**Theme:** God’s law trumps civil law.

**Exegesis of the First Reading, Tb 1:3; 2:1b–8 (353)**

Dr. Elaine Park

The Book of Tobit, probably written in the early second century BC, tells the story of Tb, exiled in Nineveh in the eighth century BC. Because Tb is an ordinary Jew, pious and upright, he is a model for other ordinary Jews about how to live faithfully among gentiles in the midst of persecution. Today Tb summarizes his early life in Jerusalem, his deportation to Nineveh, and his charitable work among his fellow exiles.

Tb presents his story as a multiple-act drama, making it a well-loved tale of courage, fidelity, and wisdom. Among his kindly acts was burying the dead who had been killed by the Assyrian King Sennacherib. Tb buried the bodies stealthily to prevent Sennacherib from finding them. When someone informed the king that Tb had buried the dead, Sennacherib took extreme vengeance, confiscating Tb's property, leaving him with nothing. When Sennacherib is assassinated, Tb re-gains his home and his family.

In today’s reading, as his family is celebrating Pentecost, Tb intends to resume his practice of caring for the poor when he learns that one of them has been murdered. Lamenting the plight of the Jews, foretold by the prophet Am, Tb buries the victim. His neighbors, rather than commending him for his act of piety, mock him, reminding how he has suffered such great losses for earlier burying the dead. Yet neither mockery nor fear of further persecution deter the faithful Tb.

**Exegesis of the Gospel, Mk 12:1–12 (353)**

Dr. Elaine Park

The context for Jesus’ teaching this parable is the continuing and escalating controversy with the chief priests, scribes, and elders. While many of Jesus’ parables focus on the good news of the kingdom of God, this one is a judgment against those who refuse to accept him.

Most of Jesus’ parables are not allegories, but this one is best understood with an allegorical reading. The vineyard represents Israel, an image that would be readily recognized by Jesus’ audience; a strong background for Israel pictured as a vineyard is found in Is 5:1–7, where the owner similarly carefully tends it. The tenant farmers of the vineyard are Israel’s leaders; the servants, one after another, are the prophets sent by God. The beloved son and heir is Jesus himself, rejected and killed, as were the prophets before him.

At the conclusion to the parable, Jesus’ citation of Ps 118 moves quickly from the picture of Jesus as the son to Jesus as the cornerstone. Those who oppose Jesus are now presented as the builders who reject the cornerstone, adding to the theme of their refusal to accept Jesus as the one sent by God. When they realize that Jesus is directing the parable against them, his opponents become enraged. From the opening controversy stories in Mk’s Gospel, the powerful leaders in Jerusalem have been seeking how to put Jesus to death. This scene foreshadows Jesus’ passion—when they will ultimately carry out their designs against him.

**Homily Suggestion**

Mary Lynne Rapien

This week we hear from the Book of Tb, a fascinating story dating to the second century before Christ. Some details are omitted. To get the full impact and enjoyment of the book, read the entire book. You won’t be disappointed. Here a blind Jew sends his son on a mission to collect money owed him. An angel, disguised as a man, accompanies him on his journey. The story is filled with intrigue, mysterious deaths, passionate love, and a fish who heals. Have I piqued your curiosity? I hope so. As the week progresses, this drama will show us fidelity, courage, and perseverance.

In today’s reading we hear about Tb performing two corporal works of mercy: feeding the hungry and burying the dead. Earlier in the book, Tb says, “I gave my clothing to the naked and my food to the poor.” He also brought his tithes to Jerusalem. However, it was burying the dead that got him into trouble with the king because it was forbidden. Tb broke the civil law to follow the law of God. The king wanted him dead. Tb hid, but he lost all of his property. At the king’s death, all was restored, but here he is again, breaking the law to do the right thing.

Are we ever challenged to break the civil law to obey God’s law? Many people today risk their lives to do exactly that. Would we?

For more information about St. Boniface, Apostle of Germany, visit saintoftheday.org.
**Theme:** All things are God’s.

**Exegesis of the First Reading, Tb 2:9–14 (354)**
Dr. Elaine Park

Woven into the Book of Tb are domestic scenes, family relationships, mealtimes, and celebrations. Since Tb represents an ordinary and faithful Jew living in the midst of gentiles, the story has many features with which people of similar circumstances can readily identify. In today's reading, after Tb had buried yet another of his slain people, he goes to sleep in his courtyard, weared from his deeds. We get a sense of his exhaustion when he seems unaware of the bird droppings that settle in his eyes, leading to blindness. Unable to be cured by doctors, Tb endures his condition, cared for by his nephew Ahiqar for two years. Because of Tb’s blindness, his wife, Anna, works at weaving to provide for their household needs. When she is paid even more than required and given a young goat for the table, Tb suggests that it was stolen and must be given back to the owners. Although Tb is portrayed as a righteous Jew, acting courageously in the face of persecution, his angry and accusatory words to his wife show the mounting frustration he must have felt in his blindness. In fact, blindness here may symbolize his inability to see or appreciate what his wife is doing to put food on the table.

Her retort is understandable: Tb’s deeds for the poor and deceased may well be charitable, but his virtue in the home is sadly lacking. Even a righteous Jew like Tb exhibits human frailty and the need for repentance.

**Exegesis of the Gospel, Mk 12:13–17 (354)**
Dr. Elaine Park

After the Jerusalem leaders hear Jesus’ parable against them but held off arresting him for fear of the crowds, they enlist some Pharisees and Herodians to ensnare Jesus through his own words. Bringing the two groups together is a clever ploy, given the question that they addressed to Jesus: the paying of taxes to Caesar. Because the Pharisees and Herodians were on opposite sides of political and religious matters, they seldom worked in partnership.

They were, however, united in their opposition to Jesus, evident in their plotting how to put him to death (3:6). On the question of taxes, the Herodians would support paying taxes to Caesar because the Herodian dynasty owed its existence to the Roman empire. On the other hand, the Pharisees would likely believe that even carrying around coins bearing Caesar’s inscription would make them unclean.

Jesus knows their hypocrisy, a term used for actors playing a role, performing for the crowds. Jesus asks that they bring him a coin used for paying taxes; a denarius was a silver Roman coin with an image of Caesar and inscriptions that gave him divine status. Since both the image and words belong to Caesar, the coin must belong to him. They should simply give back what clearly belongs to him. Jesus doesn’t elucidate what things belong to God, but his audience would know Ps 24: “The earth is the Lord’s and all it holds.” Coins belong to Caesar—everything else to God.

**Homily Suggestion**
Mary Lynne Rapien

Two natural enemies, the Pharisees and the Herodians, try to entrap Jesus. Both groups want Jesus out of the picture and so ask, “Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?” He answers, “Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” The fact that they have a Roman coin on which the emperor claims divine status shows that they have already bought into the system.

What can we get from this reading? Jesus is not saying that we should neglect our civic duty to pay taxes. Governments need money to provide services. Jesus is not so concerned about our giving to Caesar what is Caesar’s. He is more concerned about giving to God what is God’s.

In fact, everything belongs to God. We belong to God. All we possess belongs to God. The entire universe belongs to God. There is nothing we can give to God that he does not already have. Or is there?

We can give God our will. What does God ask of us?

“I give you a new commandment: Love one another.” It is in loving that we give to God. It is in loving that we enter into the life of God.

Yes, pay taxes. But fulfilling our obligation as a citizen of this world does not compare with fulfilling our obligation as a citizen of God’s kingdom. Let us be people of love.

*For more information about the feast of St. Norbert of Xanten, visit saintoftheday.org.*
Theme: God hears and answers our prayers.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Tb 3:1–11a, 16–17a (355)
Dr. Elaine Park

Tb’s lament resonates with the patterns, imagery, terminology, and faith expressed in Israel’s tradition. Like the psalmists before him, Tb acknowledges God’s righteousness, justice, mercy, and truth (Ps 25:10; 119:137). His personal suffering and individual sins remind him of the whole history of his people. “[Your people] sinned against you, and disobeyed your commandments.” Whatever punishments God meted out to them, and to Tb as well, were deserved.

Tb’s desire to die rather than continue living any longer connects him to the Jewish tradition, echoing the sentiments of Jon, Jb, and even Moses and Elijah (Nm 11:15; 1 Kgs 19:4). Although such extreme desires may seem to express hopelessness, Tb ultimately relies on whatever God chooses to do with him: “Deal with me as you please.” Even as Tb is praying, miles away the young woman Sarah is undergoing her own personal trials. Having lost seven husbands killed by the wicked demon Asmodeus, Sarah is even tormented by abuse from one of her father’s maids.

Like Tb, she would rather die than continue her life in the face of such insults. Though she first plans to hang herself, she asks instead that the Lord take her life, asking that he might let them die. God hears and answers her prayers.

The same God who was there for Tb and Sarah is present among gentiles, in need of money, and judgmental with his wife. He sees a hopeless future. Sarah has had seven husbands die on their wedding night before they came together. She is the ridicule of all around her. She believes that no one would take the risk of marrying her. She sees a hopeless future. Both she and Tobit offer prayers to God, asking that he might let them die. God did answer their prayers, but not in the way they expected.

In his despair, Tobit prayed: “Deal with me as you please.” In her prayer (not included in our reading), Sarah says, “Look favorably on me and have pity on me.” Where they saw no hope, God saw a promising future. He heard their prayers and sent aid in a most unexpected way to both of them.

The same God who was there for Tb and Sarah is here for you today. He may not answer your prayers in the way you want or on your timetable, but he will not only answer, but he will also give you the strength to carry your present burden day by day. Trust God.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mk 12:18–27 (355)
Dr. Elaine Park

Jesus’ opponents here use several controversies to ensnare him through his own words. Having escaped the trap of the Herodians and the Pharisees about paying taxes, Jesus is next questioned by the Sadducees. Their denial of the resurrection is well attested by Josephus who wrote: “The Sadducees hold that the soul perishes along with the body. They own no observance of any sort apart from the laws” (Ant. 18:16).

Their question about a woman marrying seven times with the death of each husband without leaving any descendants leads them to ask about whose wife she will be “at the resurrection.” We can easily imagine their sneering use of the phrase “at the resurrection,” suggesting that it is absurd to hold such a belief not found in the Torah. Because the Sadducees put great value on the Scriptures, meaning only the Torah for them, Jesus uses the Torah itself, “the Book of Moses,” to show how the Sadducees are misled; using the verb planao twice, Jesus indicates that the Sadducees are wandering around the truth.

The text that Jesus quotes from the scene of the burning bush in Ex occurs three times there, thereby creating an emphatic revelation of God’s identity: the God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob. Because the God who speaks to Moses continues to be the God of the great patriarchs, they must be alive in God’s presence. They must even now be enjoying resurrected life.

Homily Suggestion
Mary Lynne Rapien

Have you ever been so low that you wished you wouldn’t wake up tomorrow? Has life been so burdensome that you didn’t think you could bear another day? If you have, you are not alone. Many, many folks have felt the same way. They wouldn’t take their lives, but they wish they would die.

If this is you or has been you, you can relate to Tb and Sarah in today’s first reading. Tb is blind, a Jew living among gentiles, in need of money, and judgmental with his wife. He sees a hopeless future. Sarah has had seven husbands die on their wedding night before they came together. She is the ridicule of all around her. She believes that no one would take the risk of marrying her. She sees a hopeless future. Both she and Tobit offer prayers to God, asking that he might let them die. God did answer their prayers, but not in the way they expected.

In his despair, Tobit prayed: “Deal with me as you please.” In her prayer (not included in our reading), Sarah says, “Look favorably on me and have pity on me.” Where they saw no hope, God saw a promising future. He heard their prayers and sent aid in a most unexpected way to both of them.

The same God who was there for Tb and Sarah is here for you today. He may not answer your prayers in the way you want or on your timetable, but he will not only answer, but he will also give you the strength to carry your present burden day by day. Trust God.
Theme: Keep the first commandment first!

Exegesis of the First Reading, Tb 6:10–11; 7:1, 9–17; 8:4–9a (356)

Dr. Elaine Park

In addition to the well-crafted human characters in the Book of Tb, angels and demons populate the story. Their presence reflects the belief of Judaism that such otherworldly beings have an active role in our own world. Most simply put, demons are hostile powers opposed to God and humanity while angels intervene, through God’s power, for the good of humanity. Tb’s son Tobiah first meets the angel Raphael when he is seeking a traveling companion on his journey to retrieve money his father had deposited in Media. Raphael identifies himself by the name Azariah, a fellow Israelite and kinsman; during the trek with Tobiah, Raphael directs him to save the parts of a fish that will be used later in the story.

When the travelers reach Media, Raphael takes over in setting up the marriage between Tobiah and Sarah, the young woman who had lost seven husbands, each one killed by the demon Asmodeus. Many of the details that explain how Raphael overcame Tobiah’s fears and how he expelled the demon are omitted from the Lectionary reading.

The details that we do hear emphasize the careful adherence to the Book of Moses, portraying the characters as faithful Jews, determined to marry from among their own people as part of God’s decree. Though their marriage is preordained because of the laws of kinship, adherence to the Book of Moses, portraying the characters as faithful Jews, determined to marry from among their own people as part of God’s decree. Though their marriage is preordained because of the laws of kinship, many of the details that explain how Raphael overcame Tobiah’s fears and how he expelled the demon are omitted from the Lectionary reading.

The details that we do hear emphasize the careful adherence to the Book of Moses, portraying the characters as faithful Jews, determined to marry from among their own people as part of God’s decree. Though their marriage is preordained because of the laws of kinship, the two are blessed with a loving relationship. Their prayer beautifully expresses their love and faith.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mk 12:28–34 (356)

Dr. Elaine Park

The scribe who questions Jesus in this scene was witness to the previous controversy and saw that Jesus had answered the Sadducees well. Unlike those who sought to entrap Jesus, this man appears well-disposed to him, and sincerely seeks an answer to his question. Because there were numerous laws, which later rabbis numbered at 613, the question about which one was the “first,” or most important of all, was a reasonable query.

Jesus begins his answer by citing the Shema, the traditional prayer recited two or three times a day by observant Jews. The opening word Shema implies attentive listening and even obedience. Thus, adherence to the first commandment begins with paying attention to what God requires. Following the injunction to listen is the statement of God’s identity: Israel has no other God. Their entire way of life flows from this fundamental belief.

Because there is only God (in Hebrew, Yhwh), only one Lord who has created, redeemed, and been an abiding presence, the expected response is to love the Lord with the totality of one’s being. Because the Lord is God of the whole people, love of one another has a close correlation to love of God, not so much a second commandment as a logical extension of the first. The dialogue between Jesus and the scribe expresses their common faith, in which each one honors the other. At this point we hear that others have heard their conversation, and are now silenced.

Homily Suggestion

Mary Lynne Rapien

Jesus reduces all 613 Jewish laws to a single commandment: Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. The related commandment is: Love your neighbor as yourself. How well do we do that?

Love God with your whole heart. A young man told me once that his girlfriend informed him: “God will always be first in my life. And if God is first, then I guarantee that you will be a very happy second.” That man said they had been married for 20 years, had five children, and he was indeed a happy man. Giving God our whole heart creates room for a lot more love.

Love God with all our soul. When our will is one with God’s will, we will have reached our goal. It is a lifetime work-in-progress. Knowing and obeying require prayer and discernment.

Love God with all your mind. If we fill our minds with good things such as good books, music, conversation, and prayer, we crowd out “stinkin’ thinkin’.” If there is any part of our mind’s activity that we hesitate sharing with God, then red flags are already flying.

Love God with all your strength. This implies self-care so we are able to be at the service of God and fulfill his mission for us. Essentially, we will wear ourselves out for God.

If God is first in everything, then love of self and others will fall into place.
Theme: God promises a happy ending.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Tb 11:5–17 (357)
Dr. Elaine Park

Before Tobiah and Raphael reach home, Raphael instructs Tobiah to use some of the fish gall, retrieved from the fish caught earlier. Parts of the fish had already been used to ward off the demon Asmodeus, who had killed Sarah’s seven husbands. Following Raphael’s instructions, Tobiah smears the medicine from the fish on his father’s eyes and is soon able to peel off the cataracts. Tb responds with prayer, beginning with a customary berakah, a prayer of praise and thanks.

Tobiah relates to his father the success of his journey, culminating with his marriage to Sarah. God’s hand in finding the right bride for Tobiah evokes the patriarchal narratives in Gn, further situating this story in the Jewish tradition. Both Tobiah and Tb proclaim God as the source of their blessings. When the family welcomes Sarah, Tb again praises God with a berakah.

Repeated use of the word blessed in Tb’s two prayers emphasizes the multiple reasons for giving praise and thanks to God: God has cured Tb’s blindness, brought Sarah to them as a daughter, and blessed her family along with Tb’s. The blessing goes even beyond the two families, for God’s graciousness to Tb and his family bring joy to all the Jews living in Nineveh, for they have seen God’s blessing on the once-blind Tb.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mk 12:35–37 (357)
Dr. Elaine Park

Jesus’ activity in the temple drew a crowd, not surprising, given the multitudes who were in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. Jesus had already entered the city where people cried out: “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” The enthusiastic crowds, as well as Jesus’ activity and teaching in the temple, set the context for the controversies with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians. In this scene, Jesus is again teaching in the temple before a great crowd. His opponents were probably listening in on everything that Jesus said.

His teaching method involves asking a question, and then answering it himself, offering a new understanding to the opening v of Ps 110, a ps often cited in the NT. While the scribes expected the Christ, or Messiah, to be a descendant of King David, Jesus’ interpretation sees the Messiah as someone greater than David and his offspring. Assuming along with his audience that David is speaking in the ps, Jesus infers David to be saying, “The LORD [referring to the Lord God], says to my lord [referring to the Messiah].”

Since David calls the Messiah “my lord,” David is thereby acknowledging that the Messiah is his superior, and could not be his son. The crowd’s delight would likely arise both from this new understanding of the ps and from Jesus’ skill as a biblical interpreter.

Homily Suggestion
Mary Lynne Rapien

Do you like happy endings? I do. Today’s first reading has a storybook ending. Tobiah comes home safely. He has brought a beautiful wife with him and the money due his father. Tb regains his sight when the fish gall loosens his cataracts. All the Jews in Nineveh rejoice with him over his good fortune.

This is indeed a story with a happy ending. Tb is faithful, and all is well in the end. (I hope you have read the whole book this week so you can fill in the parts omitted in the readings.)

Unfortunately, not all of our endings are as happy. Despite our prayers: a marriage ends in divorce, our child has left the Church, our company is downsized and we lose our job. You can supply the rest of the list. We pray, but nothing seems to change.

When Sharon was suffering terminal cancer, she cried out to God for help. The answer she heard from a voice gentle and loving was, “All will be well.” She felt the truth of this divine word in her very core. She knew in her soul that all would be well—that God cared for her now, and he would care for her for all eternity. She died at peace with great expectation.

Whether our prayers are answered as were Tb’s or not, we have God’s promise that, in the end, all will be well. If we are faithful, we will have the happiest ending possible: eternal life.

For more information about St. Ephrem the Deacon, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: God is worthy of our trust.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Tb 12:1, 5–15 (358)
Dr. Elaine Park

After Tobiah follows his father’s instructions to offer Raphael half of everything they brought back, Raphael takes charge, giving father and son an exhortation, followed by a revelation of his identity. He begins by emphasizing the duty of blessing and extolling God’s name, something that Tb has done over and over with his berakah prayers. Raphael adds that the works of God should be declared and made known, indicating that prayer is to be not only a private exercise but also a means of community instruction and shared faith.

Raphael’s other advice summarizes what Tb has already been doing: prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and righteousness. Tb’s planned generosity to Raphael, along with his giving bread to the hungry and showing courage in burying the dead, present shim as an ideal for his fellow Jews. Repeating the saying, “The works of God are to be made known,” Raphael announces his own identity. Unknown to them, he has been involved in the story from the beginning, when he presented their prayers before God.

Raphael has been sent by God to put Tb to the test, and to heal both Tb and Sarah. The name Raphael means “God heals,” indicating his role in Tb’s story. One of the seven angels who serve before God, Raphael fulfills God’s commission, as do other named angels in the Bible: Gabriel and Michael. Raphael’s final task is to write down his story, a means of making known the works of God.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mk 12:38–44 (358)
Dr. Elaine Park

Scribes, Pharisees, and other opponents of Jesus receive repeated criticism in the Gospels, both through Jesus’ own words and in the narration. Significantly, these critiques are directed to particular group members and not to the entire group. In Sir 38:24—39:11, the ideal scribes were well-versed in Scripture and the law, men of deep prayer and wisdom.

Earlier in Mk’s Gospel, Jesus had praised a scribe as “not far from the kingdom of God” as he sought to understand the heart of the law he taught to others. Jesus’ comments against “the scribes” in this scene are a warning about a particular kind of scribe: those who claim privileges for themselves even as they “devour houses of widows.” They are ostentatious in their dress and religious observances—not as genuine piety but only for self-promotion.

Jesus next observes a poor widow putting money in the treasury. Unlike the showy scribes and rich people, she is almost invisible. The large copper coins put in the treasury by the wealthy would resonate loudly, drawing attention to these gifts, comparable to the attention-seeking scribal activities. In contrast, the widow puts in such small coins that they would not be heard at all. Finally, Jesus speaks directly to his disciple, seeming both to honor the widow’s generosity and subtly lament the system that has exploited her.

Homily Suggestion
Mary Lynne Rapien

Today’s Gospel offers a study in contrasts. On the one side are those scribes who are hypocrites: two-faced. They put on a good show, but they are selfish and cruel.

On the other side is the widow who is down to her last cent. Both put money into the temple treasury: the collection basket. No matter how fat the donation of the scribes, there was no sacrifice in it. It was purely discretionary money, the surplus. They didn’t have to go without because of their gift.

On the other hand, we recall the few pennies of the widow. Jesus says it is her whole livelihood. That means her life depended on it because it was all she had.

You might ask, “Is it prudent to give all you have left?” Well, the clue to the answer is in the paragraph about the scribes. They got wealthy because they “devoured the houses of the widows.” This widow may have been one of them. She knows she can’t trust the scribes. They only care about themselves. She decides to put all her trust in God. She gives to God with abandon.

God calls us to be prudent and take care of our needs. However, it is good to sacrifice some of our wants to give to those in need. It is good to “give until it hurts” sometimes.

Whether we are rich or poor, the challenge is to put our hope and trust in God who reads our hearts, not our empty actions.
Theme: What is God like?

Exegesis of the First Reading, 2 Cor 1:1–7 (359)
Dr. David Hutchinson

Paul wrote at least four letters to the Church in Corinth (1 Cor 5:9; 2 Cor 2:3–4), varying in tone from anguished to severe, from concerned to conciliatory. This week’s readings come from a more encouraging and reconciliatory part. Up to ch 10, Paul has had good relations with the Church, but a much more negative situation has emerged.

Corinth was a large cosmopolitan city with a variety of cultural and religious expressions. This included a Jewish community (Acts 18), a few of whom were converts to Christianity. Most of the Church in Corinth to which Paul wrote was made up of gentile converts. The opening blessing in v 3 balances the tension between these two groups; the text revises a traditional Jewish form by adding, “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” to “Blessed be God” (Ps 103; Ex 18:10; 1 Kgs 1:48).

Paul combines the themes of suffering and comfort. The suffering to which he refers comes not from a natural disaster or bad health but because of faith in Christ. Such suffering enables a person to offer comfort to others and to identify with their suffering.

Paul frames this entire letter as a religious document, identifying himself as an apostle to the Church.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 5:1–12 (359)
Dr. David Hutchinson

Jesus’ sermon on a mountain evokes Moses, who did the same (Ex 19:3). Jesus then sits down, as rabbis did whenever they taught. From the beginning, the sermon reflects a Jewish context and is either a substitution for Jewish practice and Torah observance, or it is a revision of the same. Although Mk tends more toward discarding Jewish practice, Mt is more about revision.

His Gospel was written to an audience with a large Jewish community and is dedicated to making sense of Jesus in that context. Most scholars believe that it was written in Antioch, a fairly large city with a thriving Jewish community. In addition, immigrant Jews from Judea and Jerusalem were on the scene after the siege of Jerusalem and the sacking of its temple in AD 70.

The blessing statements (beatitudes) suggest a kind of humility that Jesus later praises: “Whoever humbles himself will be exalted’” (23:12).

By starting out with blessings instead of laws, Jesus has already revised the tradition of Moses, who received Ten Commandments rather than ten blessings. All of the blessings are framed by suffering on account of faith. The last and more extended blessing sums up the preceding ones, describing them as an extension of prophetic behavior.

Homily Suggestion

John Quigley, OFM

Matthew places Jesus’ preaching on “the mountainside.” The Jewish Christian audience would have immediately made a connection to their parallel story of Moses delivering the Ten Commandments, their law, to the Israelites on the side of Mount Sinai after their escape from slavery.

The law gave identity to the people. It revealed God’s will to them. Here Jesus, the new Moses, is giving us another law or code, a new guide for how we should live our lives. We call these sayings “the Beatitudes.” At first glance, they appear to be advice or gentle expectations for how we as Christians should think and behave. They do not even sound like laws—certainly not hard-fast, chiseled laws like the Ten Commandments. They are gentler than commandments.

However, not only is Jesus giving us a new way of living; he is giving us a description of God’s values and life, God’s way of living. Later in this section of Mt’s Gospel, Jesus says that we are to “become perfected as our Father is perfect.” The parables are also a description of the way that God lives life: poor in spirit, sorrowing, lowly, merciful, single-hearted, even persecuted.

This description of godly life challenges our unconscious and perhaps even conscious image that God is like Zeus: a bearded wise man, interested but not passionate about our lives, remote and aloof.

Today the psalmist reminds us to “taste and see how good the Lord is; happy the person who takes refuge in him.”
Theme: Surprised integrity.

Exegesis of the First Reading, 2 Cor 1:18–22 (360)
Dr. David Hutchinson

When Paul’s plans appear to change because he does not visit Corinth as he originally intended (1 Cor 16:5–8), he explains that it is not really a change but rather an opportunity to trust the mystery of God’s “yes.” When God’s promises seem to go unfulfilled or our actions done in faith seem inconsistent, Paul argues, we are failing to see the Spirit at work. Fickle changes reflect how we view events from a limited perspective. But the mystery of God’s yes in Christ means that all of God’s promises are fulfilled; Paul is simply following the lead of God’s Spirit in all that he does. That might make him look inconsistent, but that is only because we don’t understand how God is working through him: a bold claim from a bold apostle!

Paul’s reference to God’s promises evokes more than travel plans. In the balance between gentle and Jewish converts, Paul must explain how Torah observance and Jewish prophecy are fulfilled in Christ—in spite of the struggles faced by the early Church. Historic expectations about prophecy and promises could make the failures of the early Church look much like a yes-and-no answer to people—just like Paul’s travel itinerary. Either Jesus is the Christ for both Jews and gentiles, or he is not. Paul says he is.

The words commissioned and seal further seek to bring validity to Paul; seal is also a baptismal image.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 5:13–16 (360)
Dr. David Hutchinson

The entire Sermon on the Mount suggests a higher righteousness than that of traditional Torah observance. Is this challenging ethic an impossible ideal (Luther), an eschatological statement about the impending kingdom of God (Thurneysen, Schweitzer) or a command that we—the clergy at least—are intended to follow (Anabaptist, Roman Catholic)? Recently this last position has been refined to hear the sermon as one might hear the advice of a tough coach or therapist: barely attainable but nevertheless calling us to a higher standard of behavior (Lundbom).

The key to Mt’s approach lies in today’s vv. The high standards of the Sermon on the Mount are not intended to justify the believer. In that case, they would only be a more difficult version of Jewish Torah observance—with the same result. For Mt, the behaviors suggested here are valuable only to the extent that they testify to the world who God is and how the promises of God are fulfilled in Jesus. To the extent that righteous behavior is a light to the world—or salty seasoning—it achieves its purpose. But if it seeks only justification in Antioch’s largely Jewish community, then it may simply be a way to “out-Torah” other Torah observers.

Technically speaking, salt cannot lose its saltiness. Metaphorically speaking, this expression means to lose one’s very essence.

Homily Suggestion
John Quigley, OFM

St. Anthony of Padua, an Augustinian, was profoundly moved when the bodies of the first Franciscans martyred in Africa were returned to his home country of Portugal. Deeply impressed by the martyrs’ heroism, he decided to become a Franciscan friar, hoping to die while preaching the gospel in Africa. Instead, the Franciscans sent him to Italy where he taught and preached until he died in 1231. He also served three years in France. Anthony became a brilliant theologian and preacher.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells us to let our light shine brightly and that we should make a difference in others’ lives, just as salt adds flavor to food. St. Anthony’s light has shone brightly for centuries in ways that he never anticipated and from places he never visited. It is funny how God can write something wonderful with life’s twists of direction—once we become actively involved or invested in the change.

St. Paul is a great example of this. In today’s first reading, he is resolute about the new direction of his life. He enthusiastically endorses Jesus Christ, his former enemy, calling him “the great Amen” in whose life we share when we worship before God.

Today’s readings urge us to be resolute, not “yes” one minute and then “no” another. We are to be salt and light in our families, in our parishes, in our neighborhoods and cities. We need to move enthusiastically when the direction that we have planned changes.

For more information about the feast of St. Anthony of Padua, visit saintoftheday.org.
**Theme:** Diverse yet unified.

**Exegesis of the First Reading**, 2 Cor 3:4–11 (361)

Dr. David Hutchinson

In this ch, Paul contrasts the “new covenant” and the covenant with Moses. The new covenant is not written in ink or on stone tablets but is written by the Spirit on the heart. Unlike Mt, who emphasizes the fulfillment of Jewish covenant expectations by Christ, Paul here depicts the new covenant as replacing the covenant with Moses. Paul calls the Mosaic covenant one of death and condemnation. And while Paul does refer to the light or splendor of the Mosaic covenant, he says that the new covenant “exceeds” it.

Paul describes the two covenants as differing between “condemnation” and “righteousness.” In the first case, the outcome of not meeting the demands of the covenant is condemnation. But in the case of the second, the outcome through Christ is righteousness.

Another significant difference between the covenants Paul describes is the permanence of the new covenant. This is intended to be the culmination of Paul’s argument for the new covenant. The idea of the new covenant appears in Jer 31:31, and the notion of the Spirit writing on the heart appears in Ez 36:26–27.

Similar to his words from yesterday, Paul uses his personal defense—this time about letters of recommendation—to begin a deeper theological discussion.

**Exegesis of the Gospel**, Mt 5:17–19 (361)

Dr. David Hutchinson

These vv state as clearly as any Mt’s approach with a Jewish context. There were differing opinions among Jewish followers of Jesus about how to approach the law of Moses. Mt’s Gospel emphasizes fulfillment. Not an iota or a dot of the law is intended to pass away. These vv state clearly Mt’s intention; v 20 is a very clear statement that this advice must be followed; it does not simply state high moral standards. Righteousness does not simply justify the follower, but rather it fulfills the law and the prophets, ushering in the kingdom of God.

When Mt was writing, the law and the prophets were the only canonical Scripture. This sermon suggests that Jesus came to fulfill both of these, not merely prophecy. Fulfilling the law means more than obeying it; rather, it means making the law’s intent clear.

The least/greatest contrast in v 19 recalls the beatitudes in that blessing is ascribed to unexpected places. One would expect a rabbi to be called great. But rabbis would often relax Torah observance in order to help people observe it more easily. Keeping the law as a means of justification was the primary concern. Being observant kept one in community with one’s identity intact. Moral righteousness was a secondary concern.

**Homily Suggestion**

John Quigley, OFM

Matthew’s Gospel was written for a predominately Jewish community that believed in Jesus. The readers struggled with the challenge of the importance of the law of Moses in Jewish life. Some Christians in Corinth came from a Jewish background.

Today we have St. Paul strongly criticizing the law as a vicious circle that consistently piles upon the believer more and more unattainable prescriptions, creating an undertow that “brings condemnation” upon the believer. It becomes way too much.

In his Gospel, Mt takes a different tack. He makes the strong assertion that Jesus has the most profound respect for even the “smallest letter of the law.” The evangelist extols the law but says that Jesus fulfills it, taking it to its perfection.

Both authors respond to similar challenges. In the 50s AD, Paul is angry with the Jewish enthusiasts within the Corinthian community for insisting that newly baptized gentiles need to adhere completely to the Jewish laws in order to believe in Jesus, a Jew.

Matthew writes of a less troubled engagement with Judaism. At the time of his writing, Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Romans (AD 70), and its survivors were wondering if there was any future for God’s chosen people. Matthew affirms that there is, stressing that the future is in Christ, who respected and sums up the law and the prophets.

In preserving these diverse writings for us to read and reflect upon, the Church shows a confident wisdom and belief that our expressions of faith are generally influenced by our times and life experiences. In our very different ways of talking about our faith, there is a profound unity in Christ Jesus, a unity that goes beyond any of our differences.
Theme: Our work is not simply ours.

Exegesis of the First Reading, 2 Cor 3:15—4:1, 3–6 (362)
Dr. David Hutchinson

This portion of the letter interprets Ex 34, particularly vv 29–35. Paul suggests that the veil that Moses used to remove in the presence of God’s glory—and also used to protect the people of Israel from that full splendor—points us to the veil obscuring the minds and hearts of Israel’s people. It is not the same veil—but a veil nonetheless. The question seems to be whether we should veil the splendor of God out of respect for our limitations and God’s mystery—or whether we should let the light shine, ceasing to worry about how others receive that light or how they veil it for themselves.

This section continues the tension between the old law and the new Spirit as ways of accessing God. How we access God also influences how we are changed—or not—by the encounter. When we encounter God fully in the Spirit, we are changed by God. This change is described by Paul as freedom. This change enables us to be fully as God intended.

This transformation Paul describes is a present-tense affair. We may not see the fulfillment of God’s promises in ways we expect. Believers in Corinth might not have experienced success as they had expected in the midst of their struggle. But the change Paul describes is, nevertheless, a change that happens by God’s spirit at work here and now, in the believer’s heart.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 5:20–26 (362)
Dr. David Hutchinson

The reference to righteousness sets up a series of “You have heard it said, but I say to you” statements, often called antitheses. They become more and more astounding as the sermon progresses—until they seem almost like hyperbole designed for homiletic emphasis, rather than actual advice. Readers should remember this.

The first antithesis is about several kinds of anger. One type leads to murder. The antithesis begins with a reference to the Mosaic law about murder or killing. “Those of ancient times” might also refer back as far as Cain, Abel’s murderer (Gn 4:5–8).

Then the sermon considers the behaviors associated with anger and recommends avoiding insulting or provoking another to anger. This practical advice emphasizes the intent of the sermon: that we alter our behavior as a result of hearing this. It also illustrates that even Jesus thought people could be provoked to anger—though it was dangerous to let oneself be so provoked. The standard here is pretty high. The only real hope for anger management lies in reconciliation. Brother here means another believer.

The final two vv in this antithesis seem to stand alone. There is no mercy here; this seems like an end-times saying.

Homily Suggestion
John Quigley, OFM

Matthew’s Gospel was written for Jewish Christians who were forced out of Jerusalem by the Romans, who destroyed that city in AD 70. Living in the diaspora, they were trying to make sense of this terrible disaster. The apostle tells them that their new faith has to surpass that of previous scribes and Pharisees. They must go forward and beyond what the law and the scribes have required. Giving up the adage of an eye for an eye or nursing injuries, they now must take positive steps to forgive those who had hurt them.

In today’s second reading, Christians in Corinth had seen strong criticism and attacks on Paul’s credentials as an apostle and his motives. He strongly reminds his critics, who were often Jewish teachers insisting on the observance of Jewish customs in the heavily gentile Christian community, that he fully understands Judaism and that a “veil covers the understanding of the Israelites.” He reminds them that he possesses his ministry through God’s mercy, not by his own efforts, and that he does not give in to discouragement. The whole letter sharply rebukes his enemies.

Neither Paul nor Mt had any idea that they were writing sacred Scriptures that would be put into the New Testament and Bible. They were writing personally and directly to people who needed to receive encouragement and correction from them. These writings were so helpful and clarifying that they were officially chosen by the Christian community in the third century to become part of the canon (list) of NT books. Deeply felt caring and engagement can lead us to enlightenment, clarity, and purpose—not only for our benefit but also for that of others now and for future generations.
Theme: No one is dependable.

Exegesis of the First Reading, 2 Cor 4:7–15 (363)
Dr. David Hutchinson

In ch four, Paul moves from discussing the OT and covenant theology to where he started the letter, again describing his ministry and defending himself against accusations. His faults are always an opportunity to show God’s power at work in him. Paul sets the image of a humble clay jar (representing himself, v 7) next to the light of God shining (v 6). He never refers to light shining through cracks in a pot, but a preacher might. The image of clay in a potter’s hand comes from Jer 18:1–6, the same book that speaks of a “new covenant.”

So what is the treasure that the pot contains? Is it the power of God (v 7), the “glory of God” (v 15), or “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (v 6)? Is it the “life of Jesus manifested in us” (vv 10–11) or the mission and ministry of reconciliation? Perhaps it is all of these or a combination of them. The text lets the metaphor work instead of limiting it by definition.

The suffering of a disciple is described by a list of “but not” statements. On the one side we are afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down. But we are not crushed, in despair, forsaken, or destroyed. This list recalls the Beatitudes (Monday’s Gospel), which set the context for this week’s readings—except that suffering there is blessed.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 5:27–32 (363)
Dr. David Hutchinson

These vv deal with adultery and divorce, a major arena for the law’s interpretation in Mt’s day. Divorces were fairly common as we are reminded at the beginning of the Gospel when Joseph decides not to divorce Mary (1:18–21). He humbly chooses a higher righteousness over a strict interpretation of the law.

Today’s readings demonstrate an ever-increasing standard for Jesus’ followers. Plucking out eyes and cutting off hands in order to avoid violating the law were much more severe than the typical certificate of divorce. These vv respond to several commandments and laws of the day (Ex 20:14, 17; Dt 24:1–4). Mt’s report of what Jesus said provides a way to look at a woman as a sister in faith—not lustfully or as property. By qualifying the way one can look upon a woman, the wording leaves open another possibility requiring more self-control than the Ten Commandments assume.

Adultery in the ancient world was primarily a crime against the husband and his property. Sex outside of marriage was an indiscretion, but it was not considered a serious crime. The question here is about the actions to which certain thoughts usually lead.

Homily Suggestion
John Quigley, OFM

Today Paul is continuing his fiery defense against the charges made by his critics in Corinth. From his statements, we can guess what the charges were. Again we see that the Scriptures have a very mixed and human origin. God works with us where we are and how we are.

Matthew’s Gospel has Jesus telling his disciples that they need to go beyond the accommodations that we make to our values. Moses gave permission for a man to give his wife a writ of dismissal, that is, a divorce—for any number of reasons. There were over 100 legitimate reasons. One was for burning his meal. Jesus is emphatic in his condemnation. He is telling men, that is, one half of the human race, that they cannot easily dismiss the other half on a personal whim or for a slight reason. Jesus is speaking more about the human rights of a woman than he is about sexual relations.

St. Paul is also speaking about his own human rights in his letters to the Corinthians. His letter can easily be read as to apply to all people and on a general spiritual level. But his personal remarks are sarcastic when he turns the charges against him against his critics: Yes, I am an earthen vessel, not a “super” apostle. I have indeed been persecuted, but I have never been abandoned; I have been struck down but never destroyed. God is with me—in spite of what you have been hearing.

The psalmist tells us: “I believed even when I said: ‘I am greatly afflicted.’ I said in my alarm, ‘No man is dependable.’”

In these readings we hear about our fragile human nature, its pettiness and selfishness. But we also hear a call to go beyond our smallness.
Theme: Keep it simple, stupid!

Exegesis of the First Reading, 2 Cor 5:14–21 (364)
Dr. David Hutchinson

In today’s reading Paul describes what happens when we die, and how a believer is connected with Christ in death and resurrection. Paul contrasts the earthly things we can see with the things of God, which are a source of courage during suffering. Then he discusses his ministry, which responds to what we know about death, life, God, and Christ. United with Christ in death and resurrection, we live in a new way. Because we are loved by Christ, who died and was raised as an expression of that love, we love one another.

Paul’s ministry is simply about reconciliation. For him, it is always God who initiates reconciliation; ministry participates in what God is doing. First we are reconciled, and the world is reconciled—in Christ. We become what Paul calls a new creation. This enacts the “new covenant” described in previous chs. Made new, we announce this to the world as ambassadors; ministry passes on this good news from which we benefit.

Paul does not understand ministry as the actual doing, creating, or fixing of anything from scratch. When we forgive, reconcile, or show compassion, these things are done out of the righteousness that comes from God and is in Christ (v 21).

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 5:33–37 (364)
Dr. David Hutchinson

This language of yes and no here recalls Tuesday’s reading and Paul’s rejection of playing both sides of a decision (2 Cor 1:18–19). We must always tell the truth and live truthfully. An oath is unnecessary if one is living truthfully and should not be made at all.

The Mosaic law envisioned oaths but rarely required them. It contained a prohibition against false oaths (Lv 19:12) and identified requirements for taking an oath (Nm 4:19). So Jesus is upping the standard again, but not by suggesting a more binding oath—rather, by rejecting the whole enterprise of oathmaking. Instead, he outlines a life that reflects what God’s kingdom looks like. Rather than laws and oaths, the real issue is about the heart and not letting anything substitute for giving one’s heart to God. Oaths are necessary only if there is doubt about one’s word.

Oaths operate by a kind of substitution, whereby one’s word is bolstered by reference to another authority. One swears by this or by that. And if it is done falsely, not only is one’s word damaged, but so is the reputation of the authority backing up the oath. Likewise, if one swears by a lesser authority, the oath is weak or invalid. Jesus rejects anything substituting for true integrity.

One way to translate this yes and no section is yes yes and no no. Repeating these words twice constitutes an oath in Mosaic law.

Homily Suggestion
John Quigley, OFM

At the time of Jesus, Jewish people had an elaborate system for making vows or taking an oath. You could swear on top of or by all sorts of objects, such as a wall of the temple, on an animal to be sacrificed, even by the hairs of your head. Jesus is telling his listeners to keep it simple. Do not complicate your commitments and words; mean and do exactly what you say. That will be enough. Any other complicated method of making a promise or vow is a misleading superstition.

In winding up his letter of correction to the Christians in Corinth, St. Paul says that he is no longer looking at anyone to whom he wrote this letter of defense and correction “in terms of mere human judgment.” Going beyond that way of evaluation, he shall use a new standard: Christ. Because these other people have been baptized into the Body of Christ, he will see them as one with Christ and a new creation. The old order has passed away, and now all is new. Everything has become much simpler in and because of Christ.

We do bring a lot of suffering onto others by our judgment and carefully nursed injuries—while we bring increased suffering on ourselves at the same time. Paul and Jesus both recommend that we keep it very simple. KISS: Keep it simple, stupid! Jesus tells us elsewhere that what we tie up on earth is tied up in heaven and what we release here on earth is released in heaven.

Published by FRANCISCAN MEDIA, 28 W. Liberty Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202 866-543-6870 • www.FranciscanMedia.org
Editor: Rev. Pat McCloskey, OFM, MA
Weekday Homily Helps - $60.00 per year ($72.00 for Canada). Also available: Sunday Homily Helps - $35.00 per year ($43.00 for Canada). All rights reserved. Material may not be reproduced or photocopied in any form without permission.
Theme: One Body of Christ with two feet.

Exegesis of the First Reading, 2 Cor 6:1–10 (365)
Leslie Hoppe, OFM
Though the Church honors St. Paul as its first and greatest missionary, the apostle faced serious opposition to his message and ministry—especially from some members of the Church at Corinth, a Christian community that Paul founded. A few members of the Corinthian Church objected to the way Paul handled the money collected to aid the Christian community of Jerusalem (2 Cor 6:1–10).

There were also objections to the gospel that Paul proclaimed on the part of Jewish Christians who believed that the following of Christ was another way to be a Jew. Some members of the Corinthian Church accepted the notion that salvation came through observance of Torah although Paul taught that salvation comes through faith in Christ and his atonement for sin.

Today’s passage summarizes Paul’s defense of his ministry. The apostle asserts that the difficulties he endured as a missionary prove the authenticity of his message. People may accuse him of being an imposter, but he is, in fact, a genuine and effective minister of the gospel. Though those opposed to Paul may see him as a nobody with nothing, he rejoices that he possesses everything (v 10). The personal hurt that Paul experienced because of the issues between himself and the Corinthian Christians is evident in this letter. This led Paul to defend his conduct and his message thoughtfully but energetically.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 5:38–42 (365)
Leslie Hoppe, OFM
Although the “measure for measure” punishment for offenses served to prevent extreme responses, Jesus expects his followers to put aside their right of retaliation to create an atmosphere of forgiveness leading to authentic reconciliation. After Jesus calls his followers to return good for evil, he suggests that they ignore their right to enjoy the fruits of their labor so that they can provide for the poor and be in a position to offer loans to those in need.

The commandments in the Torah represent the minimum required to ensure a well-functioning society. People have a right to enjoy the wealth they acquire because of their industry. Jesus, however, expects his followers to go beyond the commandments. Their goal should not be the protection of their rights and property but rather the good of the poor.

Jesus’ moral system is designed to respond to the needs of persons—especially persons who are on the margins of society, people who need help to survive, people who do not have resources that allow them to be independent. To enable his disciples to respond to such people, Jesus calls them to go beyond the commandments and to ignore their rights. Jesus wishes to create a new society in which his disciples place themselves at the service of those in need.

Homily Suggestion
Colin King, OFM
There is a story of a Christian church in a small town whose followers really loved Jesus. In fact, they loved him so much that they wanted to follow everything he did, and so they washed each other’s feet. But then a fight broke out over which foot should be washed first, the left foot or the right foot. This eventually split the church in half, and suddenly the small town had two new churches: Right-foot Christians and Left-foot Christians. The people of the town would go to the church they thought was correct and ignore their family, friends, and neighbors who decided to attend the other church.

Just as St. Paul was struggling with the community of Corinth, we also have divisions in our parishes. Many of these divisions have nothing to do with doctrine but rather revolve around how money is spent, how the homily is preached, or how the choir sings. Sadly, our pride causes these divisions.

We are reminded that now is an acceptable time, that today is the day of salvation, of coming together as one Body of Christ. We have a foretaste of the Lord’s salvation when we come together to this table, as bread is broken and wine is poured to be shared in the new and everlasting covenant. We come together in the deep communion with our God, ourselves, and each other. And then we go into the world together, proclaiming the Lord’s kindness and faithfulness.

For more information about St. Romuald the Abbot, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: Love and pray for your enemies.

Exegesis of the First Reading, 2 Cor 8:1–9 (366)
Leslie Hoppe, OFM

Macedonia was a Roman province in northern Greece. Two of its cities had significant Christian communities: Philippi and Thessalonica. Corinth was located in southern Greece where the Peloponnese Peninsula joins the Greek mainland. The Macedonians and the Corinthians had been political and military rivals—with Macedonia as the more dominant power. Corinth, however, became an economic power because of the commerce that passed through its two ports: Lechaion and Cenchreae. Macedonia was not as prosperous.

Paul plays on the rivalry between the Macedonian cities and Corinth to urge the Corinthians to be more generous to the collection he was taking up for the Christians in Jerusalem. There was a severe famine in Palestine, and the funds Paul was raising were intended to purchase grain for the Christians of Jerusalem, who were facing the possibility of starvation.

The apostle informs the Corinthians that the Macedonians gave most generously “beyond their means” (v 3). Paul cleverly plays on the Corinthians’ pride (“You excel in everything,” v 7) as he asks them to excel in generosity so that the collection could reach its goal to relieve their fellow Christians in Jerusalem. Paul’s commitment to the Church in Jerusalem was founded on his belief in the solidarity that should bind all Christian communities.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 5:43–48 (366)
Leslie Hoppe, OFM

Jesus’ moral system significantly avoids minimalism (satisfaction with fulfilling the letter of the law and nothing more). Jesus urges his disciples not to be satisfied with simply fulfilling obligations.

What Jesus asks of his followers here requires them to act contrary to the first impulse that people have when dealing with their enemies. Jesus asks that his disciples offer their enemies forgiveness.

Jesus begins his comments by quoting a two-part aphorism. “Love your neighbor” appears to cite the second half of Lv 19:18. “Hate your enemy” is not found in the OT. It is likely that Jesus does not intend to cite a biblical text per se but rather a popular interpretation of the OT teaching.

Preachers avoid drawing too great a contrast between Jesus’ moral teaching and that of the OT. Jesus drew on his religious tradition in teaching his disciples. For example, Prv 25:21 reads, “If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat; and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink” (also Rom 12:20). Jesus is making explicit what is implicit in this and several other OT texts (Ex 23:4–5; Prv 24:17; Jb 31:29).

Homily Suggestion
Colin King, OFM

We had a powerful image of what forgiveness and praying for those who hurt us when St. John Paul II visited with his would-be assassin in an Italian prison and asked the world to pray for the man whom he had sincerely forgiven.

We naturally resent those who do us wrong. But forgiveness is not an emotion; it is an act of the will. Sadly, this act is not popular these days. Society often seems to confuse justice with revenge, to view mercy as weak and irresponsible.

Certainly we are all painfully aware of the 2016 election cycle and its result. Some people are filled with anxiety and fear, anger and conflict, and even sadness and depression that it sowed among family, friends, and particularly random Facebook fights. It also revealed how deeply divided we are as a nation, which makes it all too easy for groups to judge others by their worst examples while judging themselves by their best intentions.

By dividing the world into baskets of good or deplorable people, we stay very busy building walls and not listening to our God, who is kind and merciful. We spend too much time building barriers between each other instead of bridges that allow us to be bearers of Jesus’ message of reconciliation and communion.
Theme: Discerning our giving.

Exegesis of the First Reading, 2 Cor 9:6-11 (367)
Leslie Hoppe, OFM

The last part of v 7 ("the Lord loves a cheerful giver") is one of the most frequently cited biblical texts, especially useful for those engaged in fund-raising appeals. It is important to remember that here Paul is encouraging people of means from Corinth to be generous in helping Jerusalem’s Christians, who are facing the very real threat of starvation.

The apostle reminds the Corinthians that God is the source of their wealth. They need to put aside any thought that they are self-sufficient. With their wealth comes the responsibility of being generous toward those in need.

Paul’s use of the sowing and harvesting of grain is clever. After all, the purpose of the collection to which he is asking the Corinthians to contribute is to raise funds sufficient to buy quantities of grain for the Christian community of Jerusalem, which was needed because of the famine that was afflicting the people of Roman Palestine.

Some Christian preachers have turned Paul’s words into a doctrine of seed faith, promising believers prosperity and even wealth if they respond generously to the preachers’ fund-raising appeals. Paul is not concerned with any project of his own but only with the poor and hungry Christians of Jerusalem.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 6:1-6, 16-18 (367)
Leslie Hoppe, OFM

Jesus warns his disciples against ostentatious religious observance. Although it is true that the disciples should let their light shine before all (Mt 5:16), there is a fine line between good example and religious hypocrisy. Jesus suggests that authentic religious observance is inconspicuous. He illustrates this principle by citing two important religious practices of his day: almsgiving and prayer.

The word hypocrite is derived from Greek, and it was originally a term related to the theater. It comes from a verb meaning “to play a part, to pretend.” Jesus suggests that his disciples keep their religious activities as private as possible because they are not “playing a part” for an audience.

Self-awareness in discerning one’s true motivation for religious observances is not easy to achieve. First, hardly anyone’s motivations are pure; they are usually some mixture of altruism and self-service. Jesus assumes that his followers will be honest with themselves in discerning their motivation for giving alms to the poor and spending time in prayer. This honesty requires a measure of maturity that comes with experience. What Jesus offers is a goal that his disciples need to take seriously: the goal of an authentic Christian life that seeks to embrace the ideals of the gospel for no other reason than that they are given to us by Jesus.

Homily Suggestion
Colin King, OFM

I am sure you have heard the joke about the pastor standing in front of his congregation as rain is leaking through the roof. He tells the congregation, “I have good news and I have bad news. The bad news is the roof is leaking,” as a large drop of water hits his head. “The good news is we have the money to repair the roof—the money is in your purses and wallets. And remember, the Lord loves a cheerful giver!”

Unfortunately, the pastor seems to be confusing St. Paul’s message of begging the Corinthians for food to send back to the hungry Christians in Jerusalem who could have starved to death waiting for a capital campaign. We, too, can confuse the admonitions of Jesus not to be hypocrites.

Just as we should not put on a performance for other people about how we follow God, we are also called to have our light shine before all people (Mt 5:16). As we grow in embracing the gospel, we have need of discerning our motivations. We have a great example of this with St. Aloysius Gonzaga, who was an Italian aristocrat. Yet he left this life of nobility and money to enter the Jesuits. When a plague broke out in Rome, he volunteered to raise alms and care for the victims of the plague. He died as a result of these truly righteous deeds and prayers done in front of many people.

For more information about St. Aloysius Gonzaga, visit saintoftheday.org.

Published by FRANCISCAN MEDIA, 28 W. Liberty Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202 866-543-6870 • www.FranciscanMedia.org
Editor: Rev. Pat McCluskey, OFM, MA
Weekday Homily Helps - $60.00 per year ($72.00 for Canada). Also available: Sunday Homily Helps - $35.00 per year ($43.00 for Canada).
All rights reserved. Material may not be reproduced or photocopied in any form without permission.
Theme: Praying without words.

Exegesis of the First Reading, 2 Cor 11:1–11 (368)

Leslie Hoppe, OFM

Here Paul deals with two issues that have been complicating his relationship with the Christian community in Corinth. The first is the favorable reception the Corinthian community gave to the emissaries of those Christians who insisted that salvation comes through observance of the Torah. This belief is contrary to what Paul taught the Corinthians, and the apostle upbraids them for allowing themselves to be seduced by his smooth-talking opponents. The gospel Paul taught is that salvation comes through faith in Christ Jesus.

The second issue is the matter of the hurt pride of the Corinthians from whom Paul accepted no financial support though he did accept such support from the Christians in Macedonia. Paul did not want to have the Corinthians as his patrons. This would have compromised his standing before them. The apostle realized that the Christian community at Corinth still needed his strong guiding hand.

His ability to offer such guidance would have been compromised if the Corinthians saw themselves as his patrons. Paul affirms that his refusal to accept their patronage was done out of love for them (v 11). The Church at Corinth was founded by Paul. Despite the problems that the community there caused Paul, it always had a special place in the apostle’s affections.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 6:7–15 (368)

Leslie Hoppe, OFM

The Our Father has a dimension that most modern Christians miss because they do not have an apocalyptic worldview. This worldview has been described as setting believers in a minority community and making their lives in the present meaningful by relating them to an end that will come soon and be characterized by a reversal of fortunes. Such a worldview speaks to people who are not in control of their destinies. This certainly characterizes the life situation of Jews and early Christians in Roman Palestine.

Each of the petitions invites God to retake control of the world that God has created—to ensure that the divine will is carried out and evil is defeated. The one petition that does not appear to reflect an apocalyptic perspective is v 11a (“Give us this day our daily bread”). The word daily is used for a Greek word whose meaning has puzzled translators, including Jerome who rendered it as supersubstantial. A note in the NABRE suggests an alternative: “bread for tomorrow.” Although this better suits the apocalyptic thrust of the prayer, the English translation of the Our Father will most likely remain.

This prayer asks God to hasten the day of the coming of God’s reign. That day will see the end of sin and death—and the transformation of the cosmos into what God created it to be.

Homily Suggestion

Colin King, OFM

How often do you try to start a conversation and then realize that you don’t have the right words or that something came out the wrong way? Perhaps the same thing happens when you try to pray. Your heart is longing for prayer, but you cannot seem to formulate the “right words.”

Usually when we lack words, life has already hurt us, and we have become disillusioned or heartbroken. We may be in stunned grief over having lost a loved one. We may be facing a broken relationship, an addiction, financial devastation, or abuse.

Or maybe we’re just uninspired, tired, worn out from the many anxieties that surround us day to day. We may be exhausted from overscheduling and under-resting while still trying to deal with a “to-do” list that never seems to get any shorter.

It is in these moments when we do not feel as if we are in control of our lives that the irony sets into our minds. Our Father already knows what we need before we even ask. Prayer is not about magic and coming up with the proper formula to get exactly what we want when we want it.

We do not pray to some distant God in a faraway galaxy, removed from our day-to-day lives. Prayer is about having a personal relationship with the God who gave us life and to whose kingdom we long to return.

For more information about Sts. Paulinus of Nola, John Fisher, and Thomas More, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: The event of love.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Dt 7:6–11 (170)
Leslie Hoppe, OFM

The core of the Book of Dt (chs 12–26) contains the laws that were to guide the people of ancient Israel in their life in the land promised to their ancestors. The first 11 chs of the book, however, seek to motivate the people to obey. Today’s lesson offers a rationale for obedience.

The first reason is based on God’s choice of Israel to be God’s people. It is a choice based not on Israel’s potential but because of God’s love for Israel and God’s fidelity to the promises made to Israel’s ancestors (vv 6–8a). (The emphasis on love is likely the reason this passage was selected for today’s feast). This love prompted God to deliver the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt (v 8b). God’s love for the people of Israel is evocative: It calls for a response of love. This response is shaped by the stipulations found in the core of Dt.

A second reason for obedience is that God rewards those who obey and punishes those who do not (vv 9–11). This, of course, grounds any religiously based moral system. It teaches that human actions have consequences beyond the immediate effects of those actions. Reward and punishment as motivating forces, however, are subordinated to God’s choice of and love for the people of Israel, which prompts them to reciprocate such love. It is a matter of the heart: God’s heart speaking to the hearts of God’s people.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 11:25–30 (170)
Leslie Hoppe, OFM

Jesus was more successful in attracting followers among common folk than from Judaism’s religious leadership. In fact, the religious leadership engineered his execution by the Romans (Jn 18:14, 28–31). Here Jesus thanks God for leading the common folk to him.

One reason for Jesus’ popularity was the simplicity of his teaching. Jesus did not multiply religious obligations to complicate Israel’s loving response to the love that God had shown them. When asked about the greatest commandment in the Torah, Jesus replies that it is to love God and neighbor (Mt 22:34–40). Jesus left it to the love, generosity, and commitments of his followers to shape their moral response in accord with this great commandment. It is a matter of love: God’s heart speaking to the hearts of God’s people.

The words burden (v 28) and yoke (v 30) were often used as metaphors for the requirement of obedience to the various prescriptions of Torah—though not in a pejorative sense. Here Jesus appropriates those terms to speak of the pattern of obedience that he is teaching. It was not a matter of minimally fulfilling obligations. His disciples are to go beyond the commandments (Mt 5:21–30). Their response to God is to be limited not by the commandments but only by the extent of their love for the God who loved them first.

Homily Suggestion
Colin King, OFM

It begins with the tiniest gesture: an interested glance, the brush of a hand. Lifelong love builds from little expressions of care before it becomes total self-surrender to the beloved. But we all know that love is not some philosophical axiom or something that is done for a while and then stops. The love we experience with God is an event that continues to unfold throughout our life.

Of course, this is one of the main beliefs that separate Christians from other religions: Our God wants to be with us because of his love for us. It is the one and the same God of bountiful love who chose us to be his own and gave us the law. The fullness of this law is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Our God did not just make us and give us a law to follow, but God actually became one of us! The Lord, whose kindness is everlasting, has a heart that is burning with love for you as an individual. When we are burdened, God’s love gives us rest. Even though we have never seen God, when we show the love and compassion of God to our suffering neighbors we know that we remain in God’s love. These events of showing God’s love in our world allow for this love to reach its perfection in our lives.

For more information about the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: Reflecting the light of the nations.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Is 49:1–6 (587)
Leslie Hoppe, OFM

Christian liturgical and homiletic tradition usually applies this text to Jesus, for example, on Tuesday of Holy Week. It is used for today’s solemnity because of references to God’s election of the servant while he was still in his mother’s womb (vv 1b and 5a). The birth and mission of John were revealed to his father not immediately before his birth but before his conception (Lk 1:5–17).

Christian tradition appropriates a text that the prophet composed to encourage the people of Judah, who were in exile from their homeland. The prophet announced that judgment was not God’s last word to Israel. Following the pattern set by the NT (Mk 1:4), the Church views John’s calling people to receive a baptism of repentance as the fulfillment of the prophet’s vision as articulated in Is 49:1–6. Through John, God is offering God’s people an opportunity for a fresh beginning in their life with God in order to prepare themselves for God’s final intervention in Israel’s life.

In addition, the Church sees its mission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth as a fulfillment of the prophet’s calling to be “a light to the nations” (v 6).

The assumption behind this prophetic text is the eternal commitment of God to God’s people. Judgment is not God’s last word to the people of Israel.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 1:57–66, 80 (587)
Leslie Hoppe, OFM

In a departure from its usual pattern of celebrating a saint’s death (that saint’s entrance into eternal life), the Church celebrates the birthday of John the Baptist because of the belief that he was sanctified in the womb (Lk 1:41). Jesus and Mary are the only other persons whose birthdays are celebrated in the Church’s liturgy.

In its own way, today’s Gospel underscores the special significance of the Baptist’s birth. First, the birth of John to his elderly mother (Lk 1:18, 36) was seen by Elizabeth’s neighbors as an act of “great mercy” (Lk 1:56). In addition, events at John’s circumcision also point to the importance of John’s birth in the divine will for Israel’s future.

At circumcision, John received his name. The custom in Jesus’ day was to name the first male child after his father or grandfather. Elizabeth’s neighbors are surprised that she does not intend to follow that custom (v 61). Zechariah confirms his wife’s decision to name their child John, a name that means “gift of God.” The circumstances around John’s birth and circumcision become a source of wonderment for the people in the “hill country of Judea.” These unusual—indeed miraculous—circumstances indicate that “the hand of the Lord” was with John (v 66). The significance of his mission would become clear when “he appeared publicly to Israel” (v 80).

Homily Suggestion
Colin King, OFM

Each of us is a unique reflection of God. Each of us brings Jesus’ presence into the world in a way the world never experienced before and will never experience again. Like John the Baptist, we are heralds of Jesus Christ.

By the virtue of our Baptism, our birthday into the family of God, we have the exact same grace that St. John the Baptist did. We, too, are called to be a voice crying out to the world with the message of the Gospel. We are called to serve others because we have been saved by God’s grace, and now we are agents of that grace in the lives of others.

Do you realize that God has filled you with everything needed to change the world? God our Father knows this. Our God who knits us in our mother’s womb and has counted the hairs on our head knows the power each of us has.

We are not free agents in this work or doing this for our own glory. We come together as a community of disciples. We as a Church community witness to the unity of God. God does indeed desire to accomplish great things through each one of us as a whole community of believers. But these accomplishments are to be seen as the working of God’s power in our midst and not our own personal achievements. In our own lives of conversion, we must decrease so that Jesus, the light to the nations, will increase, enabling his salvation to reach the ends of the earth.

For more information about the feast of the birth of St. John the Baptist, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: Stop! In the name of love.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Gn 12:1–9 (371)
Rev. Timothy P. Schehr
This reading begins one of the Bible’s most memorable faith journeys. The first step of such a journey is moving beyond earthly sources of security and trusting in the word of God. Abram accepts the challenge to leave homeland, kin, and family house. In their place he trusts in God’s promise to give him a new land, many descendants, a blessing, and a great name. This last had also been the ambition of the builders of Babel (Gn ch 11). But they sought it on their own terms rather than trusting in God to give it to them.

The patriarch Abram is 75 years old when he sets out on his journey. With him are his wife, Sarai, and his nephew Lot. Childless at this point, Abram and Sarai were comforted to have Lot with them. But by the time Abram is 100 years old, he and Sarai will have a son of their own. Only then had they arrived at a level of trust in God that would ensure their own child would be raised in a faith-filled household.

God leads Abram and Sarai to the land of Canaan where God says this land will belong to their descendants. By all appearances, this land belongs to the Canaanites living there. Abram thus keeps moving on, building altars along the way to display his devotion to God in spite of the doubts within his heart. By stages, the patriarch moves to the southernmost part of Canaan. In the next ch, he will continue all the way down to Egypt, far beyond the boundaries of the promised land. His faith has not yet grown strong.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 7:1–5 (371)
Rev. Timothy P. Schehr
This reading comes from the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord’s first extended address to the crowds. Jesus outlines the character strengths desirable in servants of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus begins with the Beatitudes and then continues with ideal standards of conduct. In this reading, Jesus challenges his disciples to strive for perfection within themselves rather than pointing out the faults of others.

Jesus cautions people quick to judge the character of others to keep in mind that they also are subject to scrutiny. True servants of the kingdom understand they will stand before the divine judge at the end of time. So it is far more profitable for people to be attentive to their own imperfections rather than look for those in others. Jesus illustrates this lesson with yet another graphic image. Imagine someone presuming to find the smallest speck of wood in the eye of another person while overlooking a huge plank of wood in his or her own eye.

This exaggerated image makes the lesson all the more apparent. Servants of God’s kingdom must be attentive to gaining clearer vision for themselves. If they are distracted by their own plans, they will be unable to see the path God is showing them. Obsession with the faults of others will only delay addressing all the faults that interfere with a person’s own relationship with God.

Homily Suggestion
Jo Koch
We live in a world of headlines, talking points, sound bites, and false news that encourage us to make snap judgments about issues, actions, intentions, behaviors, and the character of others. We feel we have moral license to judge not only the newsworthy, famous, and celebrities but also our family, friends, coworkers, and even strangers—based on snippets of information with limited knowledge, understanding, and perspective.

We forget that our judgment of others reveals more about ourselves than “the other.” Our judgments reveal our own likes and dislikes, preferences, prejudices, and self-righteousness. We see the actions of others through our own lens of familiar values, beliefs, knowledge, and experiences. From our own point of view, personal perspectives, and vantage point, we judge others.

Only if we are seeing with ultimate clarity (the eyes of God) having a 360-degree vantage point with a full knowing of the human heart and mind, including past, present, and future, can we begin to remove the wooden beam from our own eye, let alone attempt to remove the splintered vision of “the other.”

Jesus is passionate about this directive. Possibly his words today would be, “Stop, in the name of love!” St. Teresa of Calcutta echoed this by stating, “If you judge people, you have no time to love them.”
Theme: Burnt toast.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Gn 13:2, 5–18 (372)
Rev. Timothy P. Schehr
While in Egypt, Abram became rich in what this world offers. But he still does not have what only God can give him: a child. God waits for the patriarch’s faith to grow stronger. Abram is making progress.

As the reading begins, the herds of Lot and Abram are so large they are crowding each other out. With so many Canaanites and Perizzites in the land, Abram and Lot are apparently afraid to venture very far away. But now the situation has grown extreme; they must separate. Abram is anxious not to alienate his nephew Lot. After all, the patriarch as yet has no heir.

Abram lets Lot choose first. Lot’s point of view is limited; he sees only what seems good by earthly standards. The Jordan plain is well watered and lush. Did the Garden of Eden look like this? It seems Lot is especially swayed by its similarity to Egypt. This negative theme is reinforced by the detail that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Jordan plain would one day be destroyed. Lot pitches his tent near Sodom, a city filled with people who do not serve God. Does Lot feel more secure in residing near a fortified city?

By contrast, Abram trusts in God’s promises. He chooses to pitch his tent near the oak of Mamre, and there he builds an altar to the Lord. God invites Abram to explore the land in every direction. God will give him and his countless descendants all he sees.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 7:6, 12–14 (372)
Rev. Timothy P. Schehr
Jesus continues describing people who serve the kingdom of heaven, warning his disciples to treat the kingdom of heaven with the greatest respect. It is holy, a gift from God beyond anything this world offers. People don’t cast a possession of great value to dogs or swine. Likewise, serving God’s kingdom is an honor; disowning it for something unclean brings danger and death.

Jesus then sums up the law and the prophets: Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. The love and respect people seek for themselves should set the standard for the way they treat others. The incentive for loving others comes from within a person; it does not have to come from some external standard.

At the end of this passage, Jesus challenges his disciples to sincerely embrace the high standards he has placed before them in this Sermon on the Mount. He compares this challenge to passing through a narrow gate and a constricted road. It will take real determination to make progress along the way that leads to eternal life. The wide gate and the broad road lead to destruction. Many people follow this way because there is no challenge involved. They see only the transitory things of this world and reject the realm of the spirit. Their attachment to things hinders their progress through the narrow gate of faith.

Homily Suggestion
Jo Koch
Jesus speaks with great authority when he states, “Do to others whatever you would have them do to you.” At first glance, this appears to be a simple directive. Unfortunately, when you factor in human nature, it gets complicated. Take for example this real-life situation.

After 32 years of living a very traditional marriage, a couple found themselves reversing roles. Unfortunately, the wife fell and broke her hip, leaving her unable to do even the simplest tasks. The husband willingly jumped in and took on his wife’s daily activities. Each morning he carefully prepared her breakfast and delivered it to her in bed. After two weeks, the wife was clearly upset with her morning meal. In-furied, she yelled at her husband, “Why are you serving me this dry, burnt toast when every day of our lives I have made you toast that was perfectly golden brown! Why would you do this?” The husband sheepishly responded, “Because that’s how I like it best.”

In this oversimplified scenario, both the husband and wife were doing exactly what the Jesus put forth as the law. Yet their well-intended actions went completely unappreciated by the other.

Daily we find ourselves in similarly distasteful, unlikable situations. When this happens, let us be reminded to “do unto others” with the love, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness what we would want others to do for us.

For more information about St. Cyril of Alexandria, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: Being fully alive.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Gn 15:1–12, 17–18 (373)
Rev. Timothy P. Schehr

Abram still clearly has his doubts. He has not progressed so far in his faith journey as to fully trust God’s promises. To help the patriarch advance further, God speaks to him in a vision, urging him to put his fears aside. Abram now finds his voice and speaks up. He complains that God’s gift to him will be of no use if he does not have an heir. In his desperation Abram is already planning to appoint his chief steward as heir.

But God has a better plan. Abram must come to believe that his own son will be heir. To help the patriarch embrace this truth, God invites him to observe the sky’s countless stars. His descendants will be like those stars. This approach impresses Abram, who is now moved to put his faith in the Lord. But when God goes on to say he will possess the land of Canaan, Abram seeks further assurances. God obliges him.

Human relations put great stock in covenant rituals. So God tells Abram to arrange for a very elaborate covenant ritual that should provide the assurance he seeks. In such rituals mortals pass between the two halves of an animal, thereby showing how committed they are to the terms of the covenant. Abram takes great pains to protect the animals. God causes smoke and fire to pass between the pieces while at the same time God solemnly declares to Abram that the land will be his. Such a dramatic demonstration of God’s investment in Abram’s spiritual progress should move him securely beyond fear and doubt.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 7:15–20 (373)
Rev. Timothy P. Schehr

The Sermon on the Mount continues with this passage. Jesus has stressed the importance of being personally invested in the standards of the kingdom of heaven. Now he cautions his disciples to be discerning in their choice of spiritual guides.

They must be wary of false prophets. Messengers sent from God are agents of life; their words guide people along paths that lead to God. Although some prophets appear to be worthy members of God’s flock, they seek only to use others for personal gain. They are ravenous wolves ready to pounce on the sheep.

How can people distinguish between a false prophet and a true one? Jesus uses another image to help. Outwardly, all trees may look healthy. But the fruit of a tree will reveal whether it is bad or good. In a similar way, the disciples should consider what advantage flows from the words of a prophet. If those words promote only earthly gains, especially gains for a prophet personally, then that prophet does not represent the kingdom of heaven. False prophets offer others no spiritual nourishment. Jesus warns that such “rotten trees” will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

True prophets promote another’s journey of faith, serving only God’s interests. Their words nourish others spiritually, providing them with insights to advance their relationships with God and others.

Homily Suggestion
Jo Koch

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Irenaeus, a second-century bishop and Father of the Church. Although renowned among theologians for his apologetic writings, more recently a single-line quote of St. Irenaeus has given his name interfaith recognition: “The glory of God is the human person fully alive.”

This poses a critical question: How do we give glory to God by being fully alive? Throughout the NT, we find the disciples most fully alive when they are in the presence of Jesus or have encountered the risen Christ, as “When the whole crowd saw him [Jesus], they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him” (Mk 9:15) or on the road to Emmaus, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he [Christ] was talking to us on the road?” (Lk 24:32). We, too, are most fully alive in our encounters with Christ through prayer, the sacraments, unexpected life experiences, and in relationships with others, trying to recognize Christ in all of them.

There are countless portals through which we can enter the presence of Christ: nature, music, art, science, service, work, activism, Scripture, literature, exercise, recreation, and time with family and friends. These awaken our bodies, minds, hearts, and souls; all of these portals can help us to “Go in peace, glorifying God by our lives.”

For more information about St. Irenaeus of Lyon, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: High-risk grit and grace.

Exegesis of the First Reading, 2 Tm 4:6–8, 17–18 (591)
Rev. Timothy P. Schehr

This may well be the apostle’s last letter, written just before his martyrdom, perhaps in AD 67. Paul writes to his trusted associate Timothy, who played a major role in much of the apostle’s missionary work.

Paul speaks of being poured out like a wine offering to God. Perhaps he already feels his life ebbing away from him. Far from surrendering to despair, Paul speaks of his life in a positive way; he has nothing to regret. Having competed well in running along the path of life, he has now arrived at the finish line. Paul says he has kept the faith. He is apparently thinking of all the obstacles and challenges he has faced along the way. His letters and Lk’s Acts testify to the many trials Paul encountered as he preached the gospel.

With his service to God given so faithfully, Paul believes he can face the divine and just judge on the Day of the Lord. Paul speaks of receiving “the crown of righteousness,” yet he claims little credit for his achievements. He declares instead that it was the Lord who stood by him all the way and gave him the strength he needed. The Lord always rescued him “from the lion’s mouth.” Paul may be thinking here of his conversion, but more likely he means the many threats to his life during his prolonged missionary journeys. In any case, Paul is sure the Lord will continue to rescue him from evil threats. He looks forward to the Lord bringing him safely to the heavenly kingdom. For all of this Paul gives God the glory.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 16:13–19 (591)
Rev. Timothy P. Schehr

Caesarea Philippi was a model city built by Herod Philip, a friend of the emperor. In this city, Jesus asks how people regard him. Many think he is a famous person from the past whose return marks a significant turning point in time. When Jesus asks what his own disciples think of him, Peter goes way beyond what others have said. He says Jesus is divine, the Son of the living God, and the anointed one of the line of David.

Jesus recognizes his father’s influence on Peter. It is a sign that the Father, initiator of the plan of salvation, marks Peter as the apostle who will serve the kingdom of heaven dramatically. To affirm Peter’s response, Jesus declares him to be the rock, the solid foundation on which he will establish the Church. With so solid a base, the Church will be victorious over all attempts from this world’s prince to destroy it. The Church will lead people away from death and toward eternal life.

Peter is then entrusted with the keys of the kingdom; he must help all others along the path of life. For people who choose life, Peter releases them from the sins that block their way. For those who have yet to choose life, Peter retains their sins to give them every incentive to repent and walk the path of life. This is a great responsibility, and Peter will exercise it well because of his own struggles in faith.

Homily Suggestion
Mary Jo Koch

Sts. Peter and Paul, as the foundational leaders of the early Church, had the unique DNA and characteristics needed to envision, form, nurture, and grow faith-filled disciples into the “Body of Christ.”

Indisputably, St. Peter is a “leaper before a looker.” He is always the first one out of the boat, willing to risk everything (including his life) to be as close to Jesus as possible. His high-risk tolerance in conjunction with his undeniable love of Christ (Jn 21:15–19) and ultimate belief in him makes Peter the ideal candidate for inheriting the immediate “shepherding” of God’s people and advancement of the “good news” upon Jesus’ departure.

Jesus’ formal declaration of Peter’s rock-solid leadership reveals the deciding factor: Peter is in direct relationship with the Father, receiving insights and revelations.

St. Paul is a leader grounded in grace, grit, and unwavering determination. His grace is embodied in writings filled with loving encouragement, guidance, and early doctrine. His grit clearly sustains him as an itinerant preacher—and later as a prisoner facing death for his love of and belief in the triune God.

Both of these bold, fearless men of faith fully utilized the attributes that uniquely empowered them to serve God and ensured the formation and sustainability of the Church. They continue to impact us today.

For more information about the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: Choice words.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Gn 17:1, 9–10, 15–22 (375)
Rev. Timothy P. Schehr

It has been 13 years since the birth of Ishmael, Abram’s son by Hagar. Just when the patriarch may be thinking of formally announcing Ishmael as his heir, God shifts his thinking away from having things his own way and toward walking with blameless faith.

To further impress upon Abram their bond, God introduces a dramatic reminder of the covenant: Every male in the patriarch’s family will be circumcised. This sign is especially apt after Abram’s relations with Hagar to provide himself an heir. God also gives the patriarch and his wife new names appropriate to their special bond with God. He is Abraham, an exalted father; she is Sarah, a princess.

God then reveals that Sarah will give Abram a son from whom will rise rulers and nations. Clouded by his limited thinking, Abraham laughs at the prospect of becoming a father now. The patriarch requests that God instead be mindful of Ishmael. God counters this by reaffirming that Sarah will bear a son whom they are to name Isaac (a play on the Hebrew word for laughter). The covenant promises will be fulfilled in Isaac and his descendants. God will provide for Ishmael, too. He will prosper and become the father of 12 leaders. All of this will show God’s love for Ishmael, leading him to a life of gratitude and praise. However, God maintains the covenant with Isaac, a child by God’s design. God departs from Abraham, giving him time to ponder what he has heard.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 8:1–4 (375)
Rev. Timothy P. Schehr

Jesus has finished his Sermon on the Mount. Moses came down from the mountain with the law to guide the tribes of Israel along the path of life. Jesus is the new Moses, coming down from the mountain with words that fulfill the law. Great crowds follow him.

What happens next clearly exhibits the distinctive character of the kingdom proclaimed by the Lord. A leper approaches the Lord. Such a person drawing so close to any ordinary king is very unlikely. But Jesus is no ordinary king. As he declared in the sermon, the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit, those who know they need what only God can give them.

For all practical purposes, a leper was dead to society, unable to freely circulate among the people but rather confined to the fringes of the community to avoid any contamination. But this leper is not afraid to draw close to Jesus. He believes Jesus can bring him back to life. Jesus even touches the leper; this king does not recognize the boundaries of earthly kingdoms.

The leper is now clean. Because Jesus understands that the outside world will still hesitate to accept this, he sends the leper to the priests, who will examine him and declare him clean according the law of Moses (Lv 13:1–3). Then the leper will be welcomed back to life within the community.

Homily Suggestion
Jo Koch

We have much to learn in the way of humility, trust, and belief from this nondescript leper’s encounter with Jesus. As we consider the dire circumstances of the leper’s existence and the “death warrant” assigned to him, undoubtedly he was a desperate man in need of healing. Yet he does not demand a miracle from Jesus, knowing full well the absolute power of the Lord. He does not express an attitude of entitlement, that he is owed a miracle. The leper does not demand a miracle from Jesus or expect Jesus to pity him.

Instead, the leper approaches Jesus and gives him homage; bowing/kneeling is a public sign of respect and reverence. The leper humbles himself before the Lord and simply states, “If you wish, you can make me clean.” The leper publicly proclaims two key foundations of faith: trust and belief in Jesus. With the words “if you wish,” the leper places his life completely in Jesus’ hands without any conditions, contingencies, or requirements. The leper’s unwavering belief in the power and authority of Jesus is stated in “you can make me clean.” There are no “ifs,” “ands,” or “buts”—only belief, pure and simple.

Whether we find ourselves in a life/death crisis and desperately needing a miracle or we are struggling with the challenges of daily life, we are well served to enlist the example of the leper’s humility, trust, and belief by simply stating, “Lord, if you wish you can.”

For more information about the First Martyrs of Rome, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: ‘Make it so’

Exegesis of the First Reading, Gn 18:1–15 (376)
Rev. Timothy P. Schehr

After the exchange with Abraham in Gn ch 17, God departed from him. Abraham now seems to wait for God’s return; he sits at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day! Suddenly he sees three figures standing nearby. Abraham seems to understand these are no ordinary visitors. And indeed God, accompanied by two messengers, is on the way to Sodom to verify the gravity of the sin in that city (18:21). But God comes first to Abraham to give him another opportunity to display his trust in the promises he has been given.

Abraham is keenly deferential to his visitors. He presents himself as “your servant.” He pleads with them to stay for “a little food,” which turns out to be quite a feast. The visitors seem surprised that Sarah has not come forward. In the previous ch, God announced Sarah would bear a son named Isaac. Would she not have words of gratitude for this wonderful news?

God reaffirms this news now, and Sarah overhears what is said. But she laughs at the prospect of bearing a child in her old age. It seems she had not heard this until now. And as if to chide Abraham for not sharing such news with his wife, God addresses Abraham, asking why she responded the way she did to such a “marvelous” gift from God. Sarah denies what she did. She does not want to jeopardize the gift God has given her. It seems Sarah is prepared to accept something marvelous from God.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 8:5–17 (376)
Rev. Timothy P. Schehr

Immediately after healing an Israelite leper, Jesus heals a gentile’s servant. Clearly the kingdom that Jesus initiates is open to all, even those rejected by society. The reading begins with the news that a centurion has approached Jesus. For a brief moment it seems the Lord may be in danger. But then Mt tells us this Roman officer came to request healing for a servant suffering terribly. The officer probably had access to Roman doctors and medicines, but instead he comes to the Lord.

What follows is even more amazing. Jesus is ready to accompany the officer back to his home to heal the servant. But then the officer gives testimony to his profound faith in the Lord. So strong is his faith that he is confident the word of the Lord will be enough. Jesus is so moved he holds up this Roman centurion as a model of faith for the children of Israel. Jesus goes on to caution his listeners against presuming they will enjoy the kingdom of heaven simply because they can claim the patriarchs as their ancestors. What is necessary is faith on a par with the faith of this centurion.

In the reading’s final vv, Jesus heals many more. It is an invitation for the rest to seek spiritual healing. Peter’s mother-in-law gives a good example. Once healed by the hand of the Lord, she rises to serve him.

Homily Suggestion
Jo Koch

A gentile, Roman soldier may be considered the least likely to be credited for one of the most highly recognized faith quotes of all time, so profound that it is proclaimed daily by millions within the liturgy. Jesus would not let this extraordinary act of faith go unrewarded.

Who would have thought military training would be a contributing faith factor for this centurion? Yet its profound impact is apparent as he parallels his military experience to his understanding of and trust in Jesus’ authority and power. The centurion’s trust in his chain of command enables him to trust Jesus to “Make it so!” so to speak.

Often leaders who hold positions of power and responsibility have great respect for their counterparts. The centurion had civil and military authority while Jesus had spiritual authority. The centurion humbly recognized that Jesus had the ultimate power over the seen and unseen, over the possible and the impossible—over the hearts, minds, and souls of his disciples. Although Jesus was more than willing, he in turn honored the centurion’s trust and belief in him by not making the house call. Wisely Jesus did not undercut or disgrace the centurion’s faith. Jesus treated him with military respect by dismissing him, saying, “You may go,” and by honoring him with “as you have believed, let it be done for you.” Jesus simply said, in effect, “Make it so.”

For more information about St. Junipero Serra, visit saintoftheday.org.