Weekday Homily Helps

May 1, 2017

Monday [St. Joseph the Worker]

Theme: What are you looking for?

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 6:8–15 (273)
Robert J. Karris, OFM

The Jerusalem section of Acts commences with the apostle Peter as the main character. It concludes with Stephen, a spirit-inspired preacher. Acts says of him and the other six: “reputable persons filled with the Spirit and wisdom” (v 3). Verse 8 states that Stephen was “filled with grace and power” and “was working great wonders and signs among the people.” If Stephen was a “deacon” or administrative assistant to the apostles, he was a superdeacon, at the top of his class.

Robert W. Wall is right to emphasize that Lk shapes what he says of Stephen’s trial to parallel Jesus’ trial. “Luke’s literary interplay implies that Stephen is a prophet-like-Jesus whose vocation is to bring the Word of God to Israel but whose destiny is rejection and death” (Acts, 122). As Jesus promised in Lk 21:15, “I myself will give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to refute or resist.”

Stephen is accused “of speaking blasphemous words against Moses.” With fine literary irony, Lk depicts the transformation of Stephen’s face in v 15 in terms used for Moses’ transfigured face in Ex 34:29. In his sermon to the Sanhedrin, Stephen cites Moses 10 times. Is this what a blasphemer does?

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 6:22–29 (273)
Robert J. Karris, OFM

I recommend two recent books: Richard B. Hays, Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels (2016) and Marianne Meye Thompson, John: A Commentary (2015). I invite readers to recall how Jn repeats the same themes. For example, Jesus begins his public ministry by asking two disciples of John: “What are you looking for?” (1:38). In this passage, the crowd “is looking for” Jesus, not because they want to believe in him and follow him, but because they want him to fill their bellies.

Note the double usage of “bread” and “food.” We glimpse that Jn has the Church’s Eucharist in the background for v 23: “near the place where they had eaten the bread when the Lord gave thanks (eucharistesantos).” I suggest that we think deeply about who gives life and try to get away—even momentarily—from our supermarket mentality where we humans provide for ourselves an endless abundance and variety of food-stuffs. We ask: Who is the ultimate source of this abundant food?

Verse 27 is capital: “For upon him the Father, God, has set his seal.” Seal is a means of authorization. Who is the source of food and bread? It is God, the Father and creator, and Jesus, his Son, whom he has authorized to create life (1:1–4).

Homily Suggestion
John Quigley, OFM

The religious fanaticism of members of “the Synagogue of Roman Freedmen” strikes us as off-putting, ridiculous, and petty. It separates, excludes, and even injures those who believe differently. However, we see the same problematic behavior today throughout the world and in our own country. Here we have new laws that refuse entrance to the country by people of a certain religion. In the Islamic states of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, there is serious discrimination based on blasphemy laws to protect the prophet and the Quran.

In today’s story, we get a strong picture of a young, popular speaker, an assistant to the apostles who comes out of nowhere, bursting into Acts. Stephen suddenly and courageously jumps into the scene after the Resurrection, witnessing to Jesus as Messiah. Both came into a disastrous conflict with men who canonized their belief in Moses, the law, and the temple to the point of killing those who disagreed with them.

In the Gospel the people are “looking for Jesus” until they find him. They run around the lakeshore, seeking him. They “found” him after he had returned to his new home in Capernaum. Stephen, apparently and very clearly, had “found” Jesus.

Today we also celebrate the feast and memory of another man who found Jesus, but in very different circumstances: St. Joseph, the carpenter, the worker. He was the “just man” who trusted the word of his spouse, Mary. Joseph was the protector and silent guardian of his wife and baby during the family’s flight into Egypt. Joseph was the strong, silent one, the man who trusted the word that he received in his dreams.

How would you describe your search for and finding of the Lord?

For more information about St. Joseph the Worker, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: The power of forgiveness.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 7:51—8:1a (274)

Robert J. Karris, OFM

In v 52, Stephen refers to “the Righteous One.” Earlier in 3:14, Peter accused the Jewish leaders: “You denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you.” In Lk’s description of Jesus’ last hours, there are numerous references to Jesus as righteous and innocent. For example, the centurion sees how Jesus died and proclaims that he was righteous/innocent (23:47). People have risen up and put to death God’s innocently suffering Righteous One.

With fine literary and theological cross-referencing, Lk describes Stephen, an innocent, righteous one, as suffering the same fate as his Lord, Jesus. Stephen sees Jesus, standing at God’s right hand, vindicated by God as righteous/innocent.

Like Jesus at his death, Stephen also prays for the forgiveness of his murderers. Prayer is a mighty theme in Lk/Acts (see my Prayer and the NT, 40–81). In Acts, Lk demonstrates the effects of prayer (10:2; 12:11; 16:25). Saul/Paul is among those for whom Stephen prays. In the second account of his conversion, Paul goes out of his way to emphasize Stephen’s role (22:20). Indeed, the Church spreads through the blood of and the powerful prayers of its martyrs.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 6:30–35 (274)

Robert J. Karris, OFM

This is an amazing passage. The uneducated crowds and Jesus engage in interpreting Scripture. The crowd asks, “What sign will you perform?” They continue: “Our ancestors ate manna in the desert as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Why are they citing the Exodus event? One reason is that it is Passover time (6:4), and memories of the Exodus are in the air. A more probable reason is that the evangelist wants to delve more deeply into the Eucharist, using the crowds as Jesus’ foils.

The Scripture passage cited combines Ex 16:15 and Ps 78:24 and provides the outline for the rest of Jn ch 6. Thus 6:35–40 interprets “he gave them bread.” Jn 6:41–51 exegetes “from heaven.” Jn 6:52–59 provides exposition of “to eat.” Jesus is being presented as the authoritative expositor of Scripture as he reinterprets and makes present the Exodus event: “My Father is giving to you the true bread from heaven.” Like the Samaritan woman who always wants living water, the crowds want this bread always.

Jesus is the bread of life. Those who come to him and believe will never be hungry or thirsty. We all need to eat bread/food to exist. Jesus alone provides this sustenance. Neither wheat bread nor rye nor pumpernickel nor any artisan bread sustains us. Only Jesus, our bread, “gives life to the world.”

Homily Suggestion

John Quigley, OFM

Today we meet three amazing men: Stephen (a courageous and charismatic preacher), Saul (a stubborn, closed-minded zealot who will become the greatest writer about the mystery of Christ), and Athanasius of Antioch (a brilliant theologian and a bishop at 30). This doctor of the Church participated in the Council of Nicaea, which gave us the very healing term consubstantial in the Nicene Creed.

The great women and men of the first three centuries of Christianity laid a strong foundation for the Church’s later growth. The years between Stephen and Athanasius saw many martyrs and severe persecutions. These early Christians gave us more than good ideas; they set a foundation through suffering.

Impressed by Stephen’s heroism, we might think that the Church is built primarily by strong words. Yet look more closely and see where the true power was released: a power that transformed Saul into Paul, who wrote the words that inspired Athanasius and millions of others. The power was released in Stephen’s prayer, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” The power was forgiveness, pure and simple.

Stephen was also innocent, peaceful, and forgiving of his enemies—even as they killed him. And then Jesus, in today’s Gospel, moves beyond the people’s preoccupation with the mechanics of the coming of the Messiah to tell us that he still does come to us. But he is with us not as a physical, human Messiah but in a supremely intimate way: as our food. There is a secret power in the quiet word of forgiveness and in the silent presence of Christ among us at the Eucharist.

For more information about St. Athanasius of Alexandria, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: Jesus is connected to real people.

Exegesis of the First Reading, 1 Cor 15:1–8 (561)
Robert J. Karris, OFM

The immediate link with today’s feast is the mention of James, the leader of the Jewish Church in Jerusalem (see Acts chs 15 and 21; Gal ch 1). He is neither James the son of Zebedee nor James the son of Alphæus (Mk ch 3). He is “the brother of the Lord” (6:30). The appearance of the risen Lord Jesus to him transformed him into Jesus’ disciple and a leader.

Paul’s list of witnesses to the risen Lord Jesus is long and allows him to join his call to be an apostle to this tradition of witnesses. Gradually, scholars are having their eyes opened to see that Paul’s list includes men and women witnesses. First, adelphoi should be consistently translated as “brothers and sisters” in vv 1 and 6 (“he appeared to 5,000 brothers and sisters”). Second, the phrase “to all the apostles” (v 7) does not refer to “the Twelve” who have already been mentioned in v 5. Included in that group of apostles may well be women such as Mary of Magdala and Junia (Rom 16:7).

Some Corinthian Christians believed that the Resurrection was merely spiritual. In 1 Cor ch 15, Paul vigorously defends the bodily resurrection of Christ and his followers with multiple arguments. His resounding conclusion is that death does not have the final word, for it is swallowed up in victory.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 14:6–14 (561)
Robert J. Karris, OFM

Contemporary scholars continue to explore the role of the minor characters in Jn. Thomas and Philip fall into that category. In a Gospel that uses dualistic terms such as “belief” and “unbelief,” these characters are imperfect believers. They are “on the way” with Jesus. Take Philip, for example. In Jn 1:43–45, we encounter Jesus’ call of Philip, who, in turn, calls Nathanael, saying: “We have found the one Moses wrote about and the prophets too.” Isn’t Philip a representative figure of missionary zeal?

In 12:21–22, Philip’s cross-cultural background as a resident of a Jewish/Greek town comes in handy. “Some Greeks” come to Philip and ask him to be their intermediary and introduce them to Jesus. Philip becomes a mediator and connector of people to Jesus: the way, the truth, and the life.

When our eyes are opened by faith to see Jesus as God’s word and Son, then in Jesus’ works and words we see the Father. Through the Spirit who leads believers into all truth, we learn more deeply who Jesus is. Further, we are inspired to continue Jesus’ “works” with greater numbers and in more places than Jesus could do. Sometimes we imperfect disciples use our time, talent, and treasure to help others “on the way.”

Jn 6:7 indicates that Philip knew finances and how to use them for Jesus’ sake.

Homily Suggestion
John Quigley, OFM

In statues, windows, and paintings, Sts. Philip and James may look heroic. Who were these men? What were they like? How do we honor them today?

Philip spoke Greek, seems to be very practical in calculating the money needed to feed 5,000 people—as well as sincere and eager in asking Jesus at the Last Supper to show them the Father. He enthusiastically introduced Nathanael to Jesus; after the Resurrection he was an enthusiastic missionary.

The NT has three men named “James.” He is called a “brother” to Jesus (Mk 6:3). That is an amazing thought: God-in-Jesus had blood relatives. Our first reading says that Christ visited with James after the resurrection.

Philip’s innocent question to Jesus shows how little the apostles understood him. Was Jesus unclear, or were they clueless? Yet this question shows another window into God’s great mercy and patience. God enters into humanity as we are, in a very particular locality with its languages and its customs. God respects human decisions and cultures. Slipping into the universe, our world, very quietly, God-in-Jesus has family, blood relatives with whom he visited, with whom he ate, sang, danced, and cried. Through that life he saved us with the profound assurance that God will always be delighted to be quietly here with us—most often in a hidden presence.

These ordinary men, whom we remember today as extraordinary, were people like us—gradually coming to a deeper understanding and appreciation of Christ, our savior.

For more information about Sts. Philip and James, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: Opening our lives to God’s grace.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 8:26–40 (276)
Robert J. Karris, OFM

The gospel is now moving out from Jerusalem “to Samaria” (Acts 1:8), but not because of the zeal of the apostles, but because of persecution and the Spirit. One of seven assistants to the apostles, Philip is the agent of this missionary thrust into Samaria (8:4–25) and Ethiopia (vv 36–40).

Both the Samaritans and eunuchs were marginalized people in the eyes of Jewish religious leaders. Why was the eunuch reading Is 53:7–8 at this junction in Lk’s history of the Church? First, this text refers to Jesus’ humiliation and exaltation. Second, its immediate context (56:1–5) points to God’s favorable eschatological regard for eunuchs who are included in God’s people. As Is 56:5 states, God will give the marginalized eunuchs “an eternal, imperishable name.” Philip is not only a worker of signs and an eloquent speaker (8:6), but he is also a spirit-directed interpreter of Scripture.

The common translation of Acts 8:33 (based on Is 53:8) is “taken away from the earth.” That translation misses Philip’s soteriological interpretation of Is 53:8. The LXX text of Is 53:8 reads “is lifted up from the earth.” When the same Greek word (airo) is used in Acts 1:8 to describe Jesus’ ascension, it means “lifted up”—not “taken away.” Philip interprets Is as talking about Jesus’ humiliation and exaltation.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 6:44–51 (276)
Robert J. Karris, OFM

Why does Jesus quote Is 54:13 (LXX) in Jn 6:45: “They shall all be taught by God”? First, Jn universalizes “sons/children” of Israel in Is to “all.” Second, this quotation presupposes that the manna/food of Jn 6:31 refers to something that can be taught. That is, Jn is taking manna/food to refer to God’s wisdom. In Prv 9:1–5, Lady Wisdom invites people to her banquet: “Come, eat of my food and drink of the wine I have mixed” (9:5; Sir 24:20). Is 55:1–3 reads: “Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. . . . Listen attentively to me, and eat what is good, and relish rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me. Listen, so that you may live.”

The best attestation of this interpretation of food as wisdom comes from Philo of Alexandria. He writes in his On the Change of Names (259–60) that God is the one who provides our foodstuffs, quoting Ex 16:4, and then continues: “The nourishment that is really rained down upon humans is heavenly wisdom!”

Jesus, who has seen God (1:18), is the one who teaches God’s wisdom. Through Jesus’ teaching and deeds, a person is taught by God and hears God. Thus the two scriptural quotations (6:31 and 45) interpret one another. The bread is God’s word and wisdom, taught by and embodied in Jesus.

Homily Suggestion
John Quigley, OFM

Today the deacon Philip is traveling when he meets a eunuch from Ethiopia, the queen’s treasurer. Philip explains what the passages from Isaiah means in light of Christ. After the man asks for and receives Baptism, Philip is “snatched away” for another mission.

In the Gospel we hear Jesus preaching in the synagogue in Capernaum around the time of Passover, “I am the bread of life . . . I myself am the living bread come down from heaven.” This Gospel of John was written about 60 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The community of believers, Jews and gentiles, had 40, 50, 60 years to debate and discuss what the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus meant for their lives. What did he mean in his preaching? It was a time of exploration and search for meaning.

The community grew to understand that the Messiah was not limited to the physical presence of the man Jesus walking and preaching along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. The community’s experience was that the Christ, Jesus, was always with them. He was present with them through their times of joys and tribulations. They even experienced him as their food. He was really and truly present with them whenever they gathered in his name. This new ongoing enshrinement of Christ, the Word of God, “is for the life of the world.”

The dramatic conversion of the court official is symbolic of the never-ending sets of conversions that are happening around and within us. These are conversion moments that take us beyond a preoccupation with our faults to a place where we allow ourselves to be “snatched away” by God’s voice spoken in unexpected circumstances.
Theme: Laying a stronger foundation.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 9:1–20 (277)
Robert J. Karris, OFM

Paul’s election is so important to Lk that he details it thrice (see also 22:3–21 and 26:4–23). In Gal 1:13–16, Paul describes his call in a nonnarrative mode: You know “how I persecuted the church of God . . . and tried to destroy it . . . but when God, who from my mother’s womb had set me apart and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him to the gentiles.”

Paul patterns his call on that of the prophet Jer (1:4–5). Lk, too, patterns the narrative of Paul’s call on that of the prophets (Ez 1:13 and Dn 10:6–9). Both stress revelatory light. Dn describes the person who appeared to him: “His face shone like lightning, his eyes were like fiery torches, his arms and feet looked like burnished bronze, and his voice sounded like the roar of a multitude . . . . No strength was left in me. I turned the color of death and was powerless. When I heard the sound of his voice, I fell on my face in a faint.” We might find a faint parallel to the power of this light in today’s immobilization devices that disorient people by intense light, even in the daylight.

In Acts, Paul, the light to the nations, will not be the initiator of the gentile mission. Lk assigns that grace to Peter and thrice narrates Peter’s mission to gentile Cornelius (10:1–48; 11:1–18; 15:7–11).

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 6:52–59 (277)
Robert J. Karris, OFM

Jn 6:53 is key: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you.” In Jn, “the Son of Man” is simply the exalted figure of Dn 7:13–14 (who ascends victoriously into heaven) but is also the one who descends from heaven. As Jesus tells Nicodemus: “No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, that is, the Son of Man” (3:13). And this exalted figure has taken flesh (1:14), gives his flesh for the life of the world (6:51), and now gives believers his flesh to eat in the Eucharist.

Jesus concludes his contemplating exposition of Ps 78:4 and Ex 16:5 by exegeting the words “to eat” (6:31): “This is the bread which came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.”

As Marianne Meye Thompson says so well: The Eucharist “has been set in the narrative of Jesus’ life, showing that Jesus’ entire life, his whole self, his flesh and blood, were given to be the life for the world” (John, p 155). Something similar is at work in Paul’s account: “Do this . . . in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:25). The Eucharist is much more than a meal. It is embarking on Jesus’ way of self-sacrificing love.

Homily Suggestion
John Quigley, OFM

Saul, a stubborn, closed-minded zealot, was on his way to Damascus, armed with arrest warrants against those he saw as destroying Judaism. A stunning light leaves him completely disoriented. “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” His conversion takes time. With time and companionship, he gradually becomes Paul, the apostle to the gentiles. That unbelievable conversion continues to affect humanity profoundly.

When Jesus enters the Jordan River, he is overcome by a consoling, personal, and disorienting voice. After his baptism, Jesus is also led into the desert—like Paul—to adjust to the voice that shifted his life. On his return home to Nazareth, he is rejected, chased out of town, and becomes a refugee in Capernaum.

Jesus and Saul were going about their personal business when suddenly they were uprooted, dislocated, and pushed into a new life. Both men were challenged to leave all behind, and to move to a new location where they had to accept and depend on the hospitality of others. Saul was in Damascus with Ananias. Jesus was in Capernaum with Peter and his clan. Saul/Paul had to surrender his secure confidence and reputation as a powerful Pharisee with its false security. Jesus, now a refugee from his hometown Nazareth, was freed of his previous occupation to start a whole new life.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus, who has been liberated from his small hometown of Nazareth and its thinking, begins a new public life, talking to us from the synagogue in Capernaum, his adopted home. He boldly takes us to a level of spirituality that we could never have imagined. He invites us to be dislocated from our attachments and small world and to become part of him forever—for eternity. He invites us to consume him (flesh and blood), to be one with him as the Christ, Lord of the universe.

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Theme: Jesus’ choice as a leader.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 9:31–42 (278)
Robert J. Karris, OFM
The Lectionary skips the stories of Paul in Damascus and Jerusalem (9:19b–31) to narrate two miracles by Peter, one for a man and one for a woman. Lk last mentioned Peter in Acts 8:14–25 when Peter confronted Simon the magician, who wanted to buy spiritual power with money.

Peter’s two miracles are modeled on those of Elijah, Elisha, and Jesus. See 1 Kgs ch 17 for Elijah’s miracles in favor of a starving widow and his raising up of her deceased son. The author of 2 Kgs ch 4 narrates Elisha’s compassion to a widow and then how he raised up the deceased son of a grief-stricken couple. Lk 5:17–26 tells of Jesus’ cure of a paralytic, and Lk 7:11–17 narrates Jesus’ raising up of the only son of a widow.

Lk makes it very clear that Peter’s two miracles were not done by his own power: “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you”; “Peter . . . knelt down and prayed.” Peter has no need of deacons to help the widows who lamented Dorcas’ death (Acts ch 6). Note Lk’s depiction of Dorcas: “She was completely filled with good deeds and almsgiving.” Lk ends ch 9 with Peter in Joppa, from which the next stage of the spread of the gospel will take place when the centurion Cornelius comes knocking.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 6:60–69 (278)
Robert J. Karris, OFM
Verse 60 informs us that not only “the crowd,” or “the Jews,” but also “the disciples” were listening to Jesus’ teaching. Many of them say: “This saying is hard. Who can accept it?” Saying here probably means “teaching.” The Greek word skleros can mean “hard” or “fantastic.” What is Jesus’ teaching that the disciples (or we contemporary listeners) find fantastic? That he is authorized by God the Father, creator, to give life? That he is the authoritative interpreter of Scripture? That he is God’s wisdom for the life of humankind? That he gives his flesh and blood for the life of the world through his life, and death, and ongoing gift of the Eucharist?

Peter does not find Jesus’ teaching fantastic. Rather, it provides “the words of eternal life.” As a representative of the Twelve, Peter confesses, “We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.” Is 43:3 provides a wonderful parallel for this title. After God has promised redemption to Israel, God proclaims: “For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your savior.”

Jesus, the Son of Man, will ascend back to God, but only through his death and resurrection. Those who keep fleshly ways are not open to the gift of faith that comes from the Spirit.

Homily Suggestion
John Quigley, OFM
The Church now reminds us of St. Peter, perhaps lest we forget that he was surprisingly confident, articulate, and a healer. He impulsively gave hospitality to Jesus, who had been kicked out of Nazareth. No wonder Jesus called him a “rock,” a foundation.

Many disciples mistrusted Jesus’ language; a once-strong bond was severed by what they regarded as crazy ideas about Jesus being food for his people.

Written about 60 years after the Resurrection, the Gospel of Jn reflects the joys, struggles, and debates among first-century Christians, who gradually refined their beliefs and actions. Jesus was undoubtedly their food, their very sustenance in the face of persecution and disasters such as the destruction of Jerusalem.

Peter declares for the whole community: “Lord, . . . you have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe: We are convinced that you are God’s Holy One.” Peter welcomed Jesus into his home in Capernaum, had a straightforward, uncomplicated trust in Jesus, got things mixed up at times, and even denied knowing Jesus the night before his master’s death. In God’s ways the simple fisherman of Galilee does really count and figures as one of the most important figures in the story of salvation. He says in Jn’s Gospel: We have come to believe; we are convinced. He now speaks to and for the Christian community 100 years, now 2,000 years, after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Apparently God is happy for any gesture of friendship or hospitality extended to him (“you cannot give a cup of cold water to a stranger without giving it to me.”) It is easier for God to bond and to trust simple, generous people than those who have all of the right answers in their heads.
**Theme:** Seeking out marginalized people.

**Exegesis of the First Reading,** Acts 11:1–18 (279)

Dr. Carol Dempsey, OP

Peter is no stranger to controversy. The setting is Jerusalem. The apostles and believers have heard that some gentiles have accepted the word of God and that Peter has had a role to play in the gentiles’ belief. When he arrives in Jerusalem, however, he is criticized by the circumcised believers for his presence among the gentiles and for partaking in their food. Circumcised believers wanted no social exchange between Jews and gentiles, and they considered gentile food unclean and unholy (Acts 10:28).

Peter responds directly and decisively to his critics. In narrating Peter’s defense, Lk emphasizes the centrality of divine inspiration and revelation in Peter’s life and in his mission and ministry. Peter’s initial vision occurs during prayer. He is given a message that symbolizes God’s gracious relationship with the gentiles. In the second part of Peter’s defense, Lk emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit. Peter stresses that the pouring out of the Spirit is a gift from God to the gentiles, and that this gift is the same one given to the Jews.

Peter points out that the gentiles’ experience was like the believers’ experience on Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4). His appeal to Scripture recalls a statement made by the risen Christ in Acts 1:5. Peter’s speech wins over his opponents. The narrative moves from objection to defense to astonishment, with Peter’s critics acknowledging that God has granted the gentiles life-giving repentance.

**Exegesis of the Gospel,** Jn 10:11–18 (279)

Dr. Carol Dempsey, OP

Throughout his Gospel, Jn depicts Jesus using metaphorical language. Here Jesus states that he is the good shepherd, an image that enjoys a long tradition. Throughout the OT, God is often spoken of as the shepherd of God’s people. When the people began to lose heart and doubt God’s fidelity to them, the biblical writers often presented God as the future shepherd of the people (Jer 31:10; 13:17; 23:3; Is 40:11; 49:9–10). When the leaders of Israel, who are also portrayed as shepherds, fail the people, God becomes the shepherd who searches for them and nurtures them back into the fold (Ez 34:1–16; see also Zep 3:19; Mi 2:12; 4:6–7; Eccl 12:11; Sir 18:13).

When the monarchy started to collapse, Israel’s prophets began to speak of a future Davidic figure who would be a shepherd to the people (Mi 5:3; Jer 3:15; 23:4–6; Ez 34:23–24; 37:24; Zec 13:7–9). From the OT prophets emerges the image of one shepherd who will form one flock. By having Jesus identify himself as the good shepherd, both Jn and Jesus testify to Jesus’ divine origins.

This oneness with God of which the Good Shepherd speaks is precisely what many Jews could not accept and is one of the reasons why some sought to kill Jesus after he made such a claim (Jn 5:16–18). The last part of Jn’s discourse hints at the great love that Jesus has for God’s people, a love that will cost him his life.

**Homily Suggestion**

Jeanne Hunt

According to Jesus, being a shepherd means “laying down your life for the sheep.” As his followers, we are asked to live as Jesus lived. The shepherd role, as Jesus describes it, is thus a real challenge. He never hesitated to welcome marginal members of society. Shepherds care for all the sheep—even the black sheep. The ones that are feared, impaired, disliked, and just not acceptable in our circle are exactly the sheep to whom Jesus reached out. So where does that leave us? If we are living this Gospel, we are called to love, forgive, accept, and be living witnesses to our shepherd.

Jesus came into the world to bring the good news of salvation, which is for everyone. There are no exceptions. We are asked by God to love without question—no matter the circumstances. People do not need to qualify for our care. Jesus says: “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd.” We simply follow Jesus’ lead and then trust God to handle the rest.

Many of us feel threatened by this “All are welcome” attitude. We don’t want to push our beliefs on others. Yet if we look at what our Catholic faith has done for us, why wouldn’t we want to bring that to others? As good shepherds we should welcome the opportunity to share with others all that God has done for us. Being Christ to one another is nothing to be shy about. Isn’t it time to reach out to all God’s sheep?
Theme: Believing in things unseen.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 11:19–26 (280)
Dr. Carol Dempsey, OP

After the death, resurrection, ascension of Jesus, and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Church’s missionary activity commences with great vigor. Having focused earlier on the gentiles, Lk now turns his attention to the Greeks to show that the expansion of the reign of God and the good news of salvation is an expansive endeavor. The narrative’s first half sets the stage for the second half, where Barnabas acknowledges the grace of God among the new believers, exhorting them to remain faithful to the Lord, and seeking out Saul of Tarsus so that the two of them could teach the Church—the believers—and others.

The most significant city named is Antioch, where Barnabas was sent. It was the largest and most important of 16 cities in the ancient world. Antioch had a large, wealthy Jewish population in the first century CE. The Greeks who resided there were most likely god-fearing gentiles who were attracted to Jewish monotheism (Acts 10:22).

Barnabas, whose name means “son of encouragement,” was a man said to be full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit (4:36–37). He was sent to Antioch to monitor and encourage the Greeks’ progress in the faith and to affirm them. In Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians, which to outsiders indicated that they were followers of the one known as Christos.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 10:22–30 (280)
Dr. Carol Dempsey, OP

The Jewish feast of the Dedication commemorates the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem in 164 BCE. Previously, the Maccabean revolt, led by Judas Maccabeus, freed the temple (1 Mc 4:36–61) from Greek control that had taken place under Antiochus IV, who moved his Hellenization agenda forward to the extent of oppressing many faithful Jewish people. Here, Jn depicts Jesus walking in the portico of Solomon. It was along the temple’s outer wall, on its east side.

The narrative’s action begins with the Jews questioning Jesus, pressing him to reveal if he is the Messiah. They want a plain answer; Jesus offers a plain response because they are unable to grasp his parabolic metaphors. Furthermore, those who can make the connections do not believe him. They even miss the symbolic gesture of him walking in the portico of Solomon, a gesture that hints at his Davidic lineage. Hence, Jesus’ final statement to them, “The Father and I are one,” is a plain response to the Jews’ initial question.

He is the Messiah—Son of God, son of David (father of Solomon), and ultimately, he is God. Yet his listeners still fail to understand. They miss the presence of the Divine in the ordinary because they are looking for something different and miss the presence of God communicating and acting in their midst.

Homily Suggestion
Jeanne Hunt

The readings today focus on identity. Jesus’ followers are called Christians for the first time in Acts. These beginners are given their identity. Then in the Gospel, Jesus lets us know who he is. It is all about identifying yourself in our readings today.

Have you ever started listening to a radio interview right in the middle of the programming? You try to figure out who is being interviewed and just what is going on. When you finally figure out that it is a politician, a doctor, an actor, etc., your perspective changes. You have a much clearer understanding of the implications of the topic, based on your impression of the speaker. The interview is filtered by what you know about the speaker. Having a well-known name or a title can make a difference.

So, we accept that Jesus is the Christ and his followers are Christians. Giving these names clarifies who we are and to whom we belong. Knowing this made a huge difference to the people in the temple who heard Jesus. They could not see him the same ever again. And in the same way, anyone called Christian would be singled out as a member of this inclusive “Christian community.”

Imagine being a bystander in the temple the day that Jesus made his claim. This young man who looks perfectly ordinary is saying he is the Messiah. He certainly doesn’t look the part. We would seriously doubt his claim by his appearance. We would want him to give us a sign that he is the real thing. As we know, the signs come much later in the Gospel. The great gift of faith is to believe in things unseen. The Messiah is still in our midst.
Weekday Homily Helps

May 10, 2017

Wednesday [Damien de Veuster]

Theme: Allowing Christ’s light to shine.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 12:24–13:5a (281)
Dr. Carol Dempsey, OP

In addition to Barnabas and Saul/Paul as prominent prophets and teachers in Antioch, three other persons in that city receive special mention: Symeon known as Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen. Symeon was supposedly of dark complexion; his surname is Latin for black. He is not to be confused with Simon of Cyrene, who was forced to carry Jesus’ cross.

Lucius of Cyrene was one of the prophets and teachers who were led by the Spirit to commission Barnabas and Saul/Paul for missionary work. Cyrene in North Africa had a large Jewish population. Most likely Lucius was a Hellenistic Jew who may have traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch to evangelize there (Acts 11:20). Manaen was a foster brother of Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea.

The commissioning of Barnabas and Saul/Paul took place at the Holy Spirit’s direction. This divine instruction came during the men’s prayer and fasting. Here Lk emphasizes the disciples’ deep faith and the communion they share with the Spirit, the ultimate guide and source of the Church’s missionary activity. Having been commissioned by the Spirit, Barnabas and Saul/Paul continue the work of evangelization.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 12:44–50 (281)
Dr. Carol Dempsey, OP

John here presents Jesus’ final message, asserting his oneness with God. The first part of Jesus’ proclamation focuses on Jesus as the one sent by God (3:15–16; 5:36–38; 6:29, 35, 40; 7:38; 8:19, 24, 42, 45–46). To see Jesus is to see the one who sent him (1:18; 6:40; 8:19; 10:30, 38). As the world’s light, Jesus enables people to emerge from darkness and walk in the light permanently (1:4–5; 8:12; 9:5, 39; 11:9–10; 12:35–36). Whether people are saved or condemned depends on their acceptance or rejection of Jesus and his message.

In the second part of today’s proclamation, Jn shifts the focus away from Jesus’ mission and onto the critical importance of believing in his spoken word. This word is not Jesus’ own; he does not speak on his own authority. He speaks only what God has commanded him to say. Hence, with absolute authority, Jesus can claim that this word brings eternal life.

All that Jesus has spoken thus far is the word of God, which he has proclaimed with uncompromised trust, confidence, and certitude (4:34; 5:22, 30, 39). With this emphasis on his word as God’s word, Jesus stands in the prophetic tradition. As prophet par excellence, he bears witness to who God is—not only by his words but most especially through his life.

Homily Suggestion
Jeanne Hunt

These spring days bring sun and clouds. While the warm sunny days are very good for the soul, the gloomy cloudy days remind us of winter’s long, dark days. The minute we see the sun in a blue sky, our spirits rise.

In today’s Gospel, John speaks of a very different kind of gloom that permeates our environment and our secular world. It is the darkness of a world that cannot embrace the powerful light of Jesus Christ’s presence. In fact, most people have never even heard that such a light exists. Just as long periods of cloudy days affect our mood, the absence of God’s light can create a darkness as well. This internal light of Jesus’ presence within our minds and hearts is something far more helpful than a few more hours of sunlight. The eternal light seems to reassure and strengthen our human spirits. It is a presence that comforts in times of suffering and the trials of everyday life. It is a force that can warm and comfort us.

These Easter days remind us of that mysterious light that remains among us. The paschal flame that burns in our sanctuary during these days outwardly reminds us that we carry this flame in our souls. It was presented to us at Baptism and still remains—even when we are not aware of it. Jesus lights our way through every human situation. All that we need to do is tap into the warmth, comfort, and strength of this divine light—to be open to it.

Take a moment today to look at the light of the paschal candle and remember the words of the Easter proclamation: “Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendor, radiant in the brightness of your King! Christ has conquered! Glory fills you! Darkness vanishes forever!”

For more information about St. Damien de Veuster, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: Sharing God’s faithfulness and mercy.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 13:13–25 (282)
Dr. Carol Dempsey, OP

Commissioned by the Spirit (Acts 13:1–3), Paul continues evangelizing Jews and gentiles. In a spirit of boldness and with great courage, he delivers a lengthy address on the sabbath in a synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia. This address responds to the synagogue officials’ open invitation to offer words of exhortation for the people. A typical Jewish sabbath ritual consists of the call to worship, the recitation of prayers, various Scripture lessons where the reading of the law and the prophets was common, and then preaching.

The reference to “fear” of God is to be understood as awe, reverence, or love. By addressing these Jews as “Israelites,” Paul situates them in their ancestral context and then proceeds to recount the major events of their past, ending with a reference to David, son of Jesse, with whom God established a covenant (2 Sm 7:8–16). Through him the Davidic lineage and everlasting kingdom began and were promised for all ages.

Paul emphasizes God’s benevolence and patience. Cleverly, Paul ends his historical recitation with a reference to David. This recitation and his references to David is an entrée into his pronouncement about Jesus, whom Paul proclaims is the fulfillment of God’s promise to David and the one heralded by Jn the Baptist. This Jesus is Israel’s savior.

Dr. Carol Dempsey, OP

Jn reminds his listeners that many are called—but few are chosen and sent—and that a profound unity exists among God, Jesus, and God’s people, a theme heard earlier in 1:1–4. The Passover feast is the context for Jesus’ comments to his disciples. Having washed their feet and instructed them to follow his example, Jesus now gives them a new instruction on humility. He tells them that servants and messengers are not greater than their master or the one who sent them.

After Jesus refers to himself as “master” (Lk 5:5) and his disciples as "servants" (Jn 12:26), he points to God whom he serves and of whom he is a messenger as Word (Jn 1:1). The Gospel writer Jn then adds a twist to Jesus’ teaching. Jesus next tells the disciples that he is not speaking about all of them and states emphatically that he knows whom he has chosen.

The reference to “the one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me” foreshadows Jesus’ betrayal by Judas. The last v of this passage appears paradoxical. On one level, Jesus is referring to those listening to him: those disciples whom he has chosen and whom he will send. On another level, Jesus is also referring to the poor, the sick, and the oppressed, to whom he will send his disciples. The last point is clear: Whoever receives the person sent receives not only Jesus but also the one who sent him—namely, God.

Homily Suggestion
Jeanne Hunt

In the reading from Acts, we see matters of the heart. Paul’s address in the synagogue is very telling. While we hear a clear description of those times when God intervenes on behalf of the Jewish people, we also hear a powerful description of the figure of David, “a man after my own heart.” David is singled out as being “one with” the heart of God. We must understand that David did not earn God’s special love. This pure gift gives great hope to anyone who wants to know the heart of God.

When we pray today’s psalm, we hear the promise made by God to David: “My faithfulness and mercy shall be with him.” Gradually God is revealing what we find in his heart: faithfulness and mercy. The abiding promise for all ages is that God will never let us down (faithfulness) and will love us no matter the circumstance (mercy).

Paul’s speech points the way to the mercy and faithfulness of God that we find in a relationship with Christ. The resurrection of Jesus shows God’s faithfulness and merciful love in the figure of Christ dying upon the cross. Jesus Christ is the living witness of all that God had promised David. In Jesus’ death and resurrection, we receive the heart of God with all its mercy and faithfulness. We become one with the heart of God as we experience a love that will never fail us. The promise continues as we see that “nothing will separate you from me, not even death.”

So we get a glimpse of the divine heart in today’s readings: the heart of God, the heart of Jesus, the heart of David, and our hearts. Faithfulness and mercy abide in the union of our hearts. We pray that every day our hearts may become more like God’s heart.

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**Weekday Homily Helps**

**Theme:** Journeying to the Father’s house.

**Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 13:26–33 (283)**

Dr. Carol Dempsey, OP

Antioch in Pisidia is once again the setting for Paul’s discourse. For a second time, he addresses his audience directly, but this time he refers to them as the children of the family of Abraham. Through Abraham all the families of the earth are blessed (Gn 12:3). Paul’s audience, then, is not only Jews but also non-Jews, specifically those gentiles who have come to believe in Israel’s God. Paul makes clear that the promise of salvation has been given to all of them.

In his exhortation, Paul does not pass judgment on the Jewish people and their leaders for having condemned Jesus. Instead, he attributes their condemnation to their lack of understanding of who Jesus is and their inability to make connections between the prophets’ words and their lived experience of and encounters with Jesus.

Paul then focuses on God’s marvelous action that raised Jesus from the dead, and in so doing, God justified the innocent and liberated the oppressed (Acts 13:28; Is 53:10–12). The remainder of Paul’s comments focus on the resurrected, glorified Jesus. Paul reiterates that what God has promised, God has fulfilled. Paul rereads Ps 2:7 in this new context and thus gives the psalm a new understanding while disclosing its richness. This reference recalls 2 Sm 7:14 as well. Jesus, son of David, is also Son of God.

**Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 14:1–6 (283)**

Dr. Carol Dempsey, OP

The question of Jesus’ departure has already been raised in 13:33, 36. This same theme emerges again in today’s Gospel where Jn features Jesus consoling, encouraging, and instructing his disciples in these last days before his return to his Father. The disciples know that Jesus’ departure and return to the Father will be accomplished through Jesus’ death and glorification (11:4, 40; 12:23, 32–34; 13:31–32).

His words of consolation and encouragement to the disciples focus on their need for faith. The reference to the Father’s house with many dwelling places is metaphorical, and the rhetorical question that follows sets up Jesus’ promise to the disciples that they will eventually be with him. Their final lot will not be death. Jesus assures them that they know the way. His statement anticipates Thomas’ question that expresses general bewilderment; this, in turn, leads Jesus to express plainly a self-revealing statement: He is the way, the truth, and the life. Here Jn makes clear that Jesus is not only the Messiah but also the Son of God and, ultimately, God (Jn 1:1–18).

In this passage, Jn also stresses the theme of unity. Jesus is the way to unity—be it divine, earthly, or eternal (Jn 12:32; Eph 1:8–10). In Jesus, everything that separates people from God, from one another, and from creation is transformed and transcended.

**Homily Suggestion**

Jeanne Hunt

Our Gospel shows Jesus trying to calm the disciples, who have a sense of foreboding; things seem to be going terribly wrong. He tells them that he is going to prepare a place for them. This confuses them: How can he do this if they don’t know where he is going? He says that they simply need to follow his “Way” as disciples. Our practical side struggles with his spiritual language; we tend to prefer black-and-white rules and regulations.

People who receive news of a terminal diagnosis tend to busy themselves with putting their houses in order. As we get closer to death, we put aside all those concerns and begin a surrender to the deeper meaning of our lives and our faith. God’s plan replaces earth’s plan. Jesus talks of a “place” and his Father’s “house.”

All of us are a little anxious about what coming home to Jesus means. Death and resurrection are truly mysteries of faith. All we have is Jesus’ reassurance that what awaits us is very good. As we look back on the Gospel stories of Jesus caring for those who suffered with love and reassurance, we believe that we will share in that same compassion. If we can do this, when the time comes for our death, we will leave a legacy of faith that is most pleasing to God. May we have the grace to reach out, to comfort, to console, to accept, and to ease—one person at a time, just as Jesus did. What we know for sure is that Jesus is the way, our guide, and our truth for eternal life.

*For more information about Sts. Achilleus, Nereus, and Pancras, visit saintoftheday.org.*
Theme: Passing on Jesus’ light.

**Exegesis of the First Reading,** Acts 13:44–52 (284)
Dr. Carol Dempsey, OP

Continuing the work of evangelization, Paul and Barnabas encounter resistance from some Jews; this only serves to advance their mission to the gentiles. The popular response that Paul and Barnabas receive from the city’s many people incites jealously among some of the Jews. Such jealousy, however, does not intimidate or discourage Paul and Barnabas or cause them to cower. They respond to their opponents fearlessly and boldly, attitudes that are characteristic of the Spirit’s presence.

Both apostles put on notice those Jews who are jealous and abusive, declaring to them that their rejection of the divine message is their own loss. Their opposition to Paul’s message and their growing hostility mark their shortsightedness and inability to grasp the depth of what has been promised by God down through the ages, especially within the Scriptures.

Paul’s use of Scripture is a rereading of Is 49:6 and indicates that he understands the long-range implications of the prophetic word that continues to unfold throughout time. For Paul and Barnabas, this text from Is confirms their mission and gives purpose to their preaching and the persecutions arising from it. The term *the nations* in the OT is synonymous with *the gentiles* in the NT. Paul’s and Barnabas’ gesture of shaking the dust off their feet in protest was something that Jesus advocated (Lk 9:5; 10:11).

**Exegesis of the Gospel,** Jn 14:7–14 (284)
Dr. Carol Dempsey, OP

Jesus’ claim that if the disciples know him, then surely they will know the Father leaves Philip, one of the disciples, baffled to the extent that he asks Jesus to show them the Father. Philip’s request is ironic. Jesus’ three subsequent rhetorical questions addressed to Philip capture the irony and force the question of whether Philip believes that Jesus and the Father are one. Jesus’ statements that his spoken word is not his own and that the works being done are his Father’s attest to the unity that exists between Jesus and his Father.

Faith is the focus of the second half of the passage. Here Jesus urges his disciples to believe in his unity with the Father. Cognizant of their struggle and bewilderment expressed earlier through Philip’s questions, Jesus offers them an alternative: If they cannot believe in his word or the divine unity that exists between him and the Father, then they need to believe in the works he has done.

Here Jn makes the point that Jesus’ words and deeds are one and the same; thus Jn reiterates that Jesus and God are one (1:1–4). If the disciples believe in Jesus, then they will do the same works as Jesus—and even greater works. Jesus’ departure to the Father will enable him to be glorified in God, and that glorification will enable the disciples to do whatever they ask in Jesus’ name.

**Homily Suggestion**
Jeanne Hunt

The Easter season shows that the struggles of the first Christians were much like our own struggles as a Church. We can ask the questions: How is my relationship with my parish and how do I live out my discipleship? Our first reading emphasizes this. The sentence that calls us to the challenge is, “For so the Lord has commanded us, I have made you a light to the gentiles, that you may be an instrument of salvation.”

At the Easter Vigil, we watched as one person carrying the Easter candle brought the light to everyone in church. As this light spread, the darkness disappeared, making the church radiant with Easter’s glorious light. That ceremony reminds us that we are a light to others, no matter what kind of darkness they experience. From that night of beauty, we are called to carry Easter light into our world and our daily lives. The Lord is speaking to us today. He is reminding us that he has made us light to the gentiles, to everyone we meet. There are so many ways we can do this. We can volunteer at a local shelter, wish the grocery clerk a good day, pray for the construction crew that you pass in the morning, go on a mission trip, reach out to a lonely elderly person, go to Mass during the week, or be a listener for someone with a problem.

As we go through these days after Easter, be on the lookout for ways you can be a living light of Christ. Then make your personal list of ways you can be that light, which is a major part of being a disciple.

For more information about the feast of Our Lady of Fatima, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: The colors of Easter.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 14:5–18 (285)
Rev. Ed Owens, OSST

The reading tells of Paul and Barnabas in Lycaonia, an area Paul visited several times (Acts 13:51; 14:8–20; 16:1–5; 18:23). As often in Acts, the apostles are in flight from one locale to another because of their opponents. Their missionary experience mirrors that of Jesus in the Gospel, ever enduring enemy plots to discredit or harm them.

This story centers on their healing a man crippled from birth. The miracle leads the locals to think that Paul and Barnabas are Greek deities visiting in human form: respectively, Zeus (the chief god) and Hermes (messenger of the gods). Both apostles rend their garments in reaction to this misunderstanding, an act in Jewish culture that expresses deep negative emotion or reaction to outright blasphemy.

Paul responds with his first exhortation to a gentle audience in Acts. He appeals to creation (Ex 20:11; Ps 146:6), a perspective from which gentiles could more readily relate, and avoids Christological categories what would be far beyond his audience. The rain from heaven and the harvest of seasonal fruits are examples of God’s blessing on all creation. The apostles preach the miracles they have witnessed in reaction to this misunderstanding, an act in Jewish culture that expresses deep negative emotion or reaction to outright blasphemy.

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This Gospel highlights love, a mark of genuine discipleship and the way to the Father: “The word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me” (v. 24). Why? “The Father loves the Son and has given everything over to him” (3:35). The familiar quote in Jn rings true here: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (3:16).

Jn presents a distinct theology of the Spirit. The Spirit links the historical presence of Jesus in the world with the beginning of the Church.

The theology in Jn is nuanced. Jesus’ final discourse shows that he is anxious about those whom he loves, and his extended discourse serves to comfort them in their distress. He will remain among them in the Spirit. God’s spirit is in Jesus, and he passes it to believers (20:22).

Homily Suggestion
Rev. Ed Owens, OSST

Easter includes lilies, colored eggs, chicks, bunnies, and other vivid images that bespeak newness and life. Easter baskets are typically lined with ornamental green grass. Churches highlight bright colors such as yellow, green, and blue because the resurrection proclaims a new creation that only God can bring to the world.

No wonder Paul and Barnabas clarify the crowd’s well-intended but misdirected enthusiasm with numerous images from creation that they can readily understand. Turn from pagan gods to the one Lord of life who made heaven and earth! God’s power is seen in the rain, fruits of the harvest, and the blessings they bring to all creatures.

Jesus proclaims in Jn that love remains foundational for a genuine relationship with God and one another. One encounters love in everything that is life-giving. Children first experience love in a mother’s touch that leaves them feeling secure and bonded. As children learn to share their toys, treat others as they want to be treated, and take in the wonder of the outdoors, the universal love of God becomes incarnated for them. Brides wear white, and the nuptial setting is full of flowers as two become one in the bond of marriage. The white pall at Masses of Christian burial symbolizes both Baptism and faith in the Resurrection.

In its fullness, Easter is not celebrated simply as a day but as a holy season. As we begin the Fifth Week of Easter, let all of us be co-creators with God by being, as St. Augustine wrote, a resurrection people. No wonder American poet e.e. Cummings penned, “Be unto love as rain is unto color.”

For more information about St. Isidore the Farmer, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: Opening doors.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 14:19–28 (286)
Rev. Ed Owens, OSST

The Jewish opponents in the opening v represent Iconium's unbelievers who are stirring up the gentiles and poisoning their minds against Paul and Barnabas (14:2). Paul survives being stoned by the group, a detail that shows God's hand at work in the mission. Paul and Barnabas then move on to Derbe, a city along a busy main road stretching from Iconium east to Tarsus in Cilicia. Paul visited there on his first and second missionary journeys (Acts 14:6, 20; 16:1).

Acts portrays Paul amid hardships but steadfast in proclaiming the good news and gaining a considerable number of disciples. He appoints presbyters (elders) in each Church community to lead the community after he moves on. The presbytery was a form of governance in Judaism and evidenced as well in Greek and Egyptian society.

In Judaism, the term includes scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees. The apocalyptic imagery in Rev describes a celestial council of elders surrounding God on the heavenly throne (Rv 4:4, 9–11; 5:6–14).

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 14:27–31a (286)
Rev. Ed Owens, OSST

Peace in the Scriptures connotes more than the absence of war. It takes on the rich meaning of Hebrew shalom. Connotations include well-being in all areas of life: good health, economic prosperity, a good name, spiritual centeredness, the blessing of children, and long life. Shalom remains a greeting and wish for blessing in Jewish culture.

Jesus says specifically, “My peace I give you.” As he nears departing from his disciples, he leaves a legacy in his teachings and in the abiding presence in the Spirit. His farewell gift of peace will empower them amid persecution (16:33) and be his signature greeting in postresurrection appearances (20:19, 21, 26).

Jn notes as well the hand of evil described as “the ruler of the world.” Jesus’ passion and death will overcome the devil and all opposition to God as already proclaimed in Jn 13:2, 27. Such forces have no power or control over him (16:11, 33). All are contrary to genuine peace and will be overcome.

Homily Suggestion
Rev. Ed Owens, OSST

Today’s first reading emphasizes that, amid hardships and setbacks, the disciples continue to open the doors of faith to the gentiles. Their untiring zeal and success in their mission are rooted in a central message in Jn: Jesus’ passion and death have overcome the unholy things of this world. His farewell gift of peace and the Holy Spirit’s abiding presence empower the Church amid hardships and setbacks.

The door image in the reading from Acts calls to mind Jesus’ saying that he is the “door” (King James Bible) or, more precisely, sheep gate (Jn 10:7-10). The shepherd protects the flock from predators, from wandering astray, and from other dangers. Sheep tend to instinctively follow the master as the guarantor of security and safety. Thus Paul and Barnabas open “doors” to bring gentiles into the fold. They are simply missionaries of God’s greater power at work among them. As Dickens wrote in “Hunted Down,” “A very little key will open a very heavy door.” We are but instruments in the hand of God.

RCIA candidates spent many months on a spiritual journey toward entering the Church and were received at Easter. They were carefully instructed, and a sponsor stood at their side as they made their profession. The example of real people touched their lives and graced their initial interest in the faith. Those persons opened doors and did not wait for an outside knock.

This Fifth Week of Easter draws the Christian community closer to Pentecost, a solemnity often called the birthday of the Church. As we near that celebration, let all the faithful recall how God shapes us and can work within us whenever we remain open to the Spirit and grace. The disciples hiding behind closed doors out of fear of their enemies move on to proclaim good news to the world.
Theme: Being Christian.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 15:1–6 (287)
Rev. Ed Owens, OSST

Significantly, the Council at Jerusalem (or apostolic council, 51:1–35) occurs at the very center of the Acts narrative, marking a turning point in the acceptance of gentiles into the Christian community. Circumcision, a central identity sign in Judaism, has been a key debate point for Jewish Christians (Gal 2:12). Must gentiles accept this practice to be saved and enter the Church?

The first readings from today through Friday recount expansively the meeting in Jerusalem and the decision of its members. The importance of this council in the life of the early Church is great. It offers a model for how Christian leaders should handle conflicts and theological issues in a civil manner, attentive to the Holy Spirit present in their midst. Salvation comes from God in grace through Christ (15:11).

Peter is the first to speak to the assembly (15:7–11). He draws on his experience with Cornelius, a God-fearer who came to the faith along with his family. This event demonstrates that God calls Jews and gentiles alike. The mission of the Church is universal in its embrace.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 15:1–8 (287)
Rev. Ed Owens, OSST

The Gospel reading marks the final key “I AM” statement by Jesus in Jn (earlier, 6:35, 48, 51; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7–14; 11:25–26; 14:6). The “I AM” statements woven in Jn teach an intimate relationship between Jesus and divine presence in the OT. At the burning bush, the Lord reveals his identity to Moses with, “I am who am” (Ex 3:14). The term is properly a verb, not a noun. It assures that God will be present and active to the Chosen People and journey with them. Thus Jesus promises the same as the Word come into the world (Jn 1:1) and is now returning to the Father.

Jn then presents the well-known theme of the vine and branches. The vine is a major motif in the OT, along with the olive and the fig tree. The vine symbolizes sustenance and well-being in the land. The Church draws its life from Christ, the true vine. Other motifs, such as shepherd and flocks, and the head and the body, also describe this relationship.

Homily Suggestion
Rev. Ed Owens, OSST

The Council at Jerusalem in Acts is not a “You are there” account but a theological statement of the early Church at its best—amid pressing challenges and hard decisions. After thoughtful and ordered dialogue, the members agree to accept gentiles into the community. Their example serves as a timeless model for Church deliberation in every age.

A number of years ago, a US host-city newspaper reported on the annual meeting of a major Christian denomination recently held there. The article included key agenda items and anecdotal quotes noted by news reporters in attendance. One paragraph recounted the lively debate that ensued over a topic at hand. Emotions were getting high. At one point, a member rose and pleaded with the assembly, “If we cannot be Christian, can we at least be civil?” The article went on to note that the attendee’s remark evoked a momentary silence in the auditorium—after which the assembly refocused on the important matter at hand. Matters of faith and morals can arouse passionate feelings among members who all love their Church but differ on the best way to make position statements or policy.

Jesus says “I AM” some 45 times in Jn. Seven are often highlighted as key declaration statements of his identity: bread of life, light of the world, the sheep gate, the good shepherd, the resurrection, the life, and the true vine. These “I AM” proclamations remind the Church that Jesus is the one who binds it and offers that centered “still point” amid challenges of the time.

The OT recounts many moments when the Lord calls and the person responds, “Here I am!” (Heb hin-neni—for example, Abraham, Moses, and young Samuel). During this Easter season, let us rededicate ourselves to being more present, centered, and responsive to the Holy Spirit. Doing so expresses what Jesus says at his passion: “Not my will, but yours be done.” Such openness is a facet of truly being Christian.
Theme: Our restless hearts.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 15:7–21 (288)
Rev. Ed Owens, OSST

The Jerusalem Council gives testimony to God at work through the Holy Spirit (also 2:4; 10:44–47; 11:15–17). The episode is an example of classical rhetoric at work: the art of persuasion.

Peter speaks first to the assembly as he enjoys some distinction among the apostles. From this midpoint in Acts, Paul becomes clearly the apostle to the gentiles, and James takes leadership of the Jerusalem community.

Paul and Barnabas then offer testimony from their missionary journeys to affirm the effectiveness of their outreach to the gentiles. Amid setbacks, their progress in evangelizing bears witness to the Holy Spirit at work among them.

James then speaks up, blending allusions from Am and Is as support from the Scriptures. Restoration of the Davidic dynasty of old has dawned: “The fallen hut of David” is made anew. All humanity is invited to a universal vision of salvation. Let them give the gentile converts only laws essential to salvation in Jesus Christ—not a burdensome yoke of many precepts.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 15:9–11 (288)
Rev. Ed Owens, OSST

In Jn, the death and resurrection of Jesus show the bond between the Father and the Son: “The Father loves me because I lay down my life in order to take it up again” (10:17; 13:1; 15:13). Such love should be the model for how the disciples love one another (13:34; 15:12). “Keeping my commandments” must show itself in action and not simply in creedal profession. As the saying goes, “Loving is as loving does.”

Verse 11 is short but rich in meaning. My joy expresses Jesus’ affection for his disciples and his experience of theirs toward him. Complete connotes being “full” (Gk plerотhе) like a jar brimming with water. The disciples’ grief at Jesus’ departure is not endless. The Paraclete, the Comforter, will come and sustain them amid trials ahead (1 Jn 1:4; 2 Jn 1:12). This theme is succinctly stated in Jn 3:16, a v frequently cited: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son . . . .” The disciples, in turn, must give their lives to dedicated service in good times and in bad.

Homily Suggestion
Rev. Ed Owens, OSST

After the Jerusalem Council, Paul and James become more prominent figures in Acts. Paul is now apostle to the gentiles; James leads the Jerusalem community. Paul’s testimony of a successful outreach to the gentiles and the vv cited by James from the great prophets of old serve to persuade the hearers. In the Gospel reading, Jesus’ keeping his Father’s commandments gives testimony that he is the Word from God (Jn 1:1). In sum, relevant statements from the Scriptures, the testimony of others, and one’s personal experience all inform one’s commitment to the faith.

Amazingly, the phrase “How people come to believe things” typed on an Internet search engine (Google, etc.) brings up some 45 million results. The first few links are rather surprising: All relate to space aliens! One link discusses the book Abducted: How People Come to Believe They Were Kidnapped by Aliens by psychologist Susan A. Clancy. She argues that the few hundred people she interviewed were sane, intelligent people who invented “false memories” from a mix of personal nightmares, reports from film and TV, and their search for some meaning in life that science cannot provide. Clancy concludes that the otherworldly—even when cloaked in terror—can provide a transforming, inspiring experience for some people.

That this topic pops up first on an Internet search suggests that Christian evangelization must appreciate the human search for meaning in life. Catholic belief builds on the foundation of Scripture and sound tradition, developed with doctrinal and spiritual authority. Creation is intrinsically good (Gn 1–2). God is present and active in human history (Ex 3; Mt 1). The disciples find meaning in Jesus’ ministry among them and his promise of eternal life (Jn 6:68). They need not look to esoteric and exceptional experiences.

As the first reading from Acts notes, God speaks to the human heart and purifies it. St. Augustine reflected in his Confessions, “Our hearts are restless, until they rest in you.” Therein we find genuine meaning for the noble longings of the heart.

For more information about St. John I, pope and martyr, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: “I call you friends.”

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 15:22–31 (289)

Rev. Ed Owens, OSST

The Jerusalem Council leaders compose a brief letter to the gentiles that follows the Hellenistic style of greeting, body, and warm farewell. The decree is succinct and clear. Only a few concrete practices are forbidden to converts. The tone of the communication is diplomatic and conciliatory. Some missionaries may have upset potential converts with their message; the Christian community in Antioch can now rest assured because of this official statement.

Messengers travel there to proclaim the decision of the Jerusalem Council. Antioch was the most important city after Jerusalem during the initial expansion of the early Church. In Paul’s time, Antioch was at the peak of its importance. It was a center of civil and military administration in Galatia and had a number of roads leading from it to other areas.

The Jerusalem Council may well be an idealized story. Beyond exhortations and testimonies, the narrative explains nothing of how the members arrived at their decision. It offers more of a theological message, for, whatever the details involved, the Holy Spirit is at work among them. Without that gift, the assembly would simply have been another human meeting.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 15:12–17 (289)

Rev. Ed Owens, OSST

The Gospel opens with an echo from 13:34–35: Love one another as Christ has loved you. Jesus’ death will demonstrate laying down one’s life for friends. He is not a passive victim but freely chooses to embrace his fate.

The theme of friendship informs this reading. More than in any other Gospel, Jesus in Jn describes his disciples as friends (literally, loved ones). He calls Lazarus a friend. At the Last Supper, he calls the Twelve friends, stating that he will lay down his life for them. The one “beloved disciple,” though never named, represents Jesus’ relationship with all faithful followers (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20).

Unique to Jn’s passion narrative, washing the disciples’ feet stands as a unique and striking example of loving friendship in action. In doing so, Jesus brings together the relationship between master and servant, host and guest. Peter is taken aback by Jesus’ surprising move. Peter must understand that it is not about bathing (done by a host’s servant or the guest himself) but rather about relationship. The disciples must do likewise for one another. It is no small point that Judas the betrayer is included. Worthiness and reputation must not overshadow humble service as modeled by Jesus, who came to call sinners.

Homily Suggestion

Rev. Ed Owens, OSST

Friendship was an important sociocultural category in the Greco-Roman world, ranging from political alliances and partner/client relationships to deep personal intimacy. Jn presents no singular definition or discourse of friendship. His teaching of friendship unfolds in the Gospel, beginning in ch 11: the death and raising of Lazarus. Jesus wants to return to Judea because “our friend” Lazarus is “asleep,” and he will awaken him (v 11). His disciples had already warned him not to go back there, for his enemies want to stone him (v 8).

After the raising of Lazarus, Jesus’ enemies indeed plot to kill him (v 53). In sum, Lazarus will be raised up at the cost of Jesus’ life. This background in Jn 11 informs the meaning of today’s Gospel: “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (15:13). Because they are no longer slaves but friends, Jesus invites his disciples to an intimate relationship that transcends the social categories of the world—often pragmatic or self-serving: political, patron/client, etc. Christian friendship demands a personal and intimate dimension.

St. Ambrose beautifully captures the meaning of friendship in Christ: “Let us reveal our bosom to a friend . . . For he said, ‘I have called you friends because all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.’ A friend hides nothing if that friend is true. He pours forth his mind, just as the Lord Jesus poured forth the mysteries of his Father” (On the Duties of the Minister).
Theme: The power of remembering.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 16:1–10 (290)
Rev. Ed Owens, OSST

After the Council at Jerusalem, Paul becomes distinctly the missionary apostle to the gentiles in Acts. Today’s reading presents his initial successes and failures along the way. Barnabas remains his partner in close association. Timothy is introduced and emerges as a close coworker with Paul. Timothy is noted as already a respected member of the Christian community.

The matter of Timothy’s circumcision remains unclear, because it suggests that Paul overlooks the recent decision of the Council at Jerusalem and defers to Jewish custom (on Titus’ circumcision, see Gal 2:3). Some scholars have conjectured that Timothy’s mother and grandmother were pious Jewish women who had failed to observe the law in this matter (2 Tm 1:5) or that his gentile father resisted the practice.

Whatever the details behind this flourish in the narrative, Timothy goes on to be a trustworthy disciple (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10–11; Phil 2:19–22). He is not only sent to local Churches to learn of their welfare but also to exhort them to steadfastness. Paul speaks highly of Timothy at several points (1 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:22; 1 Thes 3:20).

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 15:18–21 (290)
Rev. Ed Owens, OSST

Moving from Jesus as the way to the Father, the one who promises the Holy Spirit, and the true vine, the Gospel now turns to a hard theme: hatred. The world (mentioned five times for emphasis) means all that opposes or rejects God and the message of Jesus. If the disciples face persecution or even death, they must keep in mind that their suffering is not in isolation but rather conforms to that of Jesus. Hatred and persecution are themes not unique to Jn. The synoptic Gospels speak to them as well (Mt 24; Mk 13; Lk 21).

Jesus calls his followers to remember the word he spoke to them: No slave is greater than the master. As in Hebrew Scripture, NT usage bespeaks an active and personal relationship. No wonder remembering holds an important place in the pss. The Israelites in their worship ask God to remember and act on their behalf: “He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel” (Ps 98:3).

Homily Suggestion
Rev. Ed Owens, OSST

We all know that remembering is more than mental activity such as keeping an appointment, honing skills for a spelling bee, or reciting math multiplication tables with ease. In the Scriptures as in life, remembering embraces a myriad of associations.

Remembrance draws on past experience to inform the present: God remembered Noah (Gn 8:1); remember the slavery in Egypt (Dt 16:3); remembered the wilderness journey (Dt 8:2). Mary proclaims the Lord’s remembering the promise of mercy (Lk 1:54). Remembrance demands observance and proclamation: remember [keep] the sabbath (Ex 20:3); do this in memory of me (Lk 22:19, the Eucharist).

In the Gospel reading, Jesus calls his disciples to remember the words he spoke throughout his ministry. No slave is greater than the master. As Jesus is persecuted, so his disciples should anticipate much the same for themselves. In its various expressions, remembering brings past experience to bear on the present moment. “There but for the grace of God go I” tempers judgment and anger against another person, for we all have been there and may have done much the same ourselves.

When two disciples on the road to Emmaus recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread, they muse, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us along the way and opened the Scriptures to us?” Remembrance is not all about long-past moments. It can begin with thoughts we recall at the end of a day and which we bring to bear in the days ahead.

For more information about St. Bernardine of Siena, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: A sales force for the gospel.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 16:11–15 (291)
Dr. Andrew R. Davis

This week’s first readings continue those from last week. They ended with Paul beginning his missionary travels to the ends of the earth; these comprise the entire second half of Acts (15:36—28:31). Today’s passage describes his arrival in Philippi, an important Roman city in Macedonia. Paul will later revisit the city (20:6) and also write a letter to its Church.

This account of the visit to Philippi is the first to use we to refer to Paul and an unnamed companion (20:6—21:18; 27:1—28:16). Although it is tempting to assume this companion is Lk himself, the identification cannot be proven. It is just as likely that Lk has adapted someone else’s report into his story or shifted the pronouns simply to add vividness to these scenes.

The reading narrates Paul’s encounter with the women of Philippi, especially a merchant named Lydia. The purple clothing she sells suggests wealth (Lk 16:19), as does her home ownership. Paul accepts the hospitality she offers.

Lydia’s designation as a God-fearer could describe a Jew or a gentile. Either way, the Lord opened her heart to Paul’s words. Elsewhere in Lk, the same verb to open is used of the disciples’ eyes and minds after the resurrection (24:33, 45). This successful beginning of Paul’s mission to Europe stands in stark contrast to the opposition he will soon encounter in Philippi and in numerous sojourns to come.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 15:26—16:4a (291)
Dr. Andrew R. Davis

This week’s Gospel readings continue Jn’s presentation of Jesus’ farewell discourse (chs 14–17). The second part of the discourse (chs 15–16) repeats many elements of the first (ch 14). Because these repetitions presume no knowledge of their precursors, many assume that they are a separate account that was appended to ch 14. Although the two parts have many themes in common, there are also some intriguing differences.

Today’s passage, for example, describes Jesus sending the Advocate from the Father (v 26), but in 14:16, 26, it is the Father who sends the Advocate at Jesus’ request. Together these vv imply that Jesus and the Father are one (10:30). Also, 14:26 defined the Advocate’s role as reminding the disciples of Jesus’ words, but in 15:26 he will testify to Jesus, standing as witness against persecutions (15:18–25).

The rest of today’s reading returns to the theme of the world’s hatred, which is found in its preceding vv (15:18–25). Jesus’ prediction that the disciples will be expelled from the synagogues and perhaps even killed (v 2; 9:22; 12:42) reflects not so much Jesus’ time as Jn’s time (c. 90 CE); relations between Jews and Christians were highly contentious then. Jews who had joined the Johannine community and begun to confess Jesus as the preexistent son of God were rejected by other Jews who considered this belief incompatible with Jewish monotheism.

Homily Suggestion
John Maria Devaney, OP

Six weeks ago we basked in the glory of Easter Sunday. Soon we will be celebrating Jesus’ return to the Father and the heavenly throne room. The joy of having the resurrected Christ walk and talk among the apostles and disciples must have comforted the early Church—and caused a bit of trauma when he left.

In a small way, perhaps this is why they returned to the comfort of the upper room, of course under obedience to Jesus to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit after his ascension. The lack of Jesus’ physical presence forced them to venture out to tell the world what they had seen and heard. This left very little room for the comfort and security of remaining in old places.

Fulton Sheen said once that he was in sales while God was in management. The sales rep who never leaves the office or picks up the phone to close a deal will not make a living. We who have been given the gift of faith and the fullness of revelation by our Baptism are part of Christ’s sales force. We simply have to get out of our comfort zones and closed circles—as St. Paul does in today’s first reading when he begins his great mission to the gentiles in Macedonia. He knows full well that he has the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He simply sits down and gives Lydia his gospel “sales pitch.” As manager of all grace and conversion, God opens her heart to eternal life.

For more information about St. Rita of Cascia, visit saintoftheday.org.
**Weekday Homily Helps**

**Theme:** Law and Order: Holy Trinity Unit.

**Exegesis of the First Reading**, Acts 16:22–34 (292)

Dr. Andrew R. Davis

Following yesterday’s descriptions of Paul’s initial success in Philippi, today’s reading narrates the opposition he and Silas encounter there. Just before this reading, Paul had exorcised a spirit from a slave girl, whose owners had planned to peddle her psychic abilities (vv 16–21). Their complaint to the authorities leads to the beatings and imprisonment that open today’s passage.

The earthquake that offers Paul and Silas the opportunity to escape recalls Peter’s miraculous releases by angels (5:19–20; 12:6–10)—though the divine intervention here is more subtle. The source of the earthquake is nonetheless clear evidence that God supports Paul’s mission among the gentiles, just as he supported Peter’s ministry in Jerusalem. Recognizing this divine support, the jailer addresses Paul and Silas as masters and asks how to be saved (v 30).

Their answer to the jailer aligns this story with other conversions in Acts, which likewise emphasize belief (5:14; 9:42; 11:17) and correlate it to salvation (14:9; 15:11). Moreover, the Baptism of the jailer’s household (vv 32–33) parallels similar expansions in yesterday’s story of Lydia (16:15) and the earlier story (Acts 10:48; 11:14). Finally, the joy of the jailer’s family is a typical conversions in Acts, which likewise emphasize belief and the sinful error of the outside world. The distinction is subtle, but in light of the difficulties just cited in 16:2, the latter seems more likely. The Advocate will support the Johannine community by witnessing to their truth.

**Exegesis of the Gospel**, Jn 16:5–11 (292)

Dr. Andrew R. Davis

Today’s Gospel reading returns to the subject of the Advocate (Gr parakletos). In Greco-Roman culture, such “advocates” were usually (but not exclusively) found in law courts, where they exerted influence on behalf of their friends. Indeed, in 15:26 the Advocate emphasizes to testify on behalf of Jesus—though parakletos does not mean lawyer, as “advocate” might suggest.

Like yesterday’s Gospel, this passage echoes vv from ch 14. Verses 7–11 recall 14:15–17. Both passages presume the world’s rejection of their belief in Jesus; the Advocate will support believers as they confront this hostility.

The verb convict in v 8 represents a dilemma. It can mean “to convince someone of guilt.” This meaning seems to underlie convict. Alternatively, the verb can mean “to prove someone wrong.” One’s choice depends in part on the presumed audience. If the Advocate is oriented toward the outside world, then convict makes sense, for he condemns the world because of its sin of unbelief. On the other hand, if the Advocate’s work is within the Johannine community, “prove wrong” makes better sense. In this case, the Advocate is bolstering the community by confirming the truth of their belief and the sinful error of the outside world. The distinction is subtle, but in light of the difficulties just cited in 16:2, the latter seems more likely. The Advocate will support the Johannine community by witnessing to their truth.

**Homily Suggestion**

John Maria Devaney, OP

In 2,000 years of salvation history, most Christians have never been arrested for practicing the faith. Imagine the local parish’s group of elderly ladies who pray the rosary after weekday Mass going out and being arrested for preaching the faith to the fast-food employee who daily serves them coffee on their way home! You are already smiling at this unlikely turn of events.

Getting arrested and being a Christian, however, go hand in hand from our history. In fact, for a moment, if we simply isolate Jesus’ arrest (without taking away its sobering vitality for the paschal mystery), it seems absurd to say that humans once arrested God. We finite creatures bound and shackled the infinite, uncreated creator, Second Person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ. We are such fools! We tried to convict the unconvictable! Yet out of the mystery of the Incarnation and God’s unquenchable love for us humans, God desired to be like us so closely in all things except sin, that the Creator of everything even desired—if we may say it—to get busted by the law. Jesus was busted, however, for being the Truth and not for any sin.

Christian paradox strikes again: How is it that this Truth sets us free but can land us in jail at the same time? It makes no sense to mere human beings. So if we find ourselves arrested for our beliefs—be it for real or in the court of public opinion—we need not hire an attorney. The only proper defense for us then is nothing other than God himself, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Advocate.
Theme: Love never leaves enough time.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 17:15, 22—18:1 (293)

Dr. Andrew R. Davis

Today’s reading features Paul’s famous speech at the Areopagus (“Hill of Ares”) in Athens, which lies west of the Acropolis. The term could refer to the hill itself or to the Athenian council that once met atop the hill. The informal tone of Paul’s speech suggests the former. Nonetheless, the speech represents a key moment in his mission to the gentiles.

Although the words of Paul’s speech are Lk’s invention, the scene seems to be based on a real event. Paul tries to establish common ground with Greek worship and beliefs. In Athens’ numerous shrines (v 23) and in Greek poetry and philosophy, some of which he quotes (v 28), he recognizes their shared search for God. Relying on theological rather than Christological arguments, Paul opens a dialogue between Christian faith and Greek piety/philosophy.

The reaction of the crowd is mixed at best, with some scoffing and others deferring judgment; only a few join Paul (vv 32–34). From Athens, Paul will proceed to Corinth, where he will found his best-known Church, and in his later correspondence with Corinth there is evidence of the hard lesson he learned in Athens. In 1 Cor 2:1–2, he recalls that upon his arrival in Corinth, he abandoned sublime words and wisdom, focusing instead on Christ crucified. It is intriguing to wonder if his lukewarm reception at the Areopagus prompted this new approach.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 16:12–15 (293)

Dr. Andrew R. Davis

Like this week’s previous Gospel readings, today’s passage has a parallel in ch 14. Both 14:25–26 and 16:13–15 describe the Advocate’s role in reiterating Jesus’ teaching. A distinctive feature of these passages is the equation of the Advocate (Gr parakletos) with the Holy Spirit. As noted yesterday, parakletos suggests legal advocacy; the word literally refers to one “called alongside” for (legal) support.

When the term is introduced in 14:16–17, it is a designation for the Spirit, whose name in Greek (pneuma) is more impersonal and abstract. There also we learn that the Spirit is “another Advocate” who will continue the work of the first advocate: Jesus. Thus we can see that today’s reading reiterates the Spirit’s role in continuing the teaching that Jesus began.

According to this passage, the Spirit/Advocate will glorify Jesus by relaying his words to the disciples. The Spirit is to Jesus as Jesus was to the Father during his earthly ministry. Just as Jesus received everything from the Father and offered access to the Father in heaven, so the Spirit represents the way to Jesus—insofar as the Spirit will share the truth that comes from Jesus. This path ultimately leads to the Father, as it did during Jesus’ earthly ministry. The reference to the “things that are coming” (v 13) may also suggest new teaching from the Spirit.

Homily Suggestion

John Maria Devaney, OP

A conversation with a great friend can last not only for hours, but it also can be all over the place. We share the most important events of our lives—amid many digressions, laughter, interruptions, and with much reminiscing. We hang up the phone or go our separate ways, usually with a deep desire to reconnect with that friend as soon as possible.

Of course, sometimes such conversations deal with an issue for which we need that friend’s help, perhaps an illness, death, or crisis. Those times can still leave the same desire within us to continue communicating. In today’s Gospel, we hear Jesus state, “I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now” (v 12), offering a glimpse into Christ’s excitement. Follow this for a moment: Because Jesus had every human emotion in his human nature, perhaps we can speculate that Jesus from his divine nature (being one with the Father and the Holy Spirit) was filled beyond words with excitement for his apostles and disciples to receive the fullness of revelation that could only come after Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and Pentecost.

Think back again about our deep and extended conversations as mere mortals. Although later we may think of many things we forgot to say during a conversation, we may still bask in the positive emotion of the moment. This, however, is no mere emotion for God; this is Jesus, who has a burning love for the human family, a love that lays down its life.
Theme: Joy always rises.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 18:1–8 (294)
Dr. Andrew R. Davis

Today’s reading recounts Paul’s arrival in Corinth, where he will found his best-known Church. This knowledge comes from the two letters he will write to it (1 and 2 Cor), addressing various issues within the community. As a large port city, Corinth was a cosmopolitan hub of peoples and commerce—with all the social ills that can crop up around seaports.

An important connection between today’s passage and 1 Cor is the prominence of Aquila and Priscilla in Paul’s ministry. A Jewish couple who arrived in Corinth after their expulsion from Rome, they share their home and tentmaking trade with Paul (vv 2–3). Later their house will become the home of the Corinth Church (1 Cor 16:19). Still later, they return to Rome and are among the coworkers Paul mentions in the letter he sends to the Roman Church ahead of his arrival there (16:3; 2 Tm 4:19). Another link is the reference to Crispus (v 8), whom Paul later mentions as one of only two whom he baptized (1 Cor 1:14).

Besides these connections, it is important to note how today’s passage reiterates key themes of Lk’s narrative, especially the rejection of the Gospel by Jews and Paul’s pivot to a gentile audience (vv 5–6; 13:46). Neither declaration results in a real shift in Paul’s ministry; he continues to work among Jews (18:19; 19:8). Rather, the statements encapsulate the overall narrative trajectory of Lk/Acts.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 16:16–20 (294)
Dr. Andrew R. Davis

Unlike this week’s previous Gospel readings, today’s passage has no parallel in a previous part of Jesus’ farewell discourse. Although Jesus has already mentioned several times that he is only with the disciples for “a little while” (7:33; 12:35; 13:33; 14:19), only this passage uses the same Greek word (mikron) to describe Jesus’ return to be present among the disciples.

A distinctive feature of this text is the threefold repetition of Jesus’ statement in v 16. The disciples repeat the statement among themselves as they struggle to understand it (vv 17–18). Jesus restates the words in v 19 when he questions the disciples about their meaning. The repetition underscores the total puzzlement of the disciples. This is not a case of mishearing (8:51–52) or failing to grasp a double meaning (3:3–4). The words themselves are straightforward, but their meaning is obscure. At the heart of the disciples’ misunderstanding is the apparent contradiction between “not seeing in a little while” and “seeing in a little while.”

The disparity of knowledge between Jesus and the disciples is further underscored by their confession of ignorance at the end of v 18, which is followed at the beginning of v 19 with a reference to Jesus’ insight into their confusion. He does not answer their questions directly but draws an analogy to emotional states; not seeing means grief for the disciples; seeing will be joy.

Homily Suggestion

John Maria Devaney, OP

This week we have been hearing Jesus’ great eucharistic discourse from John’s Gospel. This last address before his passion and death is to his closest followers and friends. That very night Jesus institutes the gift of the Eucharist for the Church, the same night he washes the feet of his disciples and breaks bread with the apostles who will soon betray him.

During this Passover evening of recalling God’s favor to the Israelites, Jesus tells of his leaving the apostles, not to be seen for a while. The confusion that these words cause will be inflamed—first by fear a few hours later when they scatter at his arrest and then less than 24 hours later when they will grieve his torture and execution on the cross. How could so much have transpired so quickly that week? Jesus knew it and foresaw it all, and so he could tell them that their grief would turn to joy.

St. Thomas Aquinas says, “No man can live without joy.” How true that is! As Christ then will rise from the dead less than 48 hours later, so also will joy rise again in the hearts of his disciples. How we must hold onto the same assurance in our Christian lives! Grief and our sins always seem to accompany us, but just as death has been swallowed up by Jesus’ resurrection, so our current grief and repentance can become the ashes from which joy arises until that great day when our joy is complete.

For more information about Sts. Bede, Gregory VII, and Mary Magdalene de’Pazzi, visit saintoftheday.org.
**Theme:** A joyful fool.

**Exegesis of the First Reading**, Acts 18:9–18 (295)
Dr. Andrew R. Davis

Today’s passage contains two Lukan motifs. First is Paul’s dream of the Lord (the risen Jesus) in vv 9–10. As in other visions in Acts (9:10–15; 10:10–15; 16:9–10), this dream demonstrates the divine guidance directing the apostles’ work.

The second motif is the hostile opposition of Jews. Here they bring Paul before the proconsul Gallio, who establishes an important precedent: Conflict between Jews and Christians is a matter of religious—not civil—law.

The aftermath of this ruling is unclear, especially the status of Sosthenes, whom Lk calls “a synagogue official” (v 17) but Paul later calls a “brother” (1 Cor 1:1). Without knowing his beliefs at this point in Acts, we can only guess who would attack him and why. The they in v 17 could refer to Jews or Greeks, but neither group has an obvious motivation to attack Sosthenes.

The mention of Gallio is a chronological linchpin for dating Paul’s travels. A Greek inscription mentions him as proconsul of Corinth in 52 CE, and because he seems to have left Corinth by the end of that year, we can date Paul’s sojourn there to 51–52.

The reference to Paul’s haircut and vow in v 18 indicates his status as a Nazirite, a Jew vowed to abstain from strong drink and impurity (Nm 6:1–21). During the period of the vow, which could be a lifetime or a set period, Nazirites would grow their hair, then shave it upon the vow’s fulfillment.

**Exegesis of the Gospel**, Jn 16:20–23 (295)
Dr. Andrew R. Davis

Today’s reading continues Jesus’ explanation to disciples confused over his statement that in a little while they will no longer see him; then in another little while they will see him (16:16). Initially, he correlates the apparent contradiction to different emotional states. Not seeing Jesus will be grief for the disciples, but seeing him again will be joy. The fact that the emotional responses of the world will be exactly the opposite indicates the hostility John’s community faced.

Jesus’ second approach at explanation is an analogy about a woman in birth pangs; this is meant to show how quickly one emotion can turn into its opposite.

According to this analogy, the Johannine community is the woman who must experience anguish as she delivers her baby. But once she gives birth, she will feel only the joy for her newborn child. The newborn in the analogy represents Jesus, whose renewed presence among the community will be a source of joy. In Rv 12:2–5, we find similar imagery used to describe the birth of the Messiah.

Interestingly, Jesus concludes his explanation with a statement that differs slightly from his original one. In 16:16, he says, “You will see me [again]” but in v 22 he says, “I will see you again.” This subtle shift refocuses the reader’s attention on Jesus’ agency and leads into v 23, where Jesus reasserts his role as mediator between the disciples and the Father.

**Homily Suggestion**
John Maria Devaney, OP

Today’s Gospel begins with the last verse from yesterday’s: “Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy” (v 20). Is that why today’s saint, Philip Neri, was full of supernatural joy?

He said, “A joyful heart is more easily made perfect than a downcast one.” Christ calls each of us to perfection. We must be perfect to see God face-to-face and enter into the kingdom of heaven. We all can be perfected from our sinfulness, or, if the opportunity is missed, then we can be perfected in purgatory. As we toil amid life’s trials, weeping and mourning while everyone else celebrates, let us not lose our faith, hope, and love. For if we do, we will become hard as marble, forcing Jesus to chip away our hearts to perfect them, to save them from being downcast.

If, however, we become clay, soft and docile in the hands of God, then it will be easier for him to perfect us. This may even require looking foolish in the eyes of the world. If we need a role model, we need look no farther than St. Philip Neri. The times in which he lived suffered from many of the problems we often consider only modern-day problems for the Church and society. He knew that they could be resolved only in love, kindness, joy, and mirth—even to the point of becoming fools.

*For more information about St. Philip Neri, founder of the Oratory, visit saintoftheday.org.*
Theme: Never stop asking.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 18:23–28 (296)

Dr. Andrew R. Davis

The vv prior to today’s passage are a brief summary of Paul’s stops en route to Antioch. One of these stops was Ephesus, where he left Priscilla and Aquila, while he continued on to Caesarea (18:19-21). Today’s reading is exceptional for its account of their ministry in Ephesus while Paul is absent.

The passage focuses in particular on their instruction of a Jew named Apollos. On the one hand, Apollos is an exemplary disciple. His Jewish background gives Lk a chance to demonstrate that Paul’s mission is not directed only at gentiles. Indeed, his arguments with Jews after arriving in Corinth (vv 27-28) show the movement’s serious, if sometimes contentious, engagement with Judaism. Paul’s frequent mention of Apollos in his letter to the Corinthians indicates that he was an influential preacher there (1 Cor 1:12; 3:4-6, 22; 4:6; 16:12).

On the other hand, Lk is careful to identify Apollos with a secondary rank in Paul’s mission. He is “with ardent spirit” and teaches accurately but is not “full of spirit” as are prophets in Lk/Acts, and his incomplete understanding of Jesus’ Way marks Apollos as inferior to its leaders (v 25). In particular, his knowledge of John’s baptism but not Jesus’ is the same shortcoming that Paul will encounter among some Ephesians in 19:3-5. This ignorance relates again to the Spirit, which is the defining feature of Jesus’ baptism (Lk 3:16; Acts 1:5; 11:16).

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 26:23b–28 (296)

Dr. Andrew R. Davis

After several vv of trying to resolve the disciples’ confusion with indirect explanations, Jesus in today’s text speaks to them clearly and without figures, such as the vine in 15:1-8 or the woman in labor in 16:21 (also 10:6). Like most of the Gospel readings this week, this passage repeats earlier statements in Jesus’ farewell discourse. As in the previous readings, the small differences between them are instructive.

For example, the theme of asking and receiving in vv 23-24 recalls 14:13-14, especially since both passages emphasize the power of Jesus’ name to mediate requests to the Father. In ch 14, however, the teaching focuses on Jesus’ empowerment of the disciples to continue his works after he returns to the Father; in 16:23-24, however, the teaching is a consolation to the disciples, who will grieve Jesus’ absence from their midst.

Another connection is Jesus’ statement in 16:27 that the Father loves the disciples because they have loved Jesus. This teaching echoes Jesus’ promise of the Father’s love in 14:21, 23. Although in ch 14 that love is correlated to the disciples’ observance of Jesus’ commandment, in ch 16 the disciples’ love corresponds to their belief that Jesus came from God.

A final example is Jesus’ statement in v 28 that he is going back to the Father. Here it signifies the completion of Jesus’ ministry, but in 14:12 it prepares the disciples for his absence.

Homily Suggestion

John Maria Devaney, OP

St. Paul asks, “What do you have that you have not received?” (1 Cor 4:7). Pondering this question should lead to immediate agreement—unless we have a major humility deficit. Now, of course, some could say, “I earned every dime that I have,” and that may be mostly true because the virtue of justice provided you with a fair wage for a fair day’s work.

However, let us even go deeper than that. The very fact that you are reading this right now means God had given you existence. What more could be given to us than being alive in creation? We are beggars from the moment of our conception to the moment of our last breath. This flows from the love that generated all of creation, the love that became incarnate for us, that is the love of the Holy Trinity.

Shrouded in mystery but grounded in reality, Jesus went back to his Father after the paschal mystery was fulfilled, but he promised to send forth the Holy Spirit, the love between the Father and the Son, upon the human family and the world at Pentecost. God has given all good gifts to his children, who now know to ask in the name of Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ. Yet how often does the very thing that made the angels fall keep us from seeing and asking: our pride? For this reason, let us always humble ourselves and never stop asking.

For more information about St. Augustine of Canterbury, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: One last question.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 19:1–8 (297)
Dr. Terrance Callan

Soon after Paul’s third missionary journey starts, he comes to Ephesus, the main focus of that trip. When Paul arrives there, he encounters a group of about 12 disciples (followers of Jesus) who know only the baptism of John the Baptist and know nothing of the Holy Spirit. According to Acts 18:24–26, before Paul arrived there, a Jew named Apollos was active as a missionary in Ephesus. This follower of Jesus knew only the baptism of John. Lk may imply that the disciples Paul meets in Ephesus were converted through Apollos.

Paul’s coworkers, Priscilla and Aquila, gave Apollos a more accurate understanding of following Jesus before sending him on to Corinth. Paul himself gives the Ephesian disciples a more complete understanding. He explains that the baptism of John the Baptist prepared for the coming of Jesus. Then Paul baptizes them in the name of Jesus and lays hands on them, and they receive the Holy Spirit and begin to speak in tongues and to prophesy, somewhat like the first group of disciples to receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

This story makes clear the essential connection between Christian Baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit. Receiving that Spirit was something visible to others, not simply a matter of faith.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 16:29–33 (297)
Dr. Terrance Callan

John’s account of the Last Supper is found in chs 13–17; most of it consists of Jesus’ last discourse to his disciples. Today’s reading concludes that discourse; ch 17 is Jesus’ final prayer for his disciples.

In 16:23, 25, Jesus tells his disciples that in the future they will have no questions to ask him; he will speak to them plainly, not in figures of speech. The disciples confidently assert that this time has already come. Jesus is already speaking plainly, without figures of speech; they do not need to ask questions.

Consequently, they believe that Jesus came forth from God. This is the truth about Jesus, but his disciples overestimate their own faith. Jesus asks if they now believe and predicts that the time is coming when they will abandon him, leaving him alone. This prediction will be fulfilled in a few hours when Jesus is arrested in the garden, and almost all of his disciples flee. Even though his disciples leave him, Jesus will not be alone because the Father is with him. Jesus says he has told them this so that they might have peace in him. Perhaps he means that they need not regret their abandonment of Jesus excessively because the Father is continuously present with Jesus.

Jesus ends by saying that his disciples will have trouble in the world; however, he has conquered the world. World here refers to the situation of those separated from God; Jesus has overcome this separation by making God known in the world.

Homily Suggestion
Jim Johnston

On this Memorial Day, it seems appropriate to mention the immensely popular wartime journalist Ernie Pyle. He won the Pulitzer Prize for his poignant accounts of ordinary infantrymen who served during World War II; he was killed by enemy fire on Okinawa only four months before the end of the war.

Pyle had great admiration and empathy for the American fighting forces, but he once voiced this warning about overconfidence: “It’s all right to have a good opinion of yourself, but we Americans are so smug with our cockiness, we somehow feel that just because we are Americans, we can whip our weight in wildcats.”

Today’s Gospel raises the issue of overconfidence. The disciples get a little too big for their britches—or tunics, perhaps—by asserting that they understand everything Jesus has been saying to them (now that he is speaking “plainly”) and have no need to ask him any further questions. Jesus immediately tempers their cockiness by predicting that they will cave in under pressure and abandon him in his hour of need. This prediction, of course, is fulfilled almost immediately.

On a day when we honor those who gave “the last full measure of devotion” to their country, we might do well humbly to consider what sacrifices are required of us as we attempt to meet the challenge of living out our faith in Jesus. That probably means we should have, at the very least, one question left: Lord, what would you have me do?
Theme: The circle of salvation.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 20:17–27 (298)
Dr. Terrance Callan

As Paul concludes his third missionary journey, he stops at Miletus and summons the presbyters of the Church at Ephesus (about 30 miles away) to meet him. Today’s reading includes the first part of that discourse (20:18–35).

Paul begins by reminding the presbyters what he was like when he was with them, serving the Lord humbly and persisting, despite trials presented by his opponents. His service was to tell them what was for their benefit, calling both Jews and Greeks to repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus. Implicitly, Paul presents himself as a model for those he addresses. He is going to Jerusalem, where the Holy Spirit has warned imprisonment and hardships await. Paul seems to anticipate that he may even die, but he says the only important thing is to complete his mission of bearing witness to the gospel of God’s grace.

Paul says that none of those to whom he preached during his travels will see his face again. This applies to the Ephesian presbyters, but also to all those evangelized by Paul. He says that he has fulfilled his responsibility to them by his preaching and cannot be blamed for anything bad that might happen to them, probably referring to their eternal destiny. In the continuation of the speech, Paul warns them, “Savage wolves will come among you, and they will not spare the flock.”

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 17:1–11a (298)
Dr. Terrance Callan

Jesus begins his prayer in ch 17 by asking the Father to give his son Jesus glory so that Jesus may glorify the Father. This glorification will be the restoration of the glory Jesus had with his Father before the world began. In the beginning, the Word was in glory with God. The Word became flesh in Jesus to make the Father known to the world. Now Jesus asks the Father to restore the glory he had at the beginning.

This restoration will occur when Jesus returns to the Father through his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. In this way Jesus and the Father will be glorified. Jesus has already glorified the Father by revealing the Father in himself so that those who know the Father in Jesus will have eternal life. Jesus’ return to the Father will be his own glorification and further glorification of the Father. When Jesus returns to the Father, people can see that he came to reveal the Father.

As Jesus begins to pray for his disciples, he summarizes his mission to them. He has revealed the Father’s name to them and given them the words the Father gave to Jesus. These disciples are people who belong to the Father, people whom the Father gave to Jesus. They know that everything belonging to Jesus came from the Father and believe that the Father sent Jesus. In this way Jesus has been glorified in them, and thus the Father has also been glorified. Jesus prays for them because they remain in the world while Jesus will no longer be in the world.

Homily Suggestion
Jim Johnston

If the celebrant at today’s liturgy seems a bit deliberate in proclaiming the Gospel, it’s understandable. The multiple pronouns in this passage seem to circle and interweave in an almost dizzying succession: me, you, I, mine, yours, them, these, those. Added to that circling syntax is the circular nature of the saving work Jesus describes. He asks the Father to bring him back (full circle) to the glory he once had at God’s side. Jesus willingly gave up that glory to “descend” among humans and make it possible for all to be taken up into God’s presence. In his return to God’s glory, Jesus completes the circle that embraces the disciples and all who would subsequently come to believe in him.

St. Augustine of Hippo hinted at the circular nature of salvation history when he spoke of the restlessness that was planted in our hearts by a God who wanted us to “boomerang,” so to speak, to our divine origin. In other words, creation presupposes salvation.

Catholics of an older generation were indoctrinated into this “circular” logic early in their catechism. After answering the very first question, “Who made us?” (answer: God), there was this follow-up: “Why did God make us?” To paraphrase the answer, God made us so that we should live our lives on earth in such a way as to return to God.

St. Augustine also said that God’s nature was “a circle whose center was everywhere and its circumference nowhere.” That paradox speaks to the expansiveness of God’s saving love in Jesus.
Theme: Great expectations.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Rom 12:9–16 (572)
Dr. Terrance Callan

Within chs 12–15, Paul advises the Roman Christians how to live as followers of Jesus. This passage briefly encourages them to manifest many different virtues. Perhaps it was chosen for this feast because Mary’s visit to Elizabeth displays several of these virtues.

Paul begins by articulating the principle underlying all of this advice: They must love sincerely by hating what is evil and uniting themselves with what is good. Verses 10–13 mention particular ways of acting on this principle, especially in relation to other Christians. Verse 14 applies the principle to dealing with one’s enemies.

After Paul has said, “Let love be sincere,” his saying “Love one another with mutual affection” seems somewhat redundant. However, two different Greek words are used for love: agape and philostorgos; the second refers specifically to familial love. And a more literal translation of mutual affection would be “brotherly love.” Paul urges them to love other Christians as brothers and sisters in Christ. They should also give each other honor rather than seeking it for themselves. Regarding enemies, they should bless rather than curse them. This recalls Jesus’ teaching in Mt 5:44–47. Additional advice about behavior toward enemies comes in Rom 12:17–21 (not included in this reading).

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 1:39–56 (572)
Dr. Terrance Callan

This Gospel describes the feast we celebrate today. After the angel announces to Mary that she is to be the mother of Jesus, the angel tells her that her relative Elizabeth is six months pregnant. Mary quickly goes to see her. When Mary enters the house and Elizabeth hears Mary’s greeting, Elizabeth’s unborn child leaps within her. This is not an unusual occurrence, but Elizabeth sees a very special meaning in it, probably because she is filled with the Holy Spirit and has miraculous knowledge.

She knows that Mary is pregnant with a child when Elizabeth calls “my Lord” and that this pregnancy is a matter of Mary’s believing what was spoken to her by the Lord. Elizabeth seems to have the same knowledge as Gospel readers, who have just heard about the angel’s announcement to Mary (1:26–38).

Mary responds to Elizabeth’s words with the hymn of praise known as the Magnificat from its first word in the Latin translation. The hymn’s first lines praise God; the others state reasons for that praise. The first reasons focus on what God has done for Mary. God has looked upon her lowliness; all ages will call her blessed; the Mighty One has done great things for her. The following reasons are more general. God shows mercy to those who fear him; he has lifted up the lowly, etc. God has kept his promises to Abraham. This hymn probably looks forward to what God will do through Jesus.

Homily Suggestion
Jim Johnston

The title of Sister Helen Prejean’s famous nonfiction book about death-row prisoners, Dead Man Walking, exemplifies a literary device called prolepsis (from a Greek word for anticipation or expectation). This device works by representing or assuming a future act or development as if it were already existing or accomplished. It may be thought of as a kind of “fast forward” technique. The phrase “dead man walking” is prison jargon for someone who, although slated for death, is obviously still walking around among the living.

Today’s Gospel might be characterized as “proleptic” in a number of ways. It is full of anticipation and expectation, starting with the two women who are “expecting” in a very literal sense. Then there is the anticipatory leaping for joy of the child in Elizabeth’s womb, as if he (the future John the Baptist) were already celebrating/announcing the arrival of the Messiah.

Mary’s prayerful canticle—which we know as the Magnificat—begins with a recitation of what God has done for her, but it soon expands into a more general proclamation of God’s saving deeds for all humanity. This too seems proleptic, for it anticipates what God will do through the child Mary is carrying in her womb. Indeed, Mary carries within herself the source of future hope for all the world. It’s one last example of prolepsis: the unborn savior.

For more information about the feast of the Visitation, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: The real presence of Christ.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 22:30; 23:6–11 (300)
Dr Terrance Callan

After his third missionary journey, Paul is seized in Jerusalem’s temple for speaking against it, the Jewish people, and their law. Roman soldiers intervene to save his life. The Roman commander allows Paul to speak in his own defense (Acts 21:27–22:21).

The Roman commander then brings Paul before the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish authority under Roman rule. Today’s reading omits the first exchanges between them and Paul. It relates how Paul, knowing that some of the Sanhedrin were Sadducees and others Pharisees, made use of this division. Paul says that he is a Pharisee and that he is “on trial for hope in resurrection of the dead.” Since this hope of the Pharisees is rejected by the Sadducees, the Sanhedrin is divided. Its Pharisees defend Paul, and the Sadducees presumably attack him. The ensuing dispute prompts the Roman commander to rescue Paul and bring him back to the Roman compound. That night the Lord tells Paul that he will bear witness to the Lord’s cause in Rome.

Paul was seized for speaking against the Jewish people, not for his hope in the resurrection. But Paul knows his belief that Jesus has risen, in fact, grounds all his preaching and the actions to which some people object.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 17:20–26 (300)
Dr Terrance Callan

As Jesus concludes his prayer in ch 17, he prays not only for his disciples, but also for those who will become disciples through them. Jesus prays that all his disciples may be one, repeating what he said earlier in v 11. It is not entirely clear what “being one” means. What is clear is that it is like the oneness of Jesus and the Father. The oneness of Jesus’ disciples is probably oneness with Jesus, which is simultaneously oneness with the Father because Jesus and the Father are one.

Jesus’ oneness with the Father is a matter of being the presence of the Father in the world, making the Father known to the world. Similarly, the oneness of the disciples with Jesus is a matter of being the presence of Jesus in the world after his return to the Father. Thus Jesus’ prayer that the disciples be one is a prayer that they be his presence in the world. The purpose of the disciples’ oneness with Jesus is the same as that of Jesus’ oneness with the Father—namely, that the world may believe that the Father sent Jesus. Through this faith the world will have eternal life. Jesus prays that the disciples’ oneness will be brought to perfection.

Because Jesus’ disciples are one with him, they have the glory the Father has given Jesus; the Father loves them as he loves Jesus; and they know the Father’s name as Jesus knows it. Jesus prays that in the future his disciples will be with him where he is after his return to the Father; they will see Jesus’ glory there.

Homily Suggestion
Jim Johnston

A beautiful prayer attributed to Teresa of Avila has been set to music by numerous composers, including Secular Franciscan John Michael Talbot. Part of that prayer reads: “Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world.” What a tremendous challenge this prayer presents to modern-day Christians!

This simple prayer captures a fundamental Christian tenet reflected in today’s Gospel: God was one with Jesus in taking on our humanity so as to save the world. The most dramatic implication of this is that, as followers of Jesus, we must now be the continuing, visible presence of Christ in the world.

That monumental obligation to be Christ’s presence in the world today would be a crushing (and probably impossible) responsibility were it not for the reassuring words that end today’s Gospel. Addressing his prayer to God, Jesus says, “To them, I have revealed your name so that your love for me may live in them and I may live in them.”

We rightly think of the notion of the “Body of Christ” as metaphorical (that is, Jesus in the flesh was a unique phenomenon), but Teresa’s prayer reminds us that as Catholic Christians we speak also of “real presences” of Christ—in the Eucharist, certainly, but also in the witness we bear in our lives while extending the mercy and love of Jesus to all those who are in need.

For more information about St. Justin, a second-century defender of Christianity, visit saintoftheday.org.
Theme: Third time a charm?

Exegesis of the First Reading, Acts 25:13b–21 (301)
Dr. Terrance Callan

After Paul appears before the Sanhedrin, more than 40 Jews form a conspiracy to kill him. When the Roman commander learns about this, he sends Paul under guard to Felix, the Roman governor, in Caesarea. Felix hears Paul’s case but does not resolve it. After two years, Felix is succeeded as governor by Festus (Acts 23:12—24:27). This may have happened in 60 CE.

King Agrippa and his sister Bernice arrive in Caesarea to visit Festus. Agrippa and Bernice are the great-grandson and great-granddaughter of Herod the Great. Agrippa was king of Ituraea and Trachonitis, territories north and west of the Sea of Galilee, as well as parts of Galilee and Perea. Festus tells Agrippa about Paul’s case and asks for help in understanding it. Festus says that he found Paul in custody and that the chief priests and elders in Jerusalem asked Festus to condemn Paul. So Festus had Paul tried, and was surprised to discover that the charges concerned the Jewish religion and “a certain Jesus who had died but who Paul claimed was alive.” Festus asked Paul if he was willing to return to Jerusalem for a trial on these charges. But Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen to have his case heard by the emperor (Acts 25:1–12).

Festus asks Agrippa to hear Paul’s case so that Festus can explain to the emperor the charges against Paul. Agrippa agrees to do so (25:22–27).

Exegesis of the Gospel, Jn 21:15–19 (301)
Dr. Terrance Callan

After Jesus appears to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias (21:1–14), Jesus has the dialogue with Peter found in today’s reading. When Jesus appears to his disciples, he has breakfast with them. The dialogue occurs after they finish breakfast. Three times Jesus asks Peter if Peter loves Jesus, and three times Peter says that Jesus knows Peter loves him.

This can be seen as a reversal of Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus just before Jesus’ crucifixion (18:15–27). The first two times Jesus asks he uses the Greek verb agapao; the third time he uses the verb phileo; Peter answers all three times using phileo. The two verbs can have different meanings, but may be synonymous here and be used for the sake of variety. Every time Peter affirms his love for Jesus, he tells Peter to tend Jesus’ sheep, using two different Greek verbs and nouns, again perhaps for the sake of variety. In 10:1–18, Jesus had spoken of himself as the good shepherd and his disciples as his sheep. Presumably, Jesus is telling Peter to be a good shepherd of Jesus’ disciples.

Jesus tells Peter, “When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” The evangelist comments that Jesus signified by what kind of death Peter would glorify God, but the nature of Peter’s death is not indicated very clearly. The saying does seem to suggest, however, that someone will cause Peter’s death, that he will be martyred.

Homily Suggestion
Jim Johnston

The Latin adage omne trium perfectum (“Everything that comes in threes is perfect”) reflects literature’s so-called “rule of three.” Remember stories about the three little pigs, three blind mice, the three Musketeers, the three Christmas spirits who visit Ebenezer Scrooge, Goldilocks and the three bears, and so on? The possibilities are virtually endless. This “rule” suggests that things that come in threes are either funnier, more satisfying, or more memorable than other combinations of things. We even have examples of this in our liturgy: Think of the “Holy, holy, holy” and the repetition of “Lamb of God.”

The author of today’s Gospel makes effective use of this device when he has Jesus ask Peter three times, “Do you love me?” Peter clearly thinks that once would have been enough; we learn that his feelings were hurt by the repeated query. There is, of course, a nice symmetry between this postresurrection scene and Peter’s triple denial of Jesus—as if Jesus were giving Peter a chance to completely exonerate himself by this threefold profession of love.

For believers, good things also come in threes. At the end of today’s liturgy, we will receive a blessing and sign ourselves in the name of a Trinity that represents our creation, salvation, and inspiration. Then there’s faith, hope, and love. Then there’s . . . .

For more information about Sts. Marcellinus and Peter, visit saintoftheday.org.
Today’s reading concludes Acts. In Rome, Paul lives by himself with a soldier to guard him. This house arrest is used because Paul is apparently not perceived as a public threat. He refers to wearing chains; perhaps these attach him to the soldier. Paul calls together the leaders of Rome’s Jewish community to explain why he has arrived in Rome as a prisoner, saying that although he has done nothing against the Jewish people, he was handed over to the Romans by Jews.

When the Romans tried his case, they found nothing against him deserving of the death penalty and wanted to release him. The Jews objected, and Paul was obligated to appeal to Caesar although he has no accusation to make against his own nation. Thus Paul explains why he wants to talk to the Jewish leaders and adds that he is a prisoner because of Israel’s hope. Of course, no one is opposed to him directly for this, but Paul understands their opposition as arising from his belief that Jesus fulfills the hope of Israel.

The reading omits the rest of Paul’s interaction with the Roman Jews and ends by summarizing the two years Paul spent as a prisoner in Rome. He received all who came to him and proclaimed to them the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Strikingly, Acts does not tell us how the life of Paul ended.

Today’s reading concludes Jn’s Gospel. Jesus’ dialogue with Peter in yesterday’s reading ended with Jesus telling Peter to follow him. Peter looks back and sees someone else following, namely the disciple whom Jesus loved, who had asked Jesus at the Last Supper who would betray Jesus. A disciple whom Jesus loved is first mentioned in Jn’s account of the Last Supper (13:23–26) and is subsequently mentioned three more times before the last words of this Gospel. His name is never mentioned, and there is no comparable reference to a disciple whom Jesus loved in the synoptic Gospels.

Since Jesus had spoken to Peter about Peter’s death, Peter asks Jesus about the beloved disciple’s death. Jesus asks, “What if I want him to remain until I come?” After the evangelist says these words of Jesus made people think that the beloved disciple would not die, he points out that Jesus’ words do not actually say this. This suggests that the beloved disciple has died by the time this was written, and that the evangelist is responding to an issue raised by his death.

The evangelist says about the beloved disciple that he “testifies to these things and has written them.” “These things” presumably refers to at least part of this Gospel’s content. The evangelist, who apparently is not the beloved disciple, identifies that disciple as the witness to the Gospel and says that he has written something, though obviously not these words.

In Yiddish, a schlemiel is “an awkward or unlucky person.” With all due respect to Simon Peter, the disciple to whom Jesus gave the founding nickname “rock,” this term might, at times, be affectionately applied to him. Sometimes he just can’t seem to get out of his own way.

Today we hear the very last verses of Jn’s Gospel, and we find that Peter, who in the passage just before this has redeemed himself by his triple profession of love for Jesus, stumbles once again. He receives a fairly sharp rebuke from Jesus, who basically tells him to mind his own business (which is, by the way, to follow Jesus).

We have to sympathize with Peter, who has just heard a grim, if somewhat vague, prediction of how he will die. It’s only natural that he would look at John and ask Jesus, “What about him?” After all, misery loves company. Fortunately, the story does not end there. We know that Peter went on to lead and inspire the early followers of Jesus and gave his life as a witness to that faith.

Today we celebrate the feast of an African convert to the Christian faith who accepted death by fire at the age of 26 rather than renounce his faith in Jesus before an insecure and tyrannical king. Like Peter and all those who gave their lives in witnessing to the faith, Charles Lwanga and his companions, despite their very human failings, got it right in the end.

For more information about St. Charles Lwanga and Companions, visit saintoftheday.org.