus the Prince. God made the Prince’s sacrificial death the means of atoning for the sins of all believers.

Just as in Adam everyone dies, so in the Prince everyone will be brought to life. God made the Prince’s sacrificial death the means of atoning for the sins of all believers.

Prayer

Dear God, our Father, since you have redeemed us and made us your children in the Prince, please look upon us, give us true freedom, and bring us to the inheritance you promised. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading

Ezekiel 1.3-13, 22-28

YHWH's message came to the priest Ezekiel, son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; it was there that YHWH's hand came upon me.

As I looked, a windstorm came from the north, a huge cloud flashing with fire, enveloped in brightness, from the middle of which—in the middle of the fire—something gleamed like amber. Within it were figures resembling four animals that looked like this: their shape was human, but each had four faces and four wings, and their legs went straight down; the soles of their feet were round. They shone with a gleam like burnished bronze.

This was how their faces were: each of the four had the face of a man, but on the right side was a lion's face, on the left, an ox's face, and finally, each had the face of an eagle. Their faces and their wings looked out on all four sides; they did not turn when they moved; each went straight forward. Each went straight forward, and wherever the spirit wished to go, they went; they did not turn when they moved.

Human hands were under their wings, and the wings of one touched those of another. Each had two wings spread out above, so that they touched each other's, while the other two wings of each one covered his body. In among the animals, something like burning coals of a fire could be seen; they looked like torches, moving to and fro among the animals. The fire gleamed, and from it came flashes of lightning.

Over the heads of the animals, there could be seen something like a dome, looking like gleaming crystal, stretched straight out above their heads. Their wings stretched out toward each other beneath the dome;

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each of them had two covering his body. Then I heard the sound of their wings, like the roaring of a mighty ocean, like the voice of the Omnipotent. When they moved, the clamor they made was like the noise of an army; and when they stood still, they lowered their wings.

Above the dome over their heads could be seen something like a throne, looking like sapphire, and up above, on it was seated someone who had the appearance of a man. I saw that from what looked like his waist up was like amber, and downward from what resembled a waist I saw what looked like fire; he was surrounded with brightness. The glow was like a rainbow appearing in the clouds on a rainy day. This was the vision of the appearance of YHWH's glory.

I saw what looked like a throne, and high upon it was seated someone who had the appearance of a man; and I heard a loud, rumbling cry: "Praise the glory of the Master in his home."

Praise and honor, glory and power to the one who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb through the ages of ages. Praise the glory of the Master in his home.

Second Reading

A Sermon on Shepherds by St. Augustine

You have often learned that all our hope is in the Prince and that he is our real glory and our rescue; you are members of the flock of the Good Shepherd, who watches over Israel and feeds his people. Yet there are shepherds who want to have the title of shepherd without wanting to fulfill a shepherd's duties, and so let us recall what God says to his shepherds through the prophet. You should listen carefully; I have to listen with fear and trembling:

"God's message came to me and said, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel and speak to the shepherds of Israel." We just heard this reading a moment ago, my brothers, and I have decided to speak to you on this passage. The Master will help me tell the truth if I do not speak on my own authority; because if I speak on my own authority, I will be a shepherd feeding myself and not the sheep. But if what I say is the Master's words, then he is feeding you, no matter who is speaking. "This is what is said by the Master God: Shepherds of Israel, who have only been feeding themselves, should not the shepherds be feeding the sheep?"

In other words, true shepherds take care of their sheep, not themselves. This is the principal reason why God condemns those shepherds: they took care of themselves rather than their sheep. Who are the one who are feeding themselves? They are the shepherds the Emissary described, when he said, “They are all looking for what is in it for themselves and not what is the Prince’s.”

I must make a careful distinction between two aspects of the role the Master has given me, a role that demands a rigorous accountability, and a role based on the Master’s greatness, not something that I earned. The first aspect is that I am a Christian; the second, that I am a leader. I am a Christian for my own sake, while I am a leader for your sake; the fact that I am a Christian is to my own benefit, but I am a leader for your benefit.

Many people come to God as Christians but not as leaders; perhaps they travel by an easier road and are less hampered, since they are carrying a lighter burden. In addition to the fact that I am a Christian and must give God an account of my life, I as a leader must give him an account of my supervision as well.

The Master is my shepherd; I have all I need. He gives me green pastures to take my rest.

He guides me along the right paths for the honor of his name; he gives me green pastures to take my rest.

Prayer

Omnipotent God, our Creator and guide, may we serve you with all our heart and know your forgiveness in our lives. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Ezekiel 2.8-3.11, 17-21

YHWH spoke to me, and said, “As for you, son of man, obey me when I speak to you; do not be rebellious like this house of rebellion;

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open your mouth and eat what I give you.”

I then saw a hand reaching out to me, in which there was a written scroll, which he unrolled before me; it was covered with writing front and back, and written on it was laments, wailings, and woes.

He said to me, “Son of man, eat what is in front of you; eat this scroll, and then go and speak to the house of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. “Son of man,” he then said to me, “feed your belly and fill your stomach with this scroll I am giving you.” I ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. He said, “Son of man, now go to the house of Israel and speak what I have said to them.

“I am not sending you to a people with a language hard to understand or barbarous speech, whose words you cannot understand. If I were to send you to them, they would listen to you; but the house of Israel will refuse to listen to you, since they will not listen to me, because the whole house of Israel has stubborn brows and obstinate hearts. But I will make your face as hard as theirs, and your brow as stubborn as theirs, like diamond, harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them or be intimidated by their looks, because they are a rebellious house.

“Son of man,” he said to me, “take into your heart all the words that I am telling you; listen to them carefully. Now go to your countrymen the exiles, and tell them, ‘This is what YHWH says’ whether they pay attention to it or resist you.”

This was how YHWH’s message came to me: “Son of man, I have designated you to be a watchman for the house of Israel. When you hear a statement from my mouth, you are to warn them for me.

“If I say to an immoral man, ‘You will be sure to die,’ and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from the immoral conduct so that he will continue to live, then that immoral man will die for his sin, but I will hold you responsible for his death. If, on the other hand, you have warned the immoral man and yet he has not turned away from his evil or from his immoral conduct, then he will die for his sin, but you will save your life.

“If a virtuous man turns away from virtue and does wrong when I place an obstacle in front of him for him to trip over, he will die. He will die for his sin, and his virtuous actions will not be remembered; but I will hold you responsible for his death if you did not warn him. When, on the

other hand, you have warned a virtuous man not to sin, and he has in fact not sinned, he will continue to live because of the warning, and you will save your own life.”

I have designated you to be a watchman for the house of Israel. Listen to what I say to you and speak to them in my name; do not be afraid of them or rebellious like them.

I will make your face as hard as theirs, and your forehead as stubborn and obstinate; do not be afraid like them or rebellious like them.

Second Reading *A Sermon on Shepherds, by St. Augustine*

Let us consider the unflattering words of God which Scripture addresses to shepherds who feed themselves and not the sheep. “You drink their milk and cover yourselves with their wool; you kill the ones you have fattened; but you do not put my sheep out to pasture. You have failed to strengthen what was weak, to heal what was sick, and to bandage what was injured. You did not call back what went astray, or look for what was lost. You have destroyed what was strong, and my sheep have been scattered, because there is no shepherd.”

This is spoken to the shepherds who feed themselves and not the sheep; it speaks of their concern and their neglect. What is their concern? “You drink their milk and cover yourselves with their wool.” And so the Emissary asks, “Does anyone plant a vineyard and not eat its fruit? Does anyone tend a flock and not drink from the flock’s milk?” In this way, we learn that the milk of the flock is whatever temporal support and nourishment God’s people give to those who are placed over them. It is of this that the Emissary was speaking in the passage just quoted.

Although he chose to support himself by the work of his own hands and did not ask for milk from the sheep, the Emissary did say that he had the right to receive the milk, because the Master had arranged it so that those who are preaching the Good News would be able to live from the Good News. Paul also says that others of his fellow Emissaries made use of this right, which was a right granted them and not unlawfully usurped. But Paul went further by not taking what was rightfully his; he forgave the debt, even while the others did not ask for what was not due them—and that is why Paul went further. Perhaps his action was foreshadowed by the Good Samaritan, who said, when he brought the

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sick man to the inn, “If you spend any more, I will repay you on my way back.”

What more can I say about those shepherds who do not need the flock’s milk? They are more merciful; or rather, they are carrying out a fuller service of mercy. They are able to do so, and they do it. They should receive praise; but do not condemn the others. The Emissary himself did not look for what was given; but he wanted the sheep to be fruitful, not sterile and unable to give milk.

I myself will put my sheep out to pasture, and I will give them rest myself, says the Master God. I will look for a lost sheep and bring back one that strays.

I will strengthen the weak and protect the healthy and strong; I will look for a lost sheep and bring back one that strays.

Prayer

Omnipotent God, our Creator and guide, may we serve you with all our heart and know your forgiveness in our lives. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Ezekiel 8.1-6, 16-9.11

On the fifth day of the sixth month, in the sixth year, as I was sitting in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, the hand of God YHWH fell upon me there.

I looked up and saw a form that resembled a man; downward from what looked like his waist, there was fire, and upward there seemed to be a glow like the sheen of amber. He reached out what looked like a hand and grasped me by the hair on my head. Spirit lifted me into the air and brought me in a trance-like state to the entrance of the north gate of Jerusalem, where there stood the statue of jealousy that incites jealousy.

There I saw the glory of the God of Israel, like the vision I had seen

on the plain. He said to me, "Son of man, look toward the north." I looked toward the north and saw north of the gate the altar of the statue of jealousy. "Son of man," he asked, "do you see what they are doing? Do you see the tremendous abominations that the house of Israel is perpetrating here, making me leave my sanctuary? But you will see even greater monstrosities."

Then he brought me into the inner court of YHWH's house, and there at the door of YHWH's Temple, between the vestibule and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to YHWH's Temple and their faces toward the east; they were bowing down to the sun. "Do you see this, son of man?" he asked. "Is it such a trivial matter for the house of Judah to do the abominable things they have done here—because they have filled the land with violence and have provoked me again and again—that now they must also thumb their noses at me? So I will also act with fury; I will not look on them with pity or show mercy!"

Then he shouted for me to hear: "Come, you whips for the city!" With that, I saw six men coming from the direction of the upper gate which faces north, each with a destroying weapon in his hand; among them was a man dressed in linen, with a writer's case at his waist. They entered and stood beside the bronze altar.

Then he called to the man dressed in linen with the writer's case at his waist, and said to him, "Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and mark an X on the foreheads of those who are moaning and groaning over all the abominations that are perpetrated within it." Then I heard him tell the others, "Pass through the city after him, and strike! Do not look on them with pity or show them any mercy! Old men, young men, maidens, women, children—wipe them out! But do not touch anyone marked with the X. Begin at my sanctuary."

So they began with the men, the elders, who were in front of the Temple. "Defile the Temple," he told them, "and fill the courts with those who are slaughtered; then go and strike in the city!"

As they began to strike, I was left alone. I fell on my face, and cried, "Ah, God YHWH! Will you destroy all that is left of Israel when you pour your fury over Jerusalem?" He answered me, "The sins of the house of Israel are great beyond measuring; the land has been filled with bloodshed, and the city with lawlessness. They think that YHWH has

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abandoned the land, and that he does not see them. But I will not look on them with pity or show any mercy; I will bring down their conduct on their heads.”

Then I saw the man dressed in linen with the writing-case at his waist make his report: “I have done what you ordered.”

When you see the “abomination that causes desolation” standing in the holy place, there will be great hardship; if that time were not shortened, no human being could survive; but for the sake of the chosen, the period of anguish will be cut short.

Do no harm to the land or sea until we imprint the seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God. But for the sake of the chosen, the period of anguish will be cut short.

Second Reading

A Sermon on Shepherds by St. Augustine

Once when Paul was in great hardship, in prison for his acknowledgment of the truth, his fellow Christians sent him what was necessary for his wants and needs. He thanked them in these words: “You have done a good deed to share in my need. It is true that I have learned to be self-sufficient in any circumstance I find myself in; I know what it is to be prosperous, and I have learned how to endure privation. I can do everything in the one who makes me strong. Still, you have done a good deed to send things for my use.”

Just as this indicates in what sense they have done a good deed, it also shows what Paul himself was looking for: to avoid being included among those who feed themselves and not the sheep. That is, he is not happy so much at the relieving of his own needs as he is at their generosity. Then what was he looking for? “I do not set my heart on gifts,” he says; “all I am looking for is the results of my work.” It is not that I am filled, he says, but that you do not remain empty.

As for those who cannot support themselves with their own hands as Paul did, they should take what is necessary for what they need from the milk of the sheep; but they should not neglect the weakness of the sheep. They should not be looking for benefits for themselves, or they might appear to be preaching the Good News to relieve their own needs and privations; no, they should provide the light of the true message for people’s illumination—because they are like lamps, as has been said:

“Your belts should be fastened and your lamps burning,” and “No one lights a lamp and put it under a basket; he puts it on a lampstand for it to give light to everyone in the house. Your light is to shine before others in this way so that they will see your good deeds and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

Now if a lamp has been lighted for you in your house, would you not add oil to it to keep it from going out? Of course, if the lamp received the oil and failed to shine, it would obviously not be fit to put on the lampstand, and should have been thrown out immediately. But for the light to be kept alive, it must receive fuel, which is to be provided out of charity; only the Good News should not be for sale, with preachers demanding a price for it and making their living from it. If they sell it in this way, they are selling for a pittance something that is extremely valuable. They should receive support in their need from the people, but payment for their service from the Master. No, it is not right for the people to give payment to those who serve them out of love of the Good News; payment is to be expected only from the one who is also granting rescue.

Then why are they reprimanded? What are they accused of? Because, when they took the milk and covered themselves with the wool, they neglected the sheep. They were looking only to further their own goals and not the Prince's.

I want you and not what you have; parents should provide for their children, not children for their parents. I am glad to spend what I have and be spent myself for your sakes.

If my blood is to be shed as a libation on the sacrificial offering of your faith, I will be happy—and be spent myself for your sakes.

Prayer

Omnipotent God, our Creator and guide, may we serve you with all our heart and know your forgiveness in our lives. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

ednesday

First Reading

Ezekiel 10.18-22, 11.14-25

YHWH's glory left the threshold of the Temple and rested upon the cherubim; they lifted their wings, and I saw them rise off the earth, with the wheels rising along with them. They stood at the eastern gate of YHWH's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.

These were the animals I had seen beneath the God of Israel by the river Chebar, whom I now recognized to be cherubim. Each had four faces and four wings; something like human hands were under their wings. Their faces looked just like those I had seen by the river Chebar; each one went straight forward.

This is how YHWH's message came to me: "Son of man, it is about your relatives, your fellow exiles, and the whole house of Israel that the inhabitants of Jerusalem say, 'They are far from YHWH; the land of Israel has been given to us as our possession.' For this reason, I say, 'This is what is said by God YHWH: "Though I have moved them far away among the nations and scattered them over foreign countries—and was for a while their only sanctuary in the countries to which they had gone—I will gather you from the nations and assemble you from the countries over which you have been scattered, and I will restore the land of Israel to you. They will return to it and remove from it all its detestable abomination. I will give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their bodies, and replace it with a heart of flesh, so that they will live in accordance with my regulations and carry out my orders; and in that way, they will be my people and I will be their God. But as for those whose hearts are devoted to the detestable abominations, I will bring their conduct down upon their heads," says God YHWH.'"

Then the cherubim lifted their wings, and the wheels went along with them, while up above them was the glory of the God of Israel. And YHWH's glory rose from the city and took a stand on the mountain which is to the east of the city.

Spirit lifted me up and brought me back to the exiles in Chaldea, in a vision, by God's spirit. Then the vision I had seen left me, and I told the exiles everything YHWH had shown me.

The Master's glory rose to the threshold of the Temple; the Temple was filled with the cloud, and the court shone with the Master's glory. Then the Master's glory went away from the threshold of the Temple.

Jerusalem, how often have I longed to gather your children, but you refused. Your Temple will be left deserted. Then the Master's glory went away from the threshold of the Temple.

Second Reading

A Sermon on Shepherds by St. Augustine

I have explained what it means to drink milk; now let us consider what it means to be dressed in wool. One who gives milk gives nourishment, while one who gives wool gives honor. These are precisely the two things that pastors who feed themselves and not the sheep are looking for from the people: the benefit of having their wants supplied as well as the favor of honor and praise.

Yes, clothing can be taken to mean honor, since it covers nakedness; because every man without exception is weak. And who is any man placed over you except someone just like yourself? Your shepherd is a material thing; he eats, sleeps, and wakens; he was born and he is going to die. In himself he is, when you think of it, simply a man; but it is true that you make him something more by giving him honor; it is as if you are covering what is weak.

Consider the nature of the clothing that the Emissary Paul received from God's good people. He said, "You accepted me as if I were one of God's angels. I can swear that if it had been possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me." Yes, great honor was shown him. But did he then spare sinners because of that honor, perhaps out of fear that it would be refused and that he would receive less praise when he gave blame? If he had done so, he would be among the shepherds who feed themselves and not the sheep; he would then say to himself, "What has this to do with me? Let everyone do what he wants; my maintenance is safe, and my honor too. I have enough milk and wool, so let everyone do as he likes." But then are things really secure for you if everyone does as he pleases? I do not want to make you a leader over the people, but one of them: "If one part of the body suffers, all the parts suffer with him."

In recalling how they treated him, the Emissary does not want to appear forgetful of the honor they did him; and that is why he gives the

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testimony that they received him as if he were one of God's angels, and that if it had been possible, they were willing to tear out their eyes and give them to him. Yet he still comes to the sheep that is ill—the one that is diseased—to cut the wound and not spare the diseased part. He says, "Have I become your enemy then by preaching the truth?" He took from the milk of the sheep, as I mentioned a short time ago, and he was dressed in their wool, but he did not neglect his sheep. He did not look for what was his but what was the Prince's.

If they have chosen you master of the feast, do not think too highly of yourself; be like one of the guests, and look after them.

If anyone wishes to be first, he must be last of all and a slave of everyone; be like one of the guests, and look after them.

Prayer

Omnipotent God, our Creator and guide, may we serve you with all our heart and know your forgiveness in our lives. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Ezekiel 12.1-16

YHWH's message came to me: "Son of man, you live in the midst of a rebellious house; they have eyes to see but do not see, and ears to hear but do not hear, because they are a rebellious house. Now, son of man, during the day while they are looking on, move from where you live to another place; perhaps they will see that they are a rebellious house. You are to bring out your baggage like an exile in the daytime while they are looking on; in the evening, again while they are looking on, you are to go out like someone driven into exile; while they look on, dig a hole in a wall and pass through it; while they look on, shoulder the burden and set out in the darkness; cover your face so that you will not see the land, because I have made you a symbol for the house of Israel."

I did as I was told. During the day, I brought out my baggage as though it were that of an exile, and at evening I dug a hole through the

wall with my hand, and, while they looked on, started out in the darkness, shouldering my burden.

Then in the morning, YHWH's message came to me: "Son of man, did not the house of Israel, that rebellious house, ask you what you were doing? Tell them, 'This is what is said by God YHWH: "This oracle is about Jerusalem and the whole house of Israel within it.

"“I am a sign for you; what I did will happen to them; they will go into exile as captives. The ruler among them will shoulder his burden and start out in darkness, going through a hole he has dug in the wall, and covering his face to keep from being seen by anyone. But I will spread my net over him, and he will be captured in my snare; I will bring him to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans—but he will not see it—and there he will die. I will scatter all his retinue, his aides, and his troops in every direction, and pursue them with swords.

"“Then they will know that I am YHWH, when I disperse them among the nations and scatter them over foreign countries. Yet I will leave a few of them to escape battles, famines, and plagues, so that they will be able to tell of all their abominations among the nations they will come to; and in this way they will know that I am YHWH.””

When I disperse them among the nations and scatter them over many lands, they will know then that I am the Master.

If they abandon my Law and refuse to obey my rules, I will punish their crimes with my rod; they will know then that I am the Master.

Second Reading

A Sermon on Shepherds by St. Augustine

After the Master had shown what corrupt shepherds value, he also spoke about what they neglect. The defects of the sheep are widespread; there are very few healthy and sound sheep, few that are solidly sustained by the food of truth, and few that enjoy the good pasture God gives them. But the corrupt shepherds do not spare sheep like this. Is it not enough that they neglect those that are sick and weak and those that go astray and are lost; they even try, as far as is in their power, to kill the strong and healthy ones.

And yet these sheep stay alive; yes, by God's mercy, they stay alive. As for the corrupt shepherds, they kill the sheep. "How do they kill them?" you ask. By their evil lives and by the bad example they give. Or

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was God's slave, who was high among the members of the chief shepherd, told this to no purpose: "Show yourself an example of good deeds toward everyone," and "Be an example to the faithful"?

Even a strong sheep, if he turns his eyes from the Master's laws and looks at the man set over him, notices when his shepherd is living a wrong life, and begins to say in his heart, "If my shepherd lives like that, why should I not live like him?" The corrupt shepherd kills the strong sheep; but if he kills the strong one, what does he do to the rest? After all, by his immoral life, he kills even the sheep he had not strengthened but found strong and hardy.

I appeal to your love, and again I say, even if the sheep have life and are strong in the Master's message, and if they hold fast to what they have heard from the Master, "Do what they say and not what they do"; still, as far as he himself is concerned, a shepherd who lives a corrupt life before his people kills the sheep under his care. This kind of shepherd should not deceive himself because the sheep is not dead; because, though it is still alive, he is still a murderer—just as when a lustful man looks on a woman with passion, even though she is chaste, he has committed adultery; because the Master said in plain truth: "Whoever has looked on a woman with passion has already committed adultery with her in his heart." He has not entered her bedroom, yet he has raped her within the bedroom of his heart.

And so anyone who lives a corrupt life before those who have been placed under his care is killing, as far as he himself is concerned, even the strong. Anyone who imitates him dies; anyone who does not has life; but as for him, he is killing both of them. "You kill what is healthy and you do not put my sheep out to pasture."

If a great deal has been given to you, a great deal will be expected of you; more will be expected of a person to whom more has been entrusted.

The most severe judgment will be reserved for those in high places; more will be expected of a person to whom more has been entrusted.

Prayer

Omnipotent God, our Creator and guide, may we serve you with all our heart and know your forgiveness in our lives. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning

with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.

FRIDAY

First Reading *Ezekiel 16.3, 5-7,8-15, 35, 37, 40-43, 59-63*

This is what God YHWH says to Jerusalem: “By origin and birth, you are from the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. You were thrown out on the ground as something loathsome, the day you were born.

“Then I passed by and saw you weltering in your blood, and I said to you, ‘Live in your blood and grow like a plant in the field.’ You grew and developed; you came to the age of puberty. Again I passed by you and saw that you were now old enough for love; so I spread the corner of my cloak over you to cover your nakedness; I swore an oath to you and entered into a Treaty with you; you became mine,” says God YHWH.

“Then I bathed you in water, washed away your blood, and anointed you with scented oil. I dressed you in an embroidered gown, put sandals of fine leather on your feet; I gave you a fine linen sash and silk robes to wear. I adorned you with jewelry; I put bracelets on your arms, a necklace around your neck, a ring in your nose, pendants in your ears, and a glorious tiara upon your head. In this way, you were dressed in gold and silver; your clothes were fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. Fine flour, honey, and oil were your food. You were extremely beautiful, with the dignity of a queen; you were famous among the nations for your beauty, since it was perfect, because of my splendor which I had bestowed on you,” says God YHWH.

“But you were captivated by your own beauty; you used your fame to make yourself a prostitute, and you lavished your favors on every passer-by, whose own you became.

“Therefore, you whore, listen to what YHWH says! I will now gather all your lovers whom you tried to please, whether you loved them or did not love them. They will lead an assemblage against you to stone you and hack you with their swords. They will burn your rooms down and

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torture you while a great many women look on; and in this way I will put an end to your prostitution, and you will never again give payment.

“When I have wreaked my fury upon you, I will stop being jealous of you; I will be quiet and no longer exasperated. But because you did not remember what happened when you were a girl, and enraged me with all of this, I am for this reason bringing down your conduct upon your head,” says God YHWH. “Because did you not add debauchery to the rest of your abominable deeds?”

“And this is what is said by God YHWH: ‘I will deal with you in accordance with what you have done, since you despised your oath and broke the Treaty. But I will remember the Treaty I made with you when you were a girl, and I will set up an eternal Treaty with you. Then you will remember your conduct and be ashamed when I take your sisters, older and younger than you, and give them to you as daughters, even though I am not bound by my Treaty with you. Because I will re-establish my Treaty with you, so that you will know that I am YHWH, and will remember and be covered with consternation, and will be totally silenced for shame when I pardon you for all you have done,’ says God YHWH.”

“I have called you back, like an abandoned wife; for a brief moment of anger, I hid my face from you; but with an everlasting love, I had pity on you,” says the Master, your redeemer.

“I will remember the Treaty I made with you when you were a young woman; and I will make a Treaty with you that will last forever; with an everlasting love, I had pity on you,” says the Master, your redeemer.

Second Reading

A Sermon on Shepherds by St. Augustine

You have already been told about the evil things shepherds desire; let us now consider what they neglect. “You have failed to strengthen what was weak, to heal what was sick, and to bandage what was injured,” that is, what was broken. “You did not call back the straying sheep or look for those that were lost; what was strong you destroyed.” Yes, you have cut them down and killed them. The sheep are weak, which is to say their hearts are weak, and so, since they are rash and unprepared, they may give in to temptations.

A negligent shepherd fails to say to a believer, “You, son, come to the service of God; stand firm in fear and virtue, and prepare your soul for temptation.” A shepherd who does say this strengthens the one who is weak and makes him strong; and this kind of believer will then not hope for prosperity in this world, because if he has been taught to hope for worldly benefit, he will be corrupted by prosperity. Then, when adversity comes, he may be destroyed.

A builder who builds in this way is not building the believer on a rock; he is building him on sand. “But the rock is the Prince.” Christians must imitate the Prince’s sufferings, not set their hearts on pleasures. One who is weak will be strengthened when he is told, “Yes, expect the temptations of the world, but the Master will set you free from them all if your heart has not abandoned him; because it was to strengthen your heart that he came to suffer and die, to be spat upon and crowned with thorns, to be accused of shameful things—yes, and came to be fastened to the wood of the cross. He did all this for you, and you did nothing; he did not do it for himself, but for you.”

But what sorts of shepherds are the ones who for fear of offending someone not only fail to prepare the sheep for the temptations that might threaten them but even promise them worldly happiness? God made no such promise himself to the world; on the contrary, God foretold hardship upon hardship in this world until the end of time. And you want the Christian to be exempt from these troubles? Precisely because he is a Christian, he is destined to suffer more in this world.

That is, the Emissary says, “Everyone who wants to live a holy life in the Prince will suffer persecution.” But, shepherd, you are looking for what is yours and not the Prince’s; you are disregarding what the Emissary says: “Everyone who wants to live a holy life will suffer persecution.” You say instead, “If you live a holy life in the Prince, everything good will be yours in abundance. If you do not have children, you will embrace and nurture all the people, and none of them will die.”

Is this what you think is constructive for a believer? Pay attention to what you are doing and where you are putting him; you have built him on sand. The rain will come, the river will overflow and rush in, the wind will blow, and the elements will dash against that house of yours. It will fall, and its ruin will be great.

Lift him up off the sand and put him on rock; let him be in the

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Prince, if you want him to be a Christian. Let him turn his thoughts to sufferings, however insignificant they may be in comparison to the Prince's; have him center his attention on the Prince, who was without sins, and yet made restitution for what he had not done; have him consider Scripture, which says to him, "He punishes every son he acknowledges"; have him prepare to be punished, or else not try to be acknowledged as a son.

God has found us fit to be servants of his Good News, and so when we speak, we try to please God and not human beings.

Our preaching does not come from a mistake or impure motives or a desire to deceive; we try to please God and not human beings.

Prayer

Omnipotent God, our Creator and guide, may we serve you with all our heart and know your forgiveness in our lives. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.



First Reading

Ezekiel 18.1-13, 20-32

YHWH's message came to me: "Son of man, what is the meaning of this proverb you recite in the land of Israel:

'Fathers have eaten green grapes,

and so their children's teeth are set on edge'"

As surely as I am alive," says God YHWH, "I swear that there will no longer be anyone among you who will repeat this proverb in Israel; because all lives are mine; the life of a father is like the life of the son; both are mine. Only the one who sins will die.

"If a man is virtuous—if he does what is right and honest, if he does not eat on the mountains, or raise his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, if he does not defile his neighbor's wife or have relations with a menstruating woman, if he oppresses no one, gives back the collateral of a debt, commits no robbery, if he gives food to the hungry and clothes

the naked, if he does not lend at interest or exact usury, if he holds aloof from wrongdoing, judges justly between a man and his opponent, if he lives by my regulations and is careful to follow my rules—he will be sure to live,” says God YHWH.

“But if he fathers a son who is a thief, murderer, or who does any of these things (though the father does none of them)—a son who eats on the mountains, defiles the wife of his neighbor, oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not return collateral, raises his eyes to idols, does detestable things, lends at interest and exacts usury—this son will certainly not live. Because he practiced all these abominations, he will be sure to die; his death will be his own fault.

“Only the one who sins will die. A son will not be charged with the guilt of his father, or a father charged with the guilt of his son. A virtuous man’s virtue will be his own, just as a vicious man’s vice will be his.

But if a vicious man turns away from all the sins he committed, if he keeps all my regulations and does what is right and honest, he will be sure to live; he will not die. None of the crimes he committed will be remembered against him; he will live because of the virtue he has practiced. Do I derive any pleasure from the death of an evil person?” says God YHWH. “Is it not that I am overjoyed when he turns from his evil ways so that he can live?

“And if a virtuous man turns from the path of virtue to do evil, the same kind of abominable things that vicious men do, can he do this and still live? None of his virtuous deeds will be remembered, because he has broken faith and committed sins; because of this, he will die.

“You say, ‘YHWH’s way is not just!’ Listen now, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unjust, or is it your ways that are unjust? When a virtuous man turns away from virtue to commit depravity and dies, it is because of the depravity he committed that he must die. But if an evil man turns from the depravity he has committed and does what is right and honest, he will preserve his life; since he has turned away from all the sins he committed, he will be sure to live; he will not die. And yet the house of Israel says, ‘YHWH’s way is not just!’ Is it my way that is not just, house of Israel, or is it not that your ways are not just?

“And so I will judge each of you, house of Israel, in accordance with his ways,” says God YHWH. Turn and be converted from all your

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crimes, so that they will be no cause of guilt for you. Throw away all the crimes you have committed, and make a new heart and a new spirit for yourselves. Why should you die, house of Israel? I take no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” says God YHWH. “Turn back and live!”

Never again will they say, “The fathers ate green grapes and the children’s teeth are what is set on edge. Only a soul that sins will die.

I will judge each person in accordance with what he himself has done; a son will not suffer for the sins of his father, or a father for the sins of his son. Only a soul that sins will die.

Second Reading

A Sermon on Shepherds by St. Augustine

Scripture says, “God corrects every son he acknowledges.” But a bad shepherd says, “Perhaps I will be exempt.” If he is exempt from the suffering of his punishments, then he is not included among God’s sons. You will say, “Does God really punish every son?” Yes, every one, just as he chastised his only Son. His only Son, born from the reality of the Father, equal to the Father “in the form of God,” the Word through whom everything came into existence, could not be chastised. It was for this reason that he was dressed in flesh so that he would know chastisement. God punishes his only Son, who is without sin; does he then leave unpunished an adopted son who is with sin? The Emissary says that we have been called to adoption. We have been adopted as sons, so that we could be coheirs with the only Son, and also so that we could be his inheritance: “Ask me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance.” The Prince gave us the example by his own sufferings.

But clearly, a person who is weak must neither be deceived with false hope or broken by fear; otherwise, he may fail when temptations come. Say to him, “Prepare your soul for temptation.” Perhaps he is starting to falter, to shake with fear; perhaps he does not want to come forward. You have another passage of Scripture for him: “God is faithful; he will not allow you to have trouble that is beyond your strength.” Make that promise while preaching about the sufferings to come, and you will strengthen a person who is weak. When someone is held back because of excessive fear, promise him God’s mercy. It is not that there will be a lack of temptations and troubles, but that God will not allow someone to be tempted beyond what he can bear. In this way, you will be building

up the broken person.

When they hear of the troubles that are coming, some people arm themselves more, and, so to speak, are eager to drain the cup. The ordinary medicine of the faithful seems to them only a little thing; for themselves they look for the glorious death of martyrs. Others hear of the troubles to come, and when they do arrive—as arrive they must—they become broken and lame. Yet it is right for things like this to happen to Christians, and no one values them except the one who desires to be a true Christian.

Over the bandage of comfort, put a splint on what has been broken. Say this: “Do not be afraid. The God you believed in does not abandon you in your troubles. God is faithful; he does not allow you to have troubles that are beyond your strength. I am not the one saying this; it is the Emissary, and he goes on to say, ‘Are you willing to accept this hardship, the hardship of the Prince who is speaking in me?’ When you hear this, you are hearing it from the shepherd who feeds Israel; because this was said of him: ‘You will give us tears to drink in the proper degree.’ The Emissary says, ‘He does not allow you to have troubles that are beyond your strength.’ This is also what the prophet intends by adding the words, ‘in the proper degree.’ God reprimands but also encourages; he brings fear, and he brings consolation; he slaps and he heals. Do not reject him.”

For your sake, Master, we are being put to death all day long, and we are being treated like sheep for slaughter; but despite all this, we have become victorious because of the one who loved us.

You have handed us over like sheep to be slaughtered, and you have scattered us among the nations; but despite all this, we have become victorious because of the one who loved us.

Prayer

Omnipotent God, our Creator and guide, may we serve you with all our heart and know your forgiveness in our lives. We make this request through our Master Prince Jesus, your Son, who is alive and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit as one God, through all the ages of ages. Amen.