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1st Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Isaiah 2: 1-5

- What does walking in the path of the Lord mean for Catholic spouses, parents, and children? The way of the Lord is the way of peace. What are we doing to bring about peace in our families?

- Arguments happen in every family between siblings, between spouses, and between parents and children. It’s perfectly normal and can even be used as an opportunity to grow in grace if we sincerely apologize, seek forgiveness, and extend mercy to one another.

- In families, parents are often the ones sending forth instruction and instructing children in their ways. But are parents’ ways the Lord’s ways? Spouses and parents need to actively place themselves at the feet of the Lord in prayer to receive His instruction in order to be better spouses and parents.

- What are the swords and spears, the weapons of war, that bring discord to our families? What are the recurrent areas of conflict or dynamics of discord? How can we beat them into plowshares and pruning hooks, instruments that cultivate new life within our family relationships?

Second Reading: Romans 13: 11-14

- Advent is like a spiritual alarm clock. Wake up!! Get up out of bed and get ready!!

- Throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Try to identify the areas of habitual sin in your life and—through confession, prayer, and the Eucharist—get rid of them and replace them with virtue.

- Marriage and parenting can be both physically and emotionally exhausting. The continual energy drain saps our spiritual strength and can send us into spiritual auto-pilot. Many spouses may find their spiritual lives to be pretty dry and uninspiring.

- Advent is a penitential season designed to raise our awareness of the nearness and the beauty of the kingdom of God. It is in our families! We have to wake up and open our eyes so we can see it.

Gospel: Matthew 24: 37-44

- You don’t know when Jesus is coming, so you have to be prepared in advance in order to be ready at a moment’s notice. Because you don’t know when it’s going to happen, you can’t put off your spiritual preparation until tomorrow.

- This isn’t just about being ready for Jesus’ second coming, it’s about being ready for—and not missing—all the times Jesus comes to us every single day. If we’re spiritually half-asleep, we’ll miss it.

- Don’t get caught in the trap of everyday life and not be prepared. Don’t be lulled into complacency like the people of Noah’s time.
**Food For Thought:**
Main message: Stay awake and be prepared, for the Lord is coming. Jesus uses the example of men and women at work, saying that one will be ready and one will not be ready. Jesus doesn’t say, “Stay home from work so you can be ready.” The day to day routine is necessary. In fact, it is where God comes to us and where we encounter Christ. Rather, the challenge is to keep our priorities straight and focused on our relationship with God. With work and family, it’s easy to get caught up in the daily grind and neglect what is really important. God isn’t a separate item on our to-do list. He should be breathing life into us and meeting us in everything on our to-do list.

**Story:**
Judy loved waking up next to her husband during the early years of their marriage. They’d hit snooze a few times, snuggle in each other’s arms, and gradually wake up and decide that they should get out from underneath the soft sheets and eat a leisurely breakfast together. Maybe they’d read the paper. It was nice. Then they had kids. All of the sudden, waking up in the morning was a trauma scene. The alarm clock was the shrill cry of a starving child in a wet diaper who clearly had no snooze button. There was no breakfast. There was no newspaper.

There was delirious, sleep-deprived chaos. And the baby wasn’t the only one crying! There is no exhaustion in the world like that experienced by new parents. The hard thing about sleep is that you’re not consciously enjoying it when you’re doing it; you don’t really realize how much you enjoy sleeping until you have to wake up. It’s so easy to ignore—or conveniently overlook—the things you know you should do when you’re constantly exhausted and half asleep. Who really worries about the toothpaste stuck to the bathroom sink or that sticky spot on the kitchen floor when their baby still isn’t sleeping through the night? The same is true of being spiritually exhausted, being on spiritual autopilot. It’s easy to ignore the things in your life that still need to be converted to Christ when you’re spiritually half asleep.

**Petition:**
That God’s grace, bringing peace to our hearts and to our families, will lead us to offer greater mercy, forgiveness, and healing in our relationships with our loved ones, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
What does walking in the path of the Lord mean for Catholic spouses, parents, and children? The way of the Lord is the way of peace. What are we doing to bring about peace in our families?
2nd Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10

- God came to us as a little child, a baby. The Almighty decided to take on our human flesh as a defenseless newborn.
- God still comes to us through our children. Their awe and wonder, their trust, their hopefulness, and their simplicity remind us how we should approach our relationship with God.

Second Reading: Romans 15:4-9

- “[T]hink in harmony with one another….” Harmony is such a sought after commodity in family life. Tempers can get short—especially when children are young, sleep is at a premium, and behavior sometimes falls short of parent’s hopes. It takes a moment of quiet, and sometimes a deep breath, to strive for harmony.
- “Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you…” Part of the challenge families’ face in growing closer to God is that God calls us each to conversion in different ways at different times. Sometimes that conversion comes quickly and sometimes it comes slowly and with tremendous effort. It can be tempting to pigeonhole each other within our families and fail to recognize and call forth that conversion in one another. Wherever we are in our spiritual journey, we need to constantly welcome one another to become more authentically the people God created us to be.

Gospel: Matthew 3:1-12

- Advent is a penitential season, much like Lent. That’s why we light purple candles and wear purple vestments. Purple is the color of repentance. So, during Advent, we need to “make room” for Christ to come more fully into our lives. To do that we must first turn away from our sins. Advent is a wonderful time to begin fresh and make a good confession.
- John the Baptist’s reproach to the Pharisees calls us each to task. Though we may consider ourselves stereotypical “good Catholics,” is that bearing itself out in our lives? What “good fruit” do we have to show for it? How can we bear more fruit for Christ this Advent season?

Food For Thought:
One of parents’ primary concerns is how to keep children safe. Parents use child safety locks, car seats, baby gates, helmets, and sometimes even leashes to keep their children safe. As children grow, the dangers they face in this world are so great that many parents wish they could wrap their children in bubble wrap to keep them safe from all the potential hurt and danger that children, teenagers, and young adults often confront. Yet the first reading talks about a young child guiding a lion, a baby playing by a cobra’s den, and a child placing his hand on an adder’s lair. It sounds like a tragic news story in the making! But God assures us that, one day, even these things will be harmless. Pain and harm will be no more, because the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. Knowing God—truly knowing Him—changes everything about a person. Knowing God in the biblical sense is a surrender of oneself to God, a full conversion. Imagine a day when
everyone in the world has dedicated themselves to knowing, loving, and serving the one true God of heaven and earth. That day will come. Christ ushered it in when He took on our humanity, lived, died, rose, and ascended into heaven for our salvation. That day is coming. It is what we long for. It is what we hope for. It is what we live for. Come, Lord Jesus!

**Story:**
During Advent many parents of younger children keep a nativity set within reach of their children. To help children focus on the meaning of the season of Advent, they keep a small stash of hay (or ripped up strips of yellow construction paper) nearby for children to add to the manger and get it ready to keep baby Jesus warm. Each time the children perform good deeds, make sacrifices of some kind, or say an extra prayer, they can add a piece of hay. This reminds them (and their parents) that during Advent we make an extra effort to make our hearts and our homes a little bit warmer and welcoming for Jesus.

**Petition:**
For children throughout the world who are in harm’s way, that the love of God, through the care and concern of others, will protect them from danger, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
John the Baptist reminds us that Advent is a season of penitence. What can we do this Advent to turn away from sin and to make more room in our hearts and homes for Christ?
**3rd Sunday of Advent**

**First Reading: Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10**
- Many in our world feel feeble, weak, frightened, and powerless to change the circumstances of injustice and oppression that overpower them.
- Isaiah was writing to a people in exile, who were longing to return to their homeland. Like them, we are in a kind of exile because sin has distorted our relationships with God and with one another.
- The coming of the long-awaited Messiah will set things right.

**Second Reading: James 5:7-10**
- In this short reading we hear the word *patient* four times! We must be patient with our circumstances and patient with one another as we wait for the coming of the Lord.
- “Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another, that you may not be judged.” These are words every family should live by. Most sibling squabbles and marital spats amount to little more than griping about each other and failing to look for the good in one another.

**Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11**
- Jesus admits to John’s disciples that He has fulfilled the messianic prophecies of Isaiah.
- Jesus challenges the crowds that had followed John into the desert by asking them what they were looking for. Sometimes we might need to ask ourselves what we are looking for. What is it that we are waiting for and longing for this Advent?

**Food For Thought:**
As parents try to raise their children with strong character, values, and faith, they battle cultural norms and often find themselves swimming against the tide. It can be exhausting. Add to this a difficult phase of childhood or a rough patch in marriage, and even the strongest Catholic parents and families can feel like they’re barely keeping their heads above water. Meanwhile, St. James reminds families to endure their current hardships with patience and firm hearts without complaining. Not at all an easy task! Looking for relief, with the weak knees and frightened hearts Isaiah mentions, where can families turn? Surely a strong prayer life devoted to the sacraments is invaluable. But families also need to find Christ in one another. The best support to a family struggling to live out their Christian mission in the world is another family trying to do the same thing.

**Petition:**
As a suffering world awaits the One who will come to save, may Christians join together in love to prepare His way, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
“Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord” (James 5:7). The season of Advent challenges us to wait patiently for the coming of Christ. What can you do within your family to focus your hearts on Christ this Advent?
4th Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Isaiah 7:10-14

- God speaks directly to His people and desires that we place our trust in Him and not ourselves.
- God makes the impossible possible: a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.
- Emmanuel means “God with us.”

Second Reading: Romans 1:1-7

- The call to holiness extends to all people.
- Jesus Christ, descended from King David, has proven through His resurrection that He is the Son of God.

Gospel: Matthew 1:18-24

- Mary’s virginal conception of Jesus – God making the impossible possible – fulfills Isaiah’s prophecy about the Messiah.
- Joseph showed incredible humility. He allowed God to change his mind about marrying Mary, even though she was pregnant and it wasn’t his child.
- We need to allow God to be the one in charge of the major decisions we make in our families. We should prayerfully consider the major decisions that concern our spouse and children and sincerely seek God’s will, placing our trust in Him, no matter what He calls us to.

Food For Thought:
Imagine how hurt and betrayed St. Joseph must have felt when he discovered that Mary was pregnant with a child he assumed was the product of adultery. In order to live righteously according to his faith, he decided to divorce her. He was a good and righteous man trying his best to follow his conscience and faith. He couldn’t bring himself to remain betrothed, bring her into his home, or raise a child he assumed was another man’s son. But he also didn’t want to bring any more shame or difficulty to Mary. So he made up his mind to divorce her quietly. But the next morning he woke up and changed his mind because of a dream. God made His will clearly known and St. Joseph obeyed in humility and faith. He admitted he had been wrong and changed his course of action because he opened himself up to God’s will.

Story:
Many people find it difficult to admit that they’re wrong. In many marriages, there is often one spouse that is quicker to apologize, while the other has a harder time admitting to not always being right. Sometimes neither spouse will give in, and disagreements can linger and build up resentment over time. Clearly this isn’t what God wants for our marriages and families. Matters can be made even more difficult if a significant decision needs to be made and the spouses disagree. The more stubbornly we commit ourselves to our own way of thinking, the more difficult it becomes to hear our spouse’s point of view. Even St. Joseph didn’t listen to Mary at first when she told him the child in her womb was conceived by the Holy Spirit. God needed to
send an angel to him in a dream to get him to come around. But he did come around, and that’s what’s important for us to remember. If we dedicate ourselves to following God’s will as a family, and not our own will, we will never go astray. That doesn’t mean that God’s will is always easy. Certainly it must have been difficult for Joseph and Mary, as it is for many of us. God’s will for our lives is sometimes challenging, but it will always lead us closer to one another and to Him.

**Petition:**
For women who are raising their children on their own without the partnership of a supportive husband, that they would be blessed with strength and grace to follow God’s will and be the best mothers they can be, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
St. Joseph obeyed God’s will, even though that meant he had to change his mind and do something that he initially thought didn’t make sense. How do you open yourself up to God’s will in your life? Is there anything going on right now or any major decisions coming up that you should seek God’s will about? How are you going to do that?
The Nativity of the Lord – Vigil Mass

First Reading: Isaiah 62:1-5

- Marriage is such a sacred and special human relationship that it is used to describe the relationship between God and His people Israel.
- The love between a husband and wife, their delight and rejoicing in one another, is how God loves, delights, and rejoices in us.


- God chose the Israelites to be His people and established a covenant with them, freed them from slavery in Egypt, and established their kingdom under David.
- Through King David’s descendants, God was faithful to His promise and sent a Savior to Israel in the person of Jesus Christ.
- Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah whose coming John the Baptist heralded.

Gospel: Matthew 1:1-25 [shorter form is Matthew 1:18-25]

- The genealogy connects Abraham to King David, and King David to Christ. Not only is Jesus a descendent of King David, His family line traces back to the very father of the Chosen People, the patriarch Abraham. Jesus’ birth is presented as the climax of salvation history.
- The genealogy lists some interesting people with some interesting stories. For example, the first patriarchs struggled with infertility and had children only through divine intervention. Some of the unions listed in the genealogy aren’t exactly traditional families. There are adulterers, prostitutes, and foreigners in Jesus’ family line. Further, Matthew traces Jesus’ genealogy through St. Joseph, Jesus’ foster (or adoptive) father, even though Matthew makes it clear that Mary conceives Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit, not Joseph.
- For more points on vs. 18-25, see Fourth Sunday of Advent Year A.

Food For Thought:

Families are messy. There is no perfect family. There’s something about this time of year that makes this reality inescapable for all of us. Family gatherings are precious times, and also sometimes difficult times. Even in the happiest and least “dysfunctional” families, human relationships can be sources of both joy and sorrow, happiness and pain, precisely because they are human. God took on our humanity in the incarnation of His Son, whose ancestral family line was not a neat and tidy package. Some of His ancestors were adulterers, prostitutes, and foreigners. God called His human parents back from the brink of divorce. None of them, except for His Mother, were sinless. These are precisely the people God chooses to use to bring about His plan to save us. The Good News of Christmas is that God used the messiness of family life, the fallen brokenness of humanity itself, to bring about the birth of Christ and the salvation of the human race. He made us all part of the family of God. We don’t have to be perfect for God to work in our lives.
**Story:**
A wise man once said, “Family puts the ‘fun’ in the word ‘dysfunctional.’” It’s true: our families are the source of our greatest joys and our biggest heartaches. Genesis says that men and women, especially through marriage, reflect the divine image and likeness of God. But it is in the very next chapter that we hear how Adam and Eve gave in to darkness, disobeyed God, and got kicked out of Paradise. God has been calling us back into His family ever since: through the covenant with Abraham, through Moses and the Ten Commandments, and through the prophets. Finally, God became one of us in the incarnation of Jesus Christ and paid the price for our sins so we could be with Him forever in heaven. How did God accomplish this? Through the messiness of a human family, Jesus’ family tree in the Gospel of Matthew is mottled with all kinds of interesting members: adulterers, prostitutes, refugees, the homeless, minorities, kings, immigrants, liars, saints, thieves, and women who didn’t know when to sit down and be quiet.

God saw potential for good in their relationships. God elevated marriage to the level of a sacrament. Despite the reality of sin in the human condition, despite the fragility and brokenness that is so often a part of our lives, God still somehow uses marriage and family life not only to draw us closer to Him, but to redeem us and to sanctify us.

**Petition:**
For all families struggling with difficulties this Christmas season, that God would allow them to see His grace working in the messiness of their lives, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
No two families are the same and all families are welcome here at our parish. If this is your first time visiting us, welcome! Please consider celebrating Mass here with us again. We would love for your family to become part of our family here at our parish.
The Nativity of the Lord – Mass at Midnight

First Reading: Isaiah 9:1-6
- Light conquers darkness, joy conquers burdens, and peace conquers battles. Good will completely conquers evil though the divine Son that is given to us.
- A child born from David’s throne will bring peace and rule with justice forever.
- Families go through dark times: sickness, unemployment, loss of a loved one, marital difficulties, etc. This reading speaks of “…the yoke that burdened them….” It offers words of hope to families experiencing difficulty. Christ comes to save.

Second Reading: Titus: 2:11-14
- God’s grace “trains” us. It brings about a change within us, strengthening us to reject sin and embrace virtue.
- Implicit is the idea that we need to practice this as we wait for Christ’s return.
- Jesus’ sacrifice cleanses us from sin and enables us to do good.

- The census highlights that Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem was a significant event for the whole Roman world.
- Luke points out that Joseph was a descendant of King David, tracing Jesus’ royal lineage through his foster/adoptive father. Families come together in all sorts of interesting ways. St. Joseph was Jesus’ “real” human father, in all the important human ways that matter.
- The Gospel tells us that Mary traveled from her home in Nazareth to Bethlehem while she was about nine months pregnant. That’s about 100 miles. We have an image of her sitting on a donkey, but that is not found in scripture. She may have walked. Either way, it would have taken at least two days, maybe even more. Small wonder she went into labor soon after they arrived.
- Imagine Joseph’s frustration and concern. He knew she was carrying the Messiah in her womb, and he had no choice but to bring his very pregnant wife on a long journey. He watched her struggle on the journey and he couldn’t help her. They arrived and he could find no reasonable place for her to deliver. They were poor travelers, turned away from the inn. He was powerless to provide for his wife and child in the way he would surely have wanted to at this vulnerable time, yet he humbly trusted and submitted himself to the will of God.
- The message of the angels to the shepherds recalls the prophecy from Isaiah and proclaims that Jesus is this savior who will bring about true and lasting peace.

Food For Thought:
Parents often operate with the reassuring yet false notion that they are in charge of their families. They may believe that they can handle what life brings their way and steer their spouses and children through whatever comes next. This gives a false sense of control over their circumstances. They plan. They build. They save. But the truth is much more unsettling than that.
Those who have been through tough times have learned the hard way that we cannot always control our circumstances. We are not as in charge as we would like to be. Parents are the stewards of their families, entrusted with authority and leadership, but God is in charge. God is the head of every family. When we rely on God for direction, when we plan according to His will and build according to His design, we may find it easier to trust in His providence.

**Petition:**
For our faith community, that we work to reach out to families in difficult situations and assist them when they are most vulnerable, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
The Blessed Mother and St. Joseph were turned away from the inn in their hour of need. Our parish turns no one away. Your family is welcome here! If you are visitors, please consider joining us to celebrate Mass again and to enjoy the fellowship our parish family has to offer.
The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

First Reading: Sirach 3:2-7, 12-14
- The authority of fathers and mothers over their children is established by God.
- Children should give their parents honor, reverence, obedience, comfort, care, consideration, and kindness.
- Such children’s prayers will be heard and their sins will be atoned. They will live a long life.
- Parents are the first tangible representatives to their children of the love and authority of God, our Father. In that sense, it is a huge responsibility. The image of God that children develop throughout their lives is, in large part, modeled after their parents.

Second Reading: Colossians 3:12-21 [shorter form is Colossians 3:12-17]
- This is a list of guidelines for Catholic family life: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, forgiveness, love, peace, thankfulness, and wisdom.
- Because we are God’s chosen ones, holy and loved by God, this is required of us.
- We must forgive because we have been forgiven. We must love because we have been loved. The fruit of all of this is peace. If we do everything in the name of Jesus, then we will avoid many of the sins that bring discord to family life.
- There is a proper order in family relationships: subordination and love between the spouses (be clear about what “subordinate” means and what it doesn’t mean, and how we, as Catholics, understand submission within Christian marriage), and obedience and gentleness between parents and children. These biblically proscribed dynamics have been misinterpreted and misused over the years to the disadvantage of women and children, so if the longer form of the reading is used, this should be addressed.

Gospel: Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23
- Joseph obeyed God and took Mary and Jesus to Egypt to protect them from Herod. They left for Egypt in the middle of the night, having made no prior plans to go there. They had to make do with what they had and rely on God to take care of them and tell them what to do next.
- After Herod died, Joseph followed specific directions from God and returned to Israel. Then the course changed again, and God told him it was safer to go to Galilee. They eventually settled in Nazareth.
- Joseph unquestioningly obeyed God’s commands, even when they changed. He protected his wife and child and ensured their care and safety.
**Food For Thought:**
We don’t know what exactly transpired when Joseph woke up from that dream in Bethlehem. Did he wake Mary up first or was she already awake? Did he hesitate? Did he start packing? In those heart-pounding moments, did Mary question Joseph or trust his instincts right away? How long after they left was their house searched by the soldiers? Did they just barely make it out in time? There is a certain value here in the virtue of obedience. Joseph obeyed God. His unquestioning obedience saved Jesus’ life and made it possible for God’s plan of salvation to be fulfilled. The virtue of obedience to authority in family life is crucial to family harmony—and so is love. Joseph didn’t question God’s love, so he also didn’t question God’s authority. Part of the role of parents in family life is to require obedience to their authority and to ultimately train their children to submit themselves to God’s authority. All authority needs to be exercised with love.

**Story:**
Maybe you’ve heard the expression, “happy wife, happy life.” If you’re married, you probably know what it means. Some people cringe a little bit during the second reading at the words, “Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord.” How about the next line, “Husbands, love your wives, and avoid any bitterness toward them”? Did anyone stare straight ahead and avoid eye contact with their spouse? Kids, when we read, “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing to the Lord,” what did you think of that? This is hard stuff to understand properly—and even harder to do. Without an attitude of sacrificial love towards one another within our family life, it is hard to get this right. That’s why St. Paul says it over and over again throughout his letters.

**Petition:**
That fathers and mothers find the courage of tender guidance in the love for their children, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
The Holy Family is more than a “nice idea” to contemplate; they serve as role models for parents, husbands and wives, and children. Joseph and Mary experienced struggles, and their faithfulness to each other and the Christ Child provide a blueprint for the faithfulness needed in our families during times of struggles and challenge.
January 1st, Mary, the Mother of God

First Reading: Numbers 6:22-27

- The first reading contains a solemn blessing, a formula which Aaron and his sons, the priests, would impart on the Israelites.
- Within families, especially within certain cultures, the blessing of children by their parents is a daily ritual.
- We should consider returning to this custom in our homes. As the Solemnity today reminds us of the role of the Blessed Mother, let it also remind us of the sacred role of all mothers and fathers as the first teachers of the faith for their children. It can also remind us that a blessing given by parents at the dinner table, before bed, or when leaving for the day’s activities creates an atmosphere of faith.

Second Reading: Galatians 4:4-7

- “Abba” is a remarkable title for God; it means “Daddy”!
- Children need to be encouraged to build and nurture their relationship with God as “Daddy,” a familiar, loving God, Who created us in His image and desires that we flourish and have abundant joy in this life and eventually in heaven.
- Fathers and mothers have an obligation to make their presence in the home loving and encouraging, instead of scolding, and to celebrate progress, instead of focusing on mistakes. Parents have the greatest influence in the lives of their children as baptized, little disciples. Being the first teachers in the faith is not an optional role, but the greatest work a parent could ever do.

Gospel: Luke 2:16-21

- When the shepherds arrived at the manger, they were amazed, and their actions and words reflected that. The beautiful line, “And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart,” is a wonderful testament to mothers everywhere.
- When children are born, each moment is remembered by their mothers—each child’s learning to walk, to speak, to think on his or her own. This process continues right through the teenage years and into adulthood.
- Some moments will be struggles. Mary certainly knew that at Jesus’ side! Reflect on Mary as our greatest intercessor for mothers in times of joy and pain and in times of fear and happiness, all of which are moments of love.

Food for Thought:

Do you ever think of your children as “little disciples?” That is exactly who they are, and this is driven home in St. Paul’s letter to the Galatians which speaks to God as Abba, best translated as “Daddy.” This is the framework within which we need to see our responsibilities as parents and our own relationship with God growing. Parents are both that loving Mommy and Daddy to their children, while at the same time they are children of God the Father. We are all little disciples, and we are all continually learning what it means to be an authentic follower of Jesus.
**Petition:**
Through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God and our Mother, may each family feel the comfort and peace of being adopted members of the family of God, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Today we celebrate not simply a new calendar year, but the wonderful role of Mary as the Mother of God. Mary was the first disciple and she remains the greatest intercessor for us, adopted children of a loving Father. As you contemplate the start of a new year, invite the Blessed Mother to be a welcome guest and model within your home. All parents are encouraged to ask the Blessed Virgin each day to keep their family under her powerful protection.
2nd Sunday after Christmas

First Reading: Sirach 24:1-2, 8-12
- Wisdom, speaking through the prophet Sirach, reminds us: “Before all ages, in the beginning, he created me.”
- Each of us, are made in the perfect image of God, and parents share in the awesome responsibility of passing on the faith from our fathers (and mothers) to our children.

Second Reading: Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18
- St. Paul calls out that we were destined for adoption by the Father before our birth, echoing the message of the First Reading.
- With that inheritance comes a profound and real hope, the hope that is offered to each child of God to flourish as one of God’s “holy ones.”
- Each person is due the love, respect and reverence as God’s chosen His adopted holy ones.

Gospel: John 1:1-18
- We have those familiar words in the beginning of John’s Gospel here about the Word, which was with God from all eternity, coming to take on flesh in the world.
- A beautiful key to this passage for families and married couples is the reminder that “…to those who did accept Him he gave the power to become children of God…”
- Think about that: if we were given the power to become children of God, that instructs us that there is some work on our part to cooperate with God so that exalted existence is embraced, and becomes a guidepost for our actions within our homes and family life.

Food for Thought:
If you are a child of God, does that shape the actions you make each day? As a parent, do you recognize in your own children that they, too, are Children of God? In that same spirit, do our actions and responsibilities as parents hold up to the standard God may set for us, namely to lay down our lives for these children He has sent into your marriage?

Petition:
That parents love each day with tenderness, while teaching their children of the power and love of God, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
When God came to earth, when the “Word became flesh,” our Almighty Father sanctified each human person, the very young, and the very old, the very weak and the very strong. He made His dwelling among us, so that we might learn from Jesus what it means to love, and what it means to set aside our own life, our own desires, each day for our families. Jesus came to teach us how to lay down our lives for our friends.
January 6th, The Epiphany of the Lord

First Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6
- In mentioning the gifts of gold and frankincense, Isaiah offers a prediction of what we read in Matthew’s Gospel. In addition, we have the beautiful phrase, “gather and come to you,” that speaks to the sons and daughters.
- In our world, there are conflicting ideas on the meaning of family life. This becomes a good place to start with these questions: What are your family’s gifts? What are the strengths, values, and relationships that make up your own gold, frankincense, and myrrh?
- We would do well to spend some time with our family counting up the spiritual gifts that are shared within the family and among its members. The greatest of these gifts is love.

Second Reading: Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6
- God’s Word continues to be revealed to us. As St. Paul wrote, “… [the mystery of Christ] which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed….”
- There is truth to this verse, even today. When we understand scripture, we do so within the context of 2,000 years of Christianity and with the benefit of interpretation and scholarship of St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and others. Their insight was not available in Paul’s time.
- We do well to reflect on what it means to share the Word of God, revealed in the Incarnation of Jesus, within our family. Could you consider family story-time that reflects on the scriptures? Have you used a children’s bible to begin telling stories of faith to the little ones in your home?

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12
- Our world is a crazy, civil, and secular society with set standards for correctness that, quite simply, are in conflict with Jesus and the Gospel.
- The Magi are a model for how parents need to educate their children about humility and authentic teaching. They gave deference first to Herod, the local king, but then learning of his treachery, they failed to return to him. More importantly, we see these great men, important men, wise men from the East prostrating themselves before a newborn baby in the clutches of poverty in a stable.
- Do we recognize the Infant Jesus in the poor of our world? Are parents teaching their children to care for those less fortunate, without regard for the secular designation of “Who is important?” Jesus, from His very birth in poverty, calls parents to teach their children what it means to be countercultural and to use their own gifts to care for the poor.

Food for Thought:
The Magi, wise men from the East who came in search of Jesus, traveled long distances, at great expense and risk, on an unknown quest. When they arrived, they immediately recognized the sacred
royalty of this poor child in a stable. Do we recognize the Infant Jesus in the poor of our world? Are parents teaching their children to care for those less fortunate? Jesus, from His very birth in poverty, calls parents to teach their children what it means to be countercultural and to use their own gifts to care for the poor.

**Petition:**
That parents have the courage and the wisdom of the Magi to recognize Christ among the poor, and with grateful hearts, teach their children to care for all those who are less fortunate in the world, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
What would it take for us to become “Magi” and to venture across long distances at great risk to find the unknown Christ child? When the Magi arrived, they immediately recognized the sacred royalty of this poor child in the stable. Do we recognize the Infant Jesus in the poor of our world? Are parents teaching their children to care for those less fortunate? Jesus, from His very birth in poverty, calls parents to teach their children what it means to be countercultural and to use their own gifts to care for the poor.
The Baptism of the Lord

First Reading: Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

- It is interesting to note that the servant of the Lord described in this reading will bring justice to the nations by NOT crying out, by NOT shouting.
- In married life, humility is an important character trait; it is necessary when we make a mistake – and we all make many.
- This passage in Isaiah speaks of the mission to establish justice and to teach – key elements of the responsibilities that parents take on at the baptism of their children. We can’t help but recall the baptism of those we love in our families when we celebrate the feast of Jesus’ baptism in the River Jordan.

Second Reading: Acts 10:34-38

- In the Acts, Peter speaks directly to the difference between the baptism preached by John the Baptist and God the Father’s anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit.
- On this day celebrating Jesus’ baptism, we need to ask ourselves these questions: Does it make a difference that you are baptized? (It should!) Do you recall that each day?

Gospel: Matthew 3:13-17

- “This is my beloved son or daughter” is what God said to each of us at our baptism. It is important to “claim” your right as a beloved son or daughter of God.
- We need to remember each day that we are baptized and to allow that reminder to influence our actions.
- One suggestion: Take your baptismal candle out of the hope chest and place it on a table near your doorway, perhaps where you leave your keys. It will serve as a reminder each time you go out that you are baptized, and more importantly, each time you return that your home is a Catholic home with a foundation of love and living the Gospels in all you do as a family.

Food for Thought
We all know our birthday, but how many know our baptismal day? We all know our age (and sometimes feel it all day long!), but do we know that we are baptized on a daily basis? Married couples need to recognize that their baptism is the foundation of their Sacrament of Matrimony. Reminding themselves that their spouse stands before them as the beloved, adopted son or daughter of a loving Father ought to change how they interact with each other.

Petition:
That parents and children will celebrate their own baptisms on this Feast of the Baptism of the Lord and, through their words and actions, share the Light of Christ with those in their homes and their communities, we pray to the Lord.
Bulletin Announcement:
Henri Nouwen wrote that we need to “claim our belovedness,” that free gift from God given at our baptism. Couples have the sacred opportunity to claim the belovedness of their spouse and of their children. Today, we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord, but we should also celebrate our own baptism and continue that celebration every day. Consider placing a white candle near the front door of your home as a daily reminder when you leave that you are baptized and when you return that your home is a Catholic home, rooted in Jesus’ own baptism. It is a home where, through words and actions, we invite God to continue to pour out His grace and love into all who dwell there.
1st Sunday of Lent

First Reading: Genesis 2: 7-9, 3: 1-7

- God’s life is in each of us.
- God gave us beautiful creation and free will.
- We were created for familial community and unfettered relationship with God and one another.
- When we sin, we often try to take others down with us.
- When we sin, we hide our nature and become ashamed of the beauty that God created us to be.

Second Reading: Romans 5: 12-19

- Our actions affect one another—we can save, or we can harm.
- The good that we do, through God’s mercy, goes farther than the bad.
- Jesus is our brother who came to live with us as family to bring salvation.
- Jesus’ example is a model for how families can bring life to one another.

Gospel: Matthew 4: 1-11

- Parents have to remember that everyone experiences temptation.
- Children should remember that even Jesus experienced temptation—and it can be overcome.
- We all need to remember that the Devil is no match for God.
- The Devil only offered Jesus what already belonged to Him—if He had accepted it, He would have lost everything.
- Only God has anything of value to offer—everything else is smoke and mirrors—and we need our families to keep us grounded in the truth.

Food For Thought:
God created us in His own image and created us for one another. When we live as families rooted in Christ, we reflect Jesus to one another, bolster one another in faith, and make each member stronger. Temptation touches everyone and can be overcome. Jesus is our perfect example and savior and, being made in His image, we can be that presence to one another.

Story:
When Ben was four years old, he asked if he could brush his teeth unsupervised. His mother hesitated, but he pleaded with her, saying that he could do it just fine by himself. Wanting to give him the opportunity to prove himself, his mom agreed. Whatever crazy toddler thought entered his mind was too powerful to resist, and the child squirted the toothpaste all over the bathroom mirror. When his mother returned (finding things too quiet) and saw the mess, she yelled, “What were you thinking?!” When she later shared her son’s behavior with her husband, his response was, “What were you thinking leaving a four year old alone to brush his teeth?!” They all laughed
about it later and used it as an opportunity to talk about personal responsibility—why we need supervision and help from others, and how our choices, when we give into temptation, affect us.

**Petition:**
For all families as they face the temptations of the world, that united in Christ they will strengthen one another against every harm, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Temptation is all around us—but it doesn’t have to master us. In and of itself, temptation is not a sin—it’s how we choose to respond to it that matters. How does belonging to a family (your own family, or God’s family) help keep you on the straight and narrow? How is your example helpful to others who might be struggling with something?
2nd Sunday of Lent

First Reading: Genesis 12: 1-4a
- Abram had to go out on his own. He had to leave his family behind to follow God.
- God promised to give Abram a huge family, which is an enormous blessing.
- God was going to make a covenant with Abram’s family, because family is where God meets us first.
- The relationship between God, Abram, and family was going to overflow into the community, bringing them blessings.

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 1: 8b-10
- God calls all of us to a holy life.
- A holy life includes bearing burdens.
- Our relationship with the Father and with our brother, Jesus, brings eternal life.

Gospel: Matthew 17: 1-9
- When Jesus goes up to the mountain, He takes only a few of His friends with Him to observe the transfiguration. It wasn’t for everyone.
- When Jesus was transfigured, Moses and Elijah, who represent the law and the prophets, appeared. This signified that Jesus is the fulfillment of those two aspects of our relationship with God and the fulfillment of the covenant with Abram.
- God speaks to the observers of this event, calling Jesus His Son. They are to listen to him.
- The relationship between the Father and Jesus needed to be revealed in this way to the Apostles so that they would understand it in the resurrection.
- The transfiguration was something of a retreat experience for the apostles.

Food For Thought:
God made a covenant with Abram, promising him a gigantic family. This didn’t happen right away, but took many years to accomplish. Abram and Sarai’s fidelity to God as they waited and waited for the promise to be fulfilled made “fertile ground,” as it were, for God to work with them. Like Abram’s family, we are all called to be holy. It is within the marriage covenant and within our families that we first learn to be holy. We are given a privileged glimpse into the relationship between the Father and Jesus through the scene of the transfiguration, where Jesus is revealed as the fulfillment of God’s covenant with His family. The human family is one of the most complete expressions of the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity. Jesus invites us to join him, along with our families (the ones we live with and our church family), to a sort of retreat where we’re given a chance to spend some time apart from the daily cares of the world in order to know God more perfectly.
**Story:**
When Barbara was a young girl, her dad would periodically take her (and separately, her sisters) on a date. He would choose a special place (usually the planetarium) to take them after having dinner and ice cream at Friendly’s. It was great because, growing up in a family of five children with a father who worked a lot, getting any quiet time was rare, and time spent with just one parent was even rarer. Their dad made each of them feel like they mattered to him, taught them how they ought to be treated when they went out on real dates, and gave them a “thing” that belonged to just the two of them (for Barbara it was the planetarium). It was also a time to get to know one another. They could talk about their day, their interests, their feelings, and science. For Barbara, it was a way of knowing what personal attention from a father was like, and reflecting on it as an adult, what personal attention from the Father was like. The covenant between human parents and children is a direct reflection of the covenant God made with His children.

Experiencing that care makes an impact. It draws us in so we want to live a life reflective of him, and gives us the tools to do it.

**Petition:**
That families will take time or retreat moments where they can experience God together, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
God calls us to times of retreat—time to get away and make opportunities for revelation and developing closeness to God and to people in our lives. This is a main ingredient for a healthy spiritual life. How do you take time personally to spend quiet time with God? How do you do this as a family? How have you found God revealed to you in those times?
3rd Sunday of Lent

First Reading: Exodus 17: 3-7
- The Hebrew people didn’t know God very well when they entered the desert.
- They were essentially refugees—people of all ages and levels of wellness.
- The desert was harsh, and the future (as far as the people could see) was uncertain.
- Being thirsty is scary, but having your children and elderly in a state of dehydration is dangerous.
- God provided for His family, even though they nagged and whined at Him (via Moses).

Second Reading: Romans 5: 1-2, 5-8
- Jesus died for the ungodly.
- Jesus gives us peace; hope does not disappoint.
- Sacrifice is hard even when it’s for a good person, but God loves us so much that He died for us when we weren’t good.

Gospel: John 4: 5-42
- The woman at the well was avoiding her community because she was a sinner.
- Jesus, breaking pretty much every convention at the time, spoke to her in an effort to evangelize.
- The woman had been married five times and was living with another guy. Jesus invited her into a relationship with Him.
- The woman believed that Jesus was offering her an “out” from her community by offering her “living water,” but it was really reconciliation with her community through baptism that He offered.
- Jesus spoke, without harshness, the truth to her, and she accepted it.
- Her conversion was so spectacular that the community that had no respect for her accepted her evangelization and came to believe in Jesus as a result of her belief.

Food For Thought:
Real thirst is supremely dangerous—without water there can be no life. The Hebrew people were desperate for water and fearful for their lives and the lives of their children. Jesus died for us while we were still sinners because that’s when we needed it. He didn’t wait for us to be good to offer us wholeness (we wouldn’t have needed it). The encounter that Jesus had with the woman at the well is proof of this. He approached a woman who He knew was sinful and offered her wholeness—offered her (a five-time divorcee living “in sin”) Baptism. His compassionate, persistent, loving approach converted her heart, which in turn, converted a whole town of Samaritans. Our definition of “family” these days is as diverse as it was in Jesus’ time. He didn’t ignore people who were in irregular marriages, or turn people (or their children) away because of them. He sought the people out and ministered to them. Our world has a real “thirst” for Jesus.

We need to make sure that we’re not withholding the “living water” from anyone.
**Story:**
When Sheila was approximately ten years old, her parents took in a young woman from Birthright. The woman, Marie, had become pregnant out of wedlock by a guy who wound up in prison. She was shunned by her family because she refused to abort the baby. Since Sheila was the only person in the house who had her own room, Marie (and eventually the baby Brandon) bunked with her. Sheila had the unique opportunity to watch Marie grow and prepare to have this baby that she would have to support alone. She watched Marie, for love of her unborn child, step out in faith in a society that looked down upon unwed mothers. When Brandon was born, Marie’s family accepted her back. Her commitment to living for her child converted the hearts of her family. She didn’t give up on God or herself, and she didn’t shy away from life just because some people didn’t like her choices. She was a sign of God’s love to her son, to Sheila’s family and to everyone who watched her persevere and succeed. Jesus reached out to her through Birthright, and she reflected Jesus to the world.

**Petition:**
That our families will be living water that flows into our communities for one another, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
The water that God gave the Hebrews was a foreshadowing of the Baptism that Jesus would offer. Jesus is “living water” and wants to give Himself to everyone. Jesus reaches out to those who don’t fit the mold of the “religious person” - that’s who He died for. How does our Church make “non-traditional” families feel welcome (or do they)? How does my family reach out to those who feel outcast?
4th Sunday of Lent

First Reading: 1 Samuel 16: 1b, 6-7, 10-13a

- Samuel was sent to anoint the next King of Israel by selecting from the sons of Jesse in Bethlehem.
- David, the eighth son is symbolically the extra kid, since seven is perfection. Yet, David is chosen by God.
- Normally, the oldest would be the son most likely selected because of his standing in the family. Because of his low standing in the family, David the youngest would be overlooked.
- God is not concerned with age order, our perception of honor or our ideas of who should be chosen.
- God sees the heart of a person and calls each of us accordingly.

Second Reading: Ephesians 5: 8-14

- As God’s children, we are children of the light.
- We should avoid the darkness of sin.
- Eventually, everything we do will be brought into the light.
- We are meant to live “spiritually awake”—to be vigilant, aware, and attentive—making choices in the light of faith.

Gospel: John 9: 1-4

- Jesus healed a man who was born blind. The man was comfortable after his healing in telling everyone what happened. He testified to Jesus having healed him.
- His parents were afraid and wouldn’t back him up. They put it all back on their son.
- The Pharisees refused to see the truth about Jesus—He said that their resistance was choosing to be blind.
- Jesus made a point of refuting the teaching that sickness and misfortune are God’s punishment for sin.
- The man who was given his sight back was the only one in the story who was willing to let his heart be converted.

Food For Thought:
If I had a son who was disabled and then miraculously healed, I would have to believe in the one who healed him. However, fear is a strong motivator. Fear can block conversion. Sometimes entire families are blinded by assumptions, traditions or apathy from seeing the potential in one of their own. Families can be resistant to change and often prefer to remain in the dark rather than change. It is hard to accept the differences in their families—whether it’s a disability, a life choice, a change in religion, or even the choice of a spouse. The list could go on and on. As members of the Family of God, we are called to love with God’s heart, to see one another with God’s eyes and to be open to the great things that our spiritual brothers and sisters are capable of. We have to
resist the temptation to keep our children bound by our assumptions about them. We have to resist the temptation to try and keep people in our families from growing and changing just because it challenges our comfort level, habits, or dysfunctions.

**Story:**
When she was young, Sophie had a bumpy relationship with her mother. Sophie’s mother had a very hard relationship with her own mother and that dysfunction was continued into the next generation. Sophie’s mother told her when was a teen that, “Mothers and daughters are not supposed to like one another.” When told this, Sophie accepted that her mother didn’t like her and didn’t care if Sophie liked her. When she went away to college, Sophie sought counseling - she was not satisfied with this relationship and had other issues as well. She made great strides in understanding herself and understanding her mother and grandmother. When she came home, she set out to repair her relationship with her mother. Instead of seeing it as Sophie making an effort to know and relate to her, her mother was offended and believed Sophie was calling her a failure. They could not see one another—they could only see their hurts and feelings of rejection. They each had their histories, burdens, assumptions and views that prevented them from having an unfettered relationship. It took many years after that (and much prayer) for them to learn how to speak to one another in a way that wasn’t perceived as being antagonistic. They needed God’s help to open their eyes to see each other with God’s eyes. It was really challenging to see past the hurt to find the value in healing - but it was worth it.

**Petition:**
That families will be open to the work of God as they learn to love and accept one another, seeing one another’s gifts and abilities as a reflection of the love of Christ, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
This week, God shows us that at times the most unlikely folks become the greatest heroes. Often, the people who know them have the hardest time accepting their greatness. Have you ever overlooked greatness or giftedness in your family? Have you ever tried to hold someone in your family back—out of fear for them, jealousy, or selfishness? Perhaps it is simply because you are afraid to lose them?
5th Sunday of Lent

First Reading: Ezekiel 37: 12-14
- God keeps God’s promises.
- God will raise us up from our graves in the resurrection.
- We will know God perfectly at the end when this happens.

Second Reading: Romans 8: 8-11
- Jesus lives in us through the Spirit.
- Our bodies are corruptible, but the Spirit makes them righteous.
- Those who do not have the Spirit do not belong to Christ.
- God will raise up our bodies and make them immortal like our souls.

Gospel: John 11: 1-45
- Jesus was friends with a family of siblings for whom He felt very deeply.
- They were such good friends that they could speak openly and frankly with Jesus.
- When the brother, Lazarus, died, Jesus cried and was very disturbed by the sisters’ suffering.
- Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead to show us that He has power over life and death.
- The whole community was charged to assist in untangling Lazarus’ burial garments, freeing him so that he could live.

Food For Thought:
God is a God of the living. God takes no pleasure in death or destruction, but uses it (as God uses all things) for good. Our bodies will rise and be rejoined to our souls at the end of time. Jesus shows us that God grieves with us. Jesus gave Lazarus back to his sisters and his community as a sign before He died that He has power over death. He also showed us that we will live with Him in the resurrection. All of us are called to “untie” one another from the things that bind us—the things that prevent us from truly living. Jesus gives us life. We are asked to help one another live fully.

Story:
Leslee came to her husband’s Catholic parish with six weeks to live, according to her doctors, and she wanted to become Catholic before she passed away from her inoperable lung cancer. When she began the process, it was agreed that she would continue as long as she could manage—trying for Easter, but with the understanding that, if she became very ill, we would receive her when it became necessary. Her process included many conversations about God’s unconditional love for us, God’s mercy and forgiveness, and the resurrection. Her doctors were wrong. Leslee received a clean bill of health a couple of weeks before Easter. She had already been with the RCIA for several months. She made her profession of faith and received her Confirmation and Communion with her RCIA group and with the joy of her family and community. In her last weeks of preparation for the Sacraments, Leslee revealed that she came to the process terrified to die. As
they discussed the story of Lazarus, she shared that her “untying” was discovering from her new Catholic family that she was freed from the fear of death. She came to know God’s love through the Church’s unconditional love, through our service to her and her service to others, from the peace that she experienced in her new prayer life, and from the deepening of the relationship she experienced with her husband as they journeyed together through the RCIA rites. She now looked forward to the resurrection. Some months later her cancer came back, this time in her brain, and she succumbed to it that November. Leslee died in friendship with Christ, in relationship with her community, and in celebration of a life well-lived.

**Petition:**
That families will be a source of healing and freedom for one another and their communities, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
God does not delight in death, but rejoices in the fullness of life for His children. Death is an unfortunate consequence of sin, not created by God, but introduced through our disobedience. Jesus saves us from that consequence through His sacrifice on the cross, giving us eternal life, erasing the effects of death, and restoring us—body and soul—to live with Him in heaven forever.

How do you experience God as a lover of life? What comfort do you take in knowing that we will be raised body and soul? What do you think it will be like to be alive in heaven?
Palm (or Passion) Sunday

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7
- Salvation comes through suffering.
- Our gifts are from the Lord and for the Lord.
- He calls us and we respond.
- In Him there is no shame.

Second Reading: Philippians 2:6-11
- Jesus chooses humility over divinity.
- We are called to live as servants and avoid the sin of Adam
- We are called to nurture a humble, obedient life at any cost.

Gospel: Matthew 26:14-27:66 (long form)
- Judas falls to original sin. (What are you willing to give me?)
- The Last Supper on earth pre-empts the eternal banquet in heaven.
- Jesus prays, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will.”
- Jesus as the Suffering Servant fulfills the Isaiah prophecy and opposes the sin of Adam.
- We all share responsibility for Jesus’ death.
- We are all offered the forgiveness that comes through His obedience.

Food For Thought:
All family members desire family bonds that are built on love and joy. Parents often look for their children to be obedient. Children look to parents for stability and security. Families depend on a level of respect for basic harmony and peace, but when a member disrupts the flow, unity is threatened and pain ensues. Throughout our readings on this Passion Sunday, we are reminded of the roller coaster ride upon which love is built. From the Suffering Servant to the crucified Christ, fidelity to love remains steadfast. This is the constant that makes sense of the most profound week in our liturgical year. As we walk through Holy Week and enter fully into His passion, let us accept the mystery of the Father’s will and remain steadfast in our response.

Story:
An 8.2 earthquake in Armenia in 1989 killed 30,000 people in less than four minutes. Parents flooded the scene looking for their lost children amid debris and mayhem. One father had remembered telling his son that he would always be there for him. Standing beside the flattened school where his boy had been buried, he decided to begin digging.

Hour after hour went by, hope was lost, and people began to stop looking. Parents returned to their empty homes, and even emergency services began to leave. The distraught father was told he was a danger to others and must accept the fatal devastation.

Still, the father refused. He dug and dug, and in the 38th hour, he heard a voice and screamed his
son’s name, “Armand?”

“Dad?” replied his son. “I knew you would come. There are fourteen of us still alive. I told my friends that my dad would get us out, and you did.”

**Petition:**
That all those who feel abandoned or lost may know the Father’s love for them, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement**
What role do we play in our family life? Can we do more to care for others? What about our Parish family? During this Holy Week, let us be more available to others and trust more in our own heavenly Father!
Good Friday

First Reading: Isaiah 52:13-53:12
- Now we enter the last of the Servant Oracles from Isaiah.
- Isaiah prophecies the ignominious death awaiting the Lord.
- He highlights the low profile of Jesus to which “none were attracted.”
- The suffering theme is continued despite His innocence.
- It is through His horrifying death that our redemption has been won.

Second Reading: Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9
- Jesus completely understands our weaknesses.
- We are encouraged to confidently make our confession to receive grace and mercy.
- Jesus was made perfect through His obedience in suffering.
- When we obey Him, He will grant us salvation.

Gospel: John 18:1-19:42
- The story begins in a garden (just as man’s story originally began in a garden).
- Peter first turns to the sword, then he turns to denial (fight or flight).
- Pilate finds no guilt in Him and reluctantly carries out the charge.
- Jesus endures all the pain of the day until He knows it is accomplished.
- The story ends in a garden (signifying the new creation).

Food For Thought:
The Gospel narrative that we have just read strikes us as anything but “good” and yet the universal church celebrates Good Friday every year. Calling the day when Jesus was crucified as good seems to be the supreme paradox, but our notion of good is not that of the world. The sadness we feel at the torture and death of Our Lord is a godly sadness. The good aspect comes from the fact that because of His complete surrender, we are able to enter a new garden where the devil loses and Jesus becomes the new Adam. Because of this day, the old way is finished, and salvation has entered history. John’s account shows the garden tomb as a place of rebirth and resurrection and, as the Father looked at the initial creation and said “It was good,” so too does He look at this day and say it is good!

Story:
The Passion of Christ is filled with so many characters. There are leading roles, such as Pilate and Peter or Mary and John. There are also many scenes around the temple or praetorium, such as the Garden or Golgotha. Crowds appear throughout, weeping or ranting, and there are moments of peace and moments of madness. This story is filled with intense emotion and with characters that portray such emotion. Let us place ourselves for a moment in the heat of the day. Let us hear the sounds and smell the scents. Let us see what they saw and let us ask ourselves which side we might have taken. Do we cry out to Jesus for mercy, or do we cry “crucify Him”? 
The truth is that in our own stories we can become any and all of these characters over and over again. But the role that really matters is the one that no one else can play. Jesus is the central figure and it is He to whom we must turn, the one who dies on the cross for our sins. Let the goodness of this day fall down upon us like the grace and mercy that oozed from the side of Christ and fell upon the soldier and, like him, let us recognize that Jesus alone is Lord and Savior!

**Petition:**
Though the things of the world might distress us, let us always place our trust in Jesus and never lose hope in His saving grace, let us pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Let us enter into the silence of the Triduum and meditate on the ways in which we can uphold our Christian values in these times. The Church is the continuation of Christ’s purpose and person in space and time. How are we furthering His mission? Finally, as we sit in the silence of these three days, let us delight in the joy that is to come through the resurrection and recommit ourselves to shepherding the souls that have been given to us.
Holy Thursday

First Reading: Exodus 12:1-8; 11-14
- The Lord gives specific directions.
- Timing is everything.
- Eating on the go suits a pilgrim’s meal.
- The Passover feast is an annual celebration.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
- St Paul talks of giving away what we receive.
- The bread and wine become the Body and Blood.
- This is the new covenant, which supplants the Passover meal.

Gospel: John 13:1-15
- Jesus is fully aware of the gravity of this moment in time.
- He had received all the power from the Father.
- Rather than “lord” it over people, Jesus immediately served His fellow man.
- This is an example for us all to follow. We should wash each other’s feet.

Food For Thought:
Ordinarily, this is the perfect night to focus on the institution of the Eucharist, especially in a time when more and more people are struggling to believe in the Real Presence. Holy Thursday, however, also exemplifies the incarnate Body of Christ, the Church. Jesus is teaching us the importance of giving ourselves totally for another. It is the night when we consume Him who has given everything for us so that we might give everything for Him and for one another. We are being called to humbly receive Him so that we might better serve one another. Jesus lays out the blueprint for holiness. Husbands and wives should lay down their lives for each other.

Children should be obedient to their parents and siblings should support one another. Our readings tonight are not just for Holy Thursday, but for holy marriages, holy families, and holy lives.

Story:
Bishop Fulton Sheen once told the story of the person who most inspired him. He explained that the Communists who took over China entered a church and desecrated the tabernacle. In doing so they threw the ciborium to the floor discarding the 32 consecrated Hosts at the same time. The local priest was horrified as he watched from his nearby prison. His visage would soon change as he later saw a small girl, who had gone unnoticed, praying fervently at the back of the church.

Each night the girl would return to the church to make a holy hour as an act of love to atone for the hatred of the Communists. She would then kneel in the sanctuary and, with her tongue on the floor, receive Jesus in the Eucharist. She continued this act each night until she had consumed the final consecrated Host. On that last night she accidentally made a noise which startled the soldiers. She was chased and caught and beaten to death by the butt of the soldier’s rifle. The girl, her nightly visits, and eventually her death were all witnessed by the imprisoned priest who recorded
these events. This act of heroic martyrdom inspired Bishop Fulton Sheen to make a holy hour every day of his life. As we contemplate the mysteries of this holy night, might we also watch one hour with Him?

**Petition:**
For a greater appreciation of religious freedom, let us pray to The Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
As Jesus gives us the model by which we are to live, let us consider how we might respond to serving those around us. Let us recognize that following Jesus sometimes means dealing with smelly feet. Let us also renew our commitment to adoring Him in the Holy Eucharist and to preparing ourselves better, in order to receive Him more worthily!
Easter Sunday – At the Vigil

First Reading: Genesis 1:1, 26-31a (short form)
- God creates man in His image.
- We are created to be fruitful and multiply.
- We are created to have dominion over all the earth.
- God looks at everything He created and finds it “very good.”

Second Reading: Genesis 22:1-2. 9a 10-13, 15-18 (short form)
- God calls to Abraham and tests him.
- Abraham’s faith saved Isaac, but an offering was still needed.
- Abraham was rewarded for his obedience to God.
- When we obey God, He blesses us abundantly.

Third Reading: Exodus 14:15-15:1
- God speaks to Moses and orders him to follow directions.
- God sends His angels to help His people.
- Moses follows directions, and his enemies are defeated.
- Moses and the people of Israel sang songs of thanksgiving to the Lord.

Fourth Reading: Isaiah 54: 5-14
- The Lord introduces Himself through Isaiah as the Redeemer.
- God promises His enduring love to His people forevermore.
- God offers peace and justice as long as we remain in His care.

Fifth Reading: Isaiah 55: 1-11
- The Lord invites us all to come to Him.
- God promises to renew His covenant with us.
- Though God’s ways are not our ways, if we do His will, God will be merciful.
- God’s generous forgiveness will bring new life.

Sixth Reading: Baruch 3:9-15, 32-4:4
- The Lord reminds us how sin brings about darkness, pain, and death, but fidelity brings light, peace, and life.
- Though we may fall away, God reminds us that He alone is almighty.
- Because of His greatness, God desires that we share fully of His riches.
Seventh Reading: Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28

• The Lord acts to uphold His holy name.
• Those who profane it will suffer; those who uphold it are blessed.
• They will be cleansed, given new hearts, and become new creations.
• They will then receive God’s spirit, live as His people, with Him as their God!

Epistle: Romans 6:3-11

• St. Paul explains the riches of death to new life through baptism.
• Christ has risen from the dead so we might live with Him.
• We also need to die to sin so we might live for God.
• This is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises.

Gospel: Matthew 28:1-10

• The story begins at the garden tomb (just as man’s story originally began in a garden).
• The Angel of the Lord is the first to declare the resurrection.
• The women are invited to “Come and see the place where He lay.”
• The response from the guards was that of death, but the women were filled with joy.
• They meet the resurrected Christ and embrace His feet in homage.
• Jesus encourages them to not be afraid and to tell the brothers to come and see Him!

Food For Thought:
In our readings we are bombarded with Old Testament accounts of God’s love for His people. It is a love story, a story of perfect creation, and then of treachery, sin, and shame. It is a story of forgiveness and conversion, new life, and everlasting peace. How many times do we turn away from God? How many times do we fall to the seduction of worldly things? This is a story about our forefathers, and yet it is a story that continues today. Finally, it is a story about Our Father in heaven, our creator, and a story that states how God never gives up on us. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. St. Paul reminds us that through His death and resurrection we have the promise of new life. Salvation history is complete, and we are now offered a full inheritance in the kingdom. Jesus tells us not to be afraid and invites us to come and see Him (just as He invited the first disciples). Now it’s our turn to respond!
**Story:**
Two friends spent years living with Jesus before His ignominious court case, charge, and subsequent death and resurrection. Each had been so profoundly affected by His life that they had offered up their own lives to follow Him. The night Jesus was taken, both men separated and ran away blindly. They became lost and alone. They questioned everything that they previously had thought was true. Both turned away from Jesus. Both were guilty of the same act and suffered similar consequences as a result of their sin. By the time Easter morning arrived and the news of His resurrection began to spread, the guilt and shame that oppressed the first man had proved too much, and in a state of despair, he took his own life. Judas was found hanging from a tree. The other man became the first of the disciples to run to the empty tomb. Though guilt and shame had crushed his world, a renewed hope brought about repentance and recommitment. He was able to show his contrition and to restate his love. Peter would become the first Pope of the Catholic Church. Each had the same sin, but each had different results. As we rejoice in the resurrection of Christ, we should make a decision to follow St. Peter’s example and recommit ourselves to our risen Lord!

**Petition:**
For all those who are in darkness or suffering from the bondage of sin, may those bonds be broken, and new light shine upon them, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement**
As we stand before the open tomb this Easter, may we be filled with new joy. Let us look to spread the good news that Jesus has set us free and calls us to live a life of abundance. May our families be witnesses to the love and the joy that filled the early church and be springboards of that same love to all they encounter!
Easter Sunday – Mass of Easter Day

First Reading: Acts 10:4a, 37-43
- Like Peter, when we accept Jesus, we follow His commands and proceed to speak.
- We are witnesses like Peter. We are called to tell people about who Jesus is and what He has done for us.
- We are all commissioned to spread the news of God’s forgiveness of our sins.

Second Reading: Colossians 3:1-4
- We are family. St. Paul begins “brothers and sisters.”
- As Christians we must focus on the things of heaven.
- Now we must put our old life to death and live a new life in the risen Christ.

Gospel: John 20:1-9
- Mary of Magdala was the first to arrive and the first to tell others.
- Peter and John were the first disciples to visit the empty tomb.
- The reverence for the tomb is like our reverence for the sanctuary.
- The two men see the empty tomb and believe (even though they do not understand).

Food For Thought
One week has passed since we came to church and shouted “Hosanna to the King.” Everything that we prepared for throughout the season of Lent has come to fruition. All of our prayers, our fasting, and our almsgiving are for this day. Holy Week is over. We have witnessed the treachery of Judas, the intimate friendships at the Last Supper, the bleeding sweat of the Lord, the tangled web woven by the Jewish authorities, the fickle superficiality of Herod the Tetrarch, and the horrors of Roman torture and subsequent death. We have also witnessed the tears of a mother, the kindness of a tomb owner, and the paranoia of those who guard the dead man. Then the world went quiet. The things we didn’t see include the descent into hades, the freeing of our forefathers, the victory over death, the anger of Satan, the rejoicing in heaven, and the stone rolled away from the tomb as the resurrection of Jesus changes everything. Holy Week may be over, but everything else now begins.

Story:
In 1994, the Rwanda genocide took almost one million lives after the Aids/HIV epidemic had already wiped out a large portion of the population. In 1995, an orphan, who had lost his family in the genocide and to the Aids epidemic, had almost given up hope when he received shoes for Christmas. It was a gift that would transform more than his feet. Alex Nsengimana recently graduated from a college in New York with a degree in Pastoral Ministry. He has not only survived the devastation, he has thrived. Alex was able to return to Rwanda and go to the prison where his family member’s killer was held. He ministered to the man and forgave him. Alex returned to his old orphanage with new shoes for everyone. He also plans on opening a church in his village for reconciliation and healing.
Saint Pope John Paul II was said to have forgiven his would be assassin, Ali Agca, on his way to the hospital after being shot. The two later met in prison where the Holy Father declared the necessity for reconciliation in a world that wants us to be enemies.

He also said that there can be no love without forgiveness. This is a day of reconciliation. It is a day of forgiveness. It is day of love. Happy Easter Sunday!

**Petition:**
That we will have the ability to forgive one another today and be a resurrection community of love, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement**
As we celebrate this day, let us ask the Lord to roll away the stones in our hearts so we too might be free to forgive others and to receive forgiveness from others. Let us follow the examples of those who have gone before us and witness the incredible love of our resurrected Lord and Savior to all we meet.
2nd Sunday of Easter

First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 2: 42-47
- Families are called to the communal life.
- Each day families share the breaking of bread and prayers.
- Each day this domestic church should share with exultation and sincerity of heart.
- Each day we’re called to lift each other up, to share each other’s joys and challenges.
- Parents are in charge of this communal process in the home and in the sharing.

Second Reading: 1 Peter 1: 3-9
- Just as parents have hopes for their children, God gives us new hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- We bring this understanding to our children: that life will have struggles, but those struggles will strengthen us to enjoy the glory of God.
- Married couples will also have struggles throughout their marriage, yet their genuine love for one another will outstand the test of time. This love becomes a choice—it does not just happen.
- Both married couples and families must work to attain the goal of their faith—the salvation of souls.
- It is the job and responsibility of each spouse to help their partner to attain holiness, Heaven, and salvation.

Gospel: John 20: 19-31
- As parents, we all may, at one point, have a little doubting Thomas tugging at us, saying, “Where is God? Why can’t I see Him?”
- We may ask ourselves, as tragedy befalls us, “Where is the loving God I believed in?”
- A parent’s job is to walk children through this doubt towards faith, showing by example how to “believe without seeing.”

Food For Thought:
If we come together communally and ritually, if we guide and support each other throughout the struggles and trials of life, then Jesus is already present in our midst through this love. That is the gift that Jesus gives us in each other, the power to work together to lead each other towards salvation and to celebrate the glory of God in everything we do.

Petition:
That families join together in the worship of our Lord, help each other through the trials of life, and grow towards the goal of getting each other into Heaven, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
When we come together communally and ritually, if we guide and support each other throughout the struggles and trials of life, then Jesus is present in our midst through this gift of love.
3rd Sunday of Easter

First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 2:14, 22-33

- It was impossible for Jesus to be held by death, but it is possible for us.
- Just as David spoke of the Resurrection, we must speak of it to our children.
- Just as David was not abandoned, neither will we be if we share this good news.

Second Reading: 1 Peter 1:17-21

- “Conduct yourselves with reverence” must be modeled in the home by the parents.
- How we dress in church, how we act in (and after) church, and how we speak about church should be reverent.
- “So that your faith and hope are in God” is the answer to children when tragedy strikes in families. It is necessary for children to see their parents call on God (“invoke as Father”).
- Children must know where to turn, or the world becomes hopeless and scary.
- It is clear that they should turn to Jesus. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.


- “In the breaking of the bread” we are nourished by each other and by Jesus.
- Families break bread together every night. It is here that we learn about, become known to, and unite with each other. We know that we are part of something bigger than ourselves (part of a family that loves us and cares about our concerns and joys in life).
- So too, when we come together at Mass, we learn about our Lord, let the Lord in on our yearnings and thankfulness, and unite with Christ. We know that we are part of something larger (part of a community of believers - God’s children).

Petition:
That in the breaking of the bread, family members realize the bond they share with each other and with Jesus, and parents have the love and courage to respond as Christ did, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Families break bread together every night. It is here that we learn about, become known to, and unite with each other. We know that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. When we come together at Mass, we learn about our Lord, let the Lord in on our yearnings and thankfulness, and unite with Christ. We know that we are part of something larger – The Body of Christ!
4th Sunday of Easter

First Reading: Acts 2: 14a, 36-41

- “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” (Acts 2:40). Just as it was 2000 years ago, it is important today to separate ourselves from the ways of the world. We are called to save our children from the world’s corruption.
- Peter teaches and encourages us to follow the way of Christ.
- In Baptism, parents promise to teach and guide their children in Christian living.
- During Confirmation, children make the promise to follow Christ themselves.
- Peter recalls and emphasized the promise of Jesus “to you and your children…” (Acts 2:39). In this verse Jesus is clear. It is the job of the family, especially the parents to pass on the faith.

Second Reading: 1 Peter 2: 4-9

- Christ and the Church teach us to be patient, especially in suffering.
- Children are not naturally graced with patience. They expect instant gratification.
- Parents can best teach patience by example.
- Children learn how to follow Christ by following their parents. They watch to see how their parents act. Do parents display patience or do they exhibit anger and resentment?
- In suffering, do parents turn to God with faith and hope? Are they willing to lean on the promise and wait on God’s will?

Gospel: John 14: 1-12

- It is the mission of the parents to be an example to their children. They lead the way on the path to following Christ. Jesus is the way. By their own example of being patient in suffering, parents become the primary teachers. This job belongs only to the parents. Religious education can be a support but it is the parents who pass on the faith.
- Parents need to teach their children about the mission of Jesus.
- Parents need to instruct and guide their children to follow Christ every day. Instructing that faith is a way of life not just restricted to Sundays and religious holidays.
- This way of life is a day by day commitment, taught by example, and guided by grace.

Story:
An aunt gave her nephew a St. Benedict medal to wear, and told him it was a ‘living prayer’ for his protection and that if he was wearing it when he died, he would go to Heaven. For months afterward, his mother had to assure him that going to heaven wasn’t that easy. She told him that there were no free tickets to Heaven, no guarantees. She’s still telling him that it is in following Jesus and being committed to His Church that we find our way. It is a lifelong struggle, aided by the sacramental life of the Church, to live a life worthy of God’s will for us. It is a parent’s duty to teach their children truth.
Petition
That all parents understand their commitment to teach their children the way of living life as a Christian, following our Savior Jesus Christ, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Children learn how to follow Christ by following their parents. They watch to see how their parents act. Parents need to instruct and guide their children to follow Christ every day. For parents, instructing in faith becomes a way of life, not just something special on Sundays and holidays.
5th Sunday of Easter


- “The ministry of the word” is to serve the community’s needs.
- Parents must model for their children that in following Jesus, the Word, they must step outside their homes to help the needy.
- When a family focuses on itself, it implodes, causing egotism and narcissism.
- Families can unite by focusing on others.
- It also shows how fortunate one’s own life is.

Second Reading: 1 Peter 2:4-9

- “Come to Him” is an invitation.
- Let ourselves “be built into a spiritual house.” We can transform our own homes from a worldly house to a spiritual home, devoted to God.
- We are called in our domestic homes to be a model to other families who see us.
- Being chosen has the responsibility of acting on our faith, not just studying it and praying once a week.

Gospel: John 14:1-12

- “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in Me.” This is step one in following Jesus.
- If we hold onto our faith and our hope, then we will be with God for eternity.
- The unity of God the Father and God the Son should manifest itself in the unity of the family.
- When we don’t understand, we ask, “How do I do this, Lord?” The answer is always that Jesus is the Way. Trust in Him and have faith in Him.

Story:
Recently a woman was asked to give a talk on marriage and family life for her parish. She said to her pastor, “Are you sure you want ME? I’m a wreck! I fail so often.” She thought to herself, I’m a fraud. How can I speak to these things I don’t do consistently very well? Her pastor said to her, “You are a woman of faith and spiritual strength. You can do this.” And she did.

Petition:
That families find the unity in their homes to serve those outside their homes and to remain faithful, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
In today’s Gospel we hear, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in Me.” A key to turning our houses into homes is to have them become the place where we begin and each day placing our trust in Jesus.
6th Sunday of Easter

First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 8: 5-8, 14-17

- Because of the gift of the Holy Spirit, we can call on Him always for all that we need.
- Both the Church and the family (parents) have a role in the bestowal of the Spirit which is to model/practice the tenets of our faith.

Second Reading: 1 Peter 3: 15-18

- “Always be ready to give an explanation … for a reason for your hope.”
- Parents must talk about this hope and make it a daily pronouncement.
- Children must not be stuck in the corruption of immediacy, but have patience and hope.
- Families must work together towards a hope in everlasting life, not towards a materialistic one here on earth.

Gospel: John 14: 15-21

- As parents we must speak of the “Spirit of truth whom the world cannot accept” loudly at home because the world is louder than we are!
- The cycle of love Jesus taught the disciples, the love He shared with us which we return to Him in our obedience to His commandments and the love we share with each other, is learned at home from the primary teachers in the home: the parents.
- We must realize that we hold the gift of this Spirit, if only we remember that He is with us always. The Spirit is within us.

Food For Thought:
The only way to battle a world that cannot accept God is to make it a way of life and existence in the home. All our needs are met by God, and even the habit of saying grace before meals acknowledges this.

Petition:
That families have the courage to speak out about their faith in the hope of bringing others to God’s love, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Our world is noisy, with many messages conflicting with what we hear from Jesus. Parents, creating Catholic homes where they share and teach the faith, need to be bold in making sure that their children hear the “Spirit of truth whom the world cannot accept.”
7th Sunday of Easter

First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 1:12-14

- “All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer.” (Acts 1:14)
- In times of fear and unknowing, it is necessary to pray.
- Families must pray together out loud—and not just before meals.
- Even removing themselves from the world is not a bad idea for families.
- Many lessons from the apostles’ examples pertain to families: pray, believe, hope, stay.

Second Reading: 1 Peter 4:13-16

- Have faith in the risen Christ, even if you suffer for this.
- The true judge is God. Your judgment is between you and God. If your actions are done in God’s name, you should not be ashamed.
- Parents should model righteousness for their children.
- When parents surround themselves with other good Catholics of a like mind and spirit, children, as they grow, can be surrounded by this true faith in their youth, before venturing into the harsh world.

Gospel: John 17:1-11a

- “I do not pray for the world but for those you have given me.” Jesus’ prayer includes not only His disciples, but us, too.
- To be given this faith is our gift in this world.

Story:
A young woman, on her own faith journey, left our Catholic faith for a while. Her mother, trying to bring her back, told her, “This Catholic faith is in your blood. It is our family tradition and belief. If you reject one then you reject the other.” The young woman did come back to the church—and with a vengeance! She taught, sang, distributed the Holy Eucharist, and still does! When her mother passed away, her son said her Catholic faith was in her DNA, and in the whole families’ DNA. To be given to Jesus is truly a reason to be glad!

Petition:
That families realize the gift of being given to Jesus, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement
The Gospel today gives us a chance to eavesdrop on Jesus’ prayer to His Father about us; we are the adopted sons and daughters given to Him, and He prays for us and acts in our lives so that we might reflect His message into the world around us. We can do that, you and I, young and old, when it becomes second nature in our homes to pray together and speak of Jesus as a friend.
Ascension of the Lord

First Reading: Acts 1:1-11
- There is more to come; the Holy Spirit will empower you.
- “Why are you still here? There’s work to do.”

Second Reading: Ephesians 1:17-23
- St. Paul prays beautifully for the Ephesians that they receive the spirit of wisdom and insight to enter more deeply into knowledge of the Lord.
- Christ has been raised up and is the head of the church.

Gospel: Matthew 28:19-20
- This is the conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel.
- Jesus gives the Great Commission.
- We, too, have been commissioned by Jesus to “make disciples of all the nations.”
- We can stand on the promise that Jesus will be with us always, “until the end of the world.”

Food For Thought:
God always calls us into relationship/deeper relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and with our brothers and sisters in the world.

We see that, even as Jesus ascends into heaven, He and His Father are concerned for His disciples and will send Their Holy Spirit to them. Their concern is much like the love of a parent for his/her child.

Because of our Baptism, we have been given a special relationship in God’s family – Jesus lives in us. Each of us is called to go into the world and share that life with others. We can and should tell the Good News by the way that we live and love. How? We can feed the hungry, comfort the lonely, and visit the sick. We can work to correct injustice in our societies and we can build strong, faithful, and loving families. In all these ways we build God’s kingdom on earth.

Story:
Students of all ages will soon be graduating from their respective schools and looking to the future. Many similar comments and advice will be offered at ceremonies ranging from Kindergarten “moving up” exercises to University commencements. In some of them, highly paid guest speakers will offer their insights on the world that awaits the graduates. In others, the local principal or teacher will have the microphone. Whatever the particular situation may be, there will be talk about the future and the “next steps” for the graduates. There will be talk of how well the institution and its faculty have prepared the students. The students will be encouraged to “go and make a difference” or to “fulfill your dreams,” all the while remembering the lessons they have learned and putting them into practice.

Obviously, I am suggesting a parallel between these experiences and that of the disciples as Jesus gathered them for the final farewell. But Jesus’ speech was not long-winded, and His words
carried something graduation addresses never can - the promise of the Holy Spirit, i.e. a guide to help the disciples fully understand their role and to interpret all the lessons they had learned.

Whatever fear or trepidations they might have upon their graduation would be taken care of by the Spirit. No school or university can promise a personal assistant/guide to journey with their new graduates. Only our loving God who cares about each one of us is able to provide for us in this special and unique way.

So, we have heard God’s Word. What do we do now? As we are sent back into the world from this holy place, pray… and pray some more…“Fill us, Lord, with Your Holy Spirit! Show us Your way!”

**Petition:**
That all Christians might open themselves more fully to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit and put them into action, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
“But wait! There’s more!” Jesus ascends into heaven, but that’s not the end of the story. The disciples will receive the Holy Spirit. We, too, will receive the Holy Spirit so that we can do the good work of being witnesses to God’s great love. Have you thought recently about how you respond to the Holy Spirit in your life?
Pentecost – At the Vigil

First Reading: Genesis 11:1-9

- Men who were migrants worked together to build a tower around which they could form an identity and not be scattered all over the earth. “Why are you still here? There’s work to do.”
- God had commanded Noah and his descendants to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gn 9:1), not to congregate in cities.
- Building the tower or monument was seen as disobedience to God’s will for men to spread out and fill the land and not congregate in cities.
- Arrogance and pride seemed to be at work among the men, for they wanted to build a tower to the sky.
- Speaking the same language, the men conspired against God’s will. After God confused their language, His will for them to disperse was fulfilled.

OR

First Reading: Exodus 19: 3-8, 16-20

- Through Moses, the Lord reminds the Israelites of His devotion to them and the covenant established with them. If they listen to God’s word and keep the covenant, they will be a kingdom of priests and a holy people.
- The Lord appears at Mount Sinai and calls Moses to the top of the mountain.

OR

First Reading: Ezekiel 37: 1-14

- The Lord speaks through Ezekiel and tells him to prophesy to the Spirit regarding the dry bones. Breathe life into them and remake them into living flesh. Jesus gives the Great Commission.
- God will do the same for the house of Israel who had lost hope. “I will put my spirit in you that you may live.” He says this emphatically: “I have promised it, and I will do it, says the Lord.” (vs. 14) We can stand on the promise that Jesus will be with us always, “until the end of the world.”

OR

First Reading: Joel 3:1-5

- God will pour out His Spirit upon all mankind: men, women, young, old. And He will do great wonders.
- On the Day of the Lord there will be a faithful remnant who will survive and be called by the Lord.
Second Reading: Romans 8:22-27
- We cannot fully understand or explain how the Spirit Himself pleads and intercedes for us.

Gospel: John 7:37-39
- Jesus invites those who thirst to come to Him, for He has living water from within.
- John (vs.39) explains that the living water is the Spirit.

Food For Thought:
Do we really understand the Holy Spirit of God? It has been written about, prophesied and promised. Those of us who are baptized and confirmed have received the Holy Spirit, but are we aware of the gifts and do we use them? Not only have we received the Holy Spirit sacramentally, but it is through the Spirit that we begin to understand the gifts. Although many times our words fail to express the fullness of this reality, it is through praying for openness to the workings of the Spirit that we come closer to understanding.

Story:
Words are inadequate to describe the Holy Spirit. Symbols include tongues of fire or a gentle dove. It is the breath of God. It can be fierce, as in the beginning of Mark’s gospel, as the Spirit drives Jesus into the desert to be tempted. And, as we read the Pentecost account in Acts tomorrow morning, the Spirit’s manifestation seems to be a tornado or earthquake that shakes the house. These metaphors are the imagination’s way of envisioning something of God for which there really are no words. It is really not so different from a poet’s struggle to articulate what love is.

In the charming 1994 Italian film The Postman (Il postino), Mario, an unschooled postman, befriends the famous Chilean poet Pablo Neruda who has come to live on this very small island, by delivering his mail each day. Mario is desperately in love with a girl, but is hopelessly tongue-tied. He asks the poet for help, and the conversation turns to metaphors.

Neruda explains to the simple man: It’s “when you talk of something, comparing it to another. For example when you say, ‘the sky weeps,’ what do you mean?”

“That it’s raining,” Mario says, and the postman gradually becomes empowered, knowing that words, even his simple ones, can reveal a deeper reality.

For parents and guardians it is our duty to help those younger ones in our charge to grasp what the gifts of the Spirit are in each of our lives and how we can use them. By sharing our own experience we teach them, just as simply as we would teach all of the other lessons children need to know. Don’t be afraid. Step out in faith and share it!

Petition:
That the members of the church appreciate their gifts and use them for the good of all, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Catch the Spirit as it is presented to each of us. When we pray and listen, the Spirit leads us to understand the gifts He brings and how we are to put them into practice in our lives.
Pentecost – During the Day

First Reading: Acts 2: 1-11

- The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples gathered in the upper room is told in just four short phrases.
- Its effect was immediate and they began speaking in different languages.
- Although the multitudes in Jerusalem were from many different countries, they all heard the Spirit-filled proclamations in their own languages.

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

- The Spirit is the unifying force, bringing together Jew and Greek, slave and free.
- Only in the Holy Spirit can we say “Jesus is Lord.”
- There should not be discord among Christians since we have all been given to drink of the one Spirit.

Gospel: John 20: 19-23

- This is Jesus’ first appearance after His resurrection to the disciples gathered in the upper room.
- His first statement to them, as well as His second, is “Peace be with you,” which is familiar to us from the Sign of Peace in the liturgy.
- Jesus tells them they are to be sent, just as the Father sent him, to do the work of God on earth, including the power to forgive or hold men’s sins.

Food For Thought:
The long awaited and promised Spirit of God comes to the Apostles at Pentecost, ushering in the beginning of the Church. Jesus had foretold that He and the Father would send the Spirit to us and that Spirit would lead us to the truth. All that Jesus had taught and shown to His followers would be made clear when the Advocate and Guarantor of Truth would come. Not only would the Spirit be about the truth, but the Spirit would lead all into unity. It would be the fulfillment of Jesus’ prayer found in John 17 that those filled with the Spirit would lead all into this deep and intimate relationship with Jesus and the Father. Through the forgiveness of sins we approach the unity we seek to be one with God and one another.

Story:
How many times have we heard someone comment in words like this, “It is so good for us all to be together? We should do this more often.” Usually this sentiment is expressed on happy occasions, which are often family get-togethers for holidays, birthdays and the like. We also hear it slightly differently at funerals or other serious events as “It is good for us to be together, but I wish it were under better circumstances.”
You see, things are often so much better when we are together. Our faith teaches us that God’s plan is that we know God and one another in a familial way. Jesus revealed God to us in terms of family. He came to us as a child, born into a very special family. When we come together in faith, in the spirit we gain strength.

Two elderly sisters had lived together in their family’s home for years at the Jersey Shore. When Superstorm Sandy hit, they were forced into emergency shelter. The weight of the reality of their situation was almost too much for them to handle. However, a phone call from a concerned emergency worker led to the sisters being housed at a neighboring mainland parish. What they found there was understanding and acceptance and the unconditional love of this new parish family such as they had known in their original parish for over 65 years. Eventually they were able to move back into their own home and their community, but not before they took the opportunity to thank the pastor and host parish for welcoming them into their hearts. “The body is one and has many members, but all the members, many though they are, are one body.” (1 Corinthians: 12:12.)

**Petition:**
That the church may be filled with the Spirit of life and forgiveness, unity and welcome, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
In the unity of the Holy Spirit, together we come to know the fulfillment of God’s plan for us.
2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 49: 3, 5-6
- From the moment of conception, we are made to serve God.
- If we think of all we do as “serving God,” we bring God’s light to the world.
- God wants to be the center of our families, and to be our strength.
- If we can allow God to be at the center, we can do amazing things for Him.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1: 1-3
- We are all called to be holy.
- We are united with Jesus and each other through the Church.
- All who are baptized (called by Jesus) are family.
- A family that calls on the Lord (one who prays together and goes to church together), is united with the Lord.

Gospel: John 1: 29-34
- All of us can/have received God’s grace as described by John the Baptist through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation.
- No matter how young or old we are, the Spirit lives within us, leads us, and strengthens us.
- Jesus is truly God.

Food For Thought:
At our baptism we receive our calling to be servants of the Lord, and we are united with Him. We have all been given gifts from God to use as we serve and strengthen that bond, including the gifts of our families and our parish family. No matter what stage of life or faith we are in, if we choose each day to be a servant and keep God at the center of our families and our day to day activities, then we will be ready and able to answer God’s call to serve. Jesus gives us the Spirit to strengthen us. We are united with Him through the grace of the sacraments, prayer, and going to Mass, especially as a family.
**Story:**
Little girls tend to ask a lot of questions. They can be very cute, but sometimes don’t always have the best timing. There was a family in Church one Sunday with their 4 year old little girl. Even though this family is in church together all the time, for the little girl this particular day at Mass was the day to ask questions. She wanted to know “what the priest was doing,” “why do we sing,” and of course at Communion time, “why did that person give you something to eat?” The parents did their best to quietly answer questions, at least the best they could in the middle of Mass. Then, after Communion a question led to a special moment. As her parents were kneeling and praying after they received Communion, the little girl wanted to know “what are you doing?” The father leaned down and simply said, “This is the time to say thank you to Jesus for all the good things.” After a moment of contemplation, the little girl knelt down next to her father and closed her eyes. In that moment, a family became united in prayer.

**Petition:**
For all members of our Parish Family, that we may be united with each other and answer our baptismal call as servants of the Lord, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
We are all called by God to be servants of the Lord. God gives us the strength and gifts we need to answer that call. He also gives us the gift of each other in our families and as a parish family. What are the gifts that God has given you that you can use to serve Him? In what ways do you feel united with the Lord in your own family and through our parish family?
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 8: 23b-9:3
- God’s light will show through the dark times.
- God will help us and relieve us of our burdens.
- There is nothing that, together with God, we cannot overcome.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1: 10-13, 17
- As a family, we must be united with each other and with God! We all belong to Christ.
- Our families are strongest when God is at the center of all we do.
- It is the cross of Jesus and our baptism that unite us as a church family.
- When we let “other things” in our world become priorities and lose focus on Jesus, then we open the door to division and discord.
- It is Jesus that unites us in our homes and in our Church.

Gospel: Matthew 4: 12-23
- Just as Jesus called His apostles, He calls us to spread the Good News.
- We are called to “lay down” things that pull us away from keeping Jesus as our focus.
- To answer God’s call sometimes means to leave behind what is comfortable and go against the norm.
- As a family, sometimes we must choose against society’s norms or expectations to follow Jesus and build our family’s faith.

Food For Thought:
While we may not be able to quit our jobs and go off into the world spreading the Good News as the apostles did, we can choose to spread the Good News in our everyday lives and activities.

How we treat others, the way we talk to each other, the way we show love both in our families and at work, and the way we react to those around us who are hurting or in need are all opportunities to witness to God’s love in us, and spread the Good News. In a world that sometimes can feel very dark, it is in these everyday things that God gives us so many opportunities to be His light.

Story:
A young boy named Jamie was at sleep away camp. While walking through one of the many trails with a group of other boys, he encountered someone he did not know sitting off to the side of the trail, crying. The boy didn’t seem hurt, just upset. It turned out the boy was crying because he was a little lost and very home sick. Instead of helping the boy, the group Jamie was with made fun of him, pointing and laughing as they walked by because he was crying. Jamie, who was raised in a Catholic home and went to church every week, chose not to make fun of the boy who was crying, but he did nothing to help him either. Jamie just walked by with his friends.
At the time, Jamie didn’t think much of it, in fact he felt like he did the right thing by not participating with those who made fun of the boy. It wouldn’t be until much later in life that Jamie would realize the missed opportunity that God gave him that day to make a difference in the world, at least in the world of a little boy who was sad and alone.

**Petition:**
That we will have the courage to answer God’s call in our everyday lives, and do the little things to bring God’s light to our world, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Even though our world can sometimes seem dark, the opportunity to be God’s light is all around us. Inside our homes, at work, or even in the way we drive, we can choose to answer God’s call for us and spread His light in the world. Do you have the courage to answer God’s call in your everyday life?
4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Zephaniah 2: 3; 3: 12-13
- We are called to be humble and to live for God.
- To live a life of kindness, honesty, and trying to do the right thing is to live as God would want us to.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1: 26-31
- To be strong in faith, we must allow ourselves to be humble.
- Jesus is the source of all our “power;” we must recognize that our gifts come from Him.
- Those who might be looked down on or dismissed, such as the poor or the young, can be instruments of the Lord and should not be discounted.

Gospel: Matthew 5: 1-12a
- It can be easy to view our hardships as burdens, but our struggles may be our paths to God.
- We are not called to be always happy by worldly standards, but to be happy in the pursuit of being close to God.
- A family that strives to be “blessed” with the things of the world may not be “blessed” according to the standards of God.
- To be truly blessed is to live for God, no matter how difficult that may be.

Food For Thought:
Our world often glorifies riches, material things, power, and popularity and equates them to success. Our society’s standard for the kind of person one should be, job one should have, or house one should live in can often dictate how we view ourselves in terms of success or failure.

We put movie stars and professional athletes on pedestals and celebrate their achievements. We even adopt their achievements as our personal goals. But the readings today paint a much different picture of what we should view as success and of what our goals should be. To be humble, giving, loving, honest, and true to the ideals of living our faith are what we should be celebrating. Instead of our society’s standards, our gauge should be who God calls us to be. Even in the face of our hardships, if we are trying to live for God, we are blessed.
**Story:**
A middle-aged family-man lived his life day-to-day in pursuit of the American dream. He was married, had three kids, a home, two cars, and both he and his wife had good jobs. While they were not rich, they had more than enough money to live comfortably and even save a little. Although by many standards the man was successful and happy, at times it didn’t seem to be enough. He would find himself constantly comparing himself to his neighbors and friends and “wishing his life looked more like theirs.” It wasn’t until he ran into an old friend that his perspective began to change. As the two friends caught up, he listened to stories about his friend losing his job, having health problems, and dealing with addiction in his family. The irony of it was that, despite the hardships, his friend didn’t seem depressed or even once wish out loud that things were different. All he said was that it was “the blessings in his life that kept him going.”

**Petition:**
For help to live not for standards set by the world around us, but as humble servants of God, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
It can be easy for us to get caught up in the goals, pressures, and expectations of the world around us and be lead away from how God calls us to view and live our lives. The readings today challenge our definition of what it means to be blessed. Is there a way that you may need to redefine your definition of what it means to be blessed?
5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 58: 7-10
- All that we have been given by God is not just for us to have, but for us to share.
- If we serve those in need, we are bringing God’s light to the world.
- To be truly happy, we are called to share what we have been given.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 2: 1-5
- Faith can (and perhaps needs to) grow from within honesty and truth, which can be messy.
- When we are humble we make room for our faith to grow.
- We must always look to God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit over our own (human) understanding.

Gospel: Matthew 5: 13-16
- It is up to us to share the Good News.
- We should never hide our faith and love of the Lord and of Christianity.
- We are called to let God’s love shine through us at all times and in all walks of life.
- We glorify God and build the Kingdom on earth each time we act in God’s love.
- We are called to love our families as God loves.

Food For Thought:
In a world that is less and less tolerant of religion, but which places an increasing emphasis on worldly things, it is more important than ever to let our faith shine through us. As Christians we are called to make a difference in the world, not just because it might be “right,” but because we choose to make a difference out of love and gratitude to God who has blessed us in so many ways. It is our day to day actions that others observe that can have the greatest evangelizing impact on those around us. These ideals can and should begin in our own homes. If we model God’s love in the way we love our own families, we become examples of God’s love in the world.

Story:
A thirty-something Christian man played on a recreational softball team. It wasn’t about being overly competitive, but rather about having fun, being with friends, and maybe even getting a little exercise. Although the man was not very outspoken about his faith, the way he carried himself seemed to speak volumes. He chose not to engage in certain conversations or use certain language while at the games. He never put his friends down for anything they did, but just simply refrained. He made it his business to be affirming to his teammates, to pick others up when they were down on themselves, and wasn’t afraid to bless himself before going to bat. One day a teammate pulled him aside saying, “I am not very religious but I can tell you are, and I was wondering if you would pray for my dad? He is very sick and needs all the help he can get.” Without ever really saying a word, the man was evangelizing his teammates, just by letting out the faith he had inside of him though his actions.
**Petition:**
That we may have the courage to show our faith in all aspects of our lives, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Are we able to share all we have, including our faith with those around us? God has blessed us with so much, and we are called to return those blessings to God. We can do this in so many ways, from helping those in need to simply witnessing to the faith we hold in our hearts. Don’t be afraid to let your light shine so that others may see God’s love in you.
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Sirach 15: 16-21

- God’s Laws (rules) are important in order for us to be saved.
- If we trust in God, we will have happiness.
- God understands us and is all-powerful. He gives us all we need to be close to Him.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 2: 6-10

- God is wise beyond all ages.
- We must remember to turn to God rather than act on our own accord.
- We should include God in making all of life’s decisions, both for ourselves and for our families.
- The Spirit is revealed to people and families who are centered on God and who seek His wisdom in all they do.

Gospel: Matthew 5: 17-37

- Our way of life should not lie in the “letter of the law” alone. Salvation lies in choosing to live following the true meaning of the law, revealed in the example of Jesus.
- The practice of living a righteous life begins in our homes and with our families.
- When we make mistakes and hurt others—especially those we love—we must seek forgiveness.
- We are called to let our thoughts, decisions, and actions be consistent with who we want to be and who we are called to be in all walks of life. We should model this for our children.

Food For Thought:
The themes of these readings are strong, maybe even hard to hear. They may help us see that some of our choices or rationalizations are not what God wants for us. They challenge us to be honest with ourselves and ask hard questions which—if our answers are honest—may not always leave us feeling very proud. However, we take comfort in God’s love, understanding, and forgiveness. We know that with the wisdom of our God we can look into our personal and family lives and see where we are called to grow. If we seek God’s wisdom, using the commandments and the example of Jesus as our guide, we can grow beyond our own limited understanding. We can take steps to live—and lead our families to live—a way of life that is focused on what God wants for us.

Petition:
That we move beyond our own knowledge and understanding by seeking God’s wisdom as a guide for all we do, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
It can be very easy to focus on our own thoughts and desires as we navigate through life. It can be
easy to forget to turn to God and seek His wisdom and guidance as we make both day-to-day and future decisions for our families. Are we able to keep God and His desires for us and our family at the center of all we do?
7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Leviticus 19: 1-2; 17-18
- We are called to try and live as God wants us to live.
- We are called to find it in our hearts to forgive those that hurt us.
- We are called to love all people.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 3: 16-23
- All of us are beautiful because God made us and is in us.
- Do not be deceived about how you view or feel about yourself. Rather, view yourself as God views you:
  - Do not look down on yourself. God loves you and is in you.
  - Do not think too highly of yourself, because all that you have has come from God. You would have nothing without God’s gifts in your life.
- You are loveable and you are loved.
- We find God’s wisdom in humility.

Gospel: Matthew 5: 38-48
- We are called to live as God wants us to live.
- We are called to be loving and accepting of all people.
- In God’s name, we are called to share all that we have—time, talent, and treasure—in the service of others.
- As Christians, we are not called to love others according to the world’s expectations; we are called to love as God loves.

Food For Thought:
Many of the ideals discussed in today’s readings can be especially difficult within our own families. Relationships between parents and teens, husbands and wives, siblings (both young and old), and among extended family members—these can all face the trials and heartache that come from being human, making mistakes, and failing to love as God loves. Our ability to accept, love, and forgive are often put to the strongest test when those we love the most are involved.

Petition:
That we may see God in each other—especially in those that have hurt us—and be able to love them as God does, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Many of the ideals discussed in today’s readings can be difficult, especially within our own families. Our ability to accept, love, and forgive are often put to the strongest test when those we love the most are involved. Are we able to see God in the faces of our own family members? Do we try and love them the way God loves?
8th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 49:14-15
- God’s love for His people is stronger than a mother’s love for her children or a bridegroom’s love for his bride.
- God is the standard for motherhood and fatherhood. Mothers and fathers are the first representatives of God.
- The “perfections” of man and woman reflect something of the infinite perfection of God.

Second Reading: 1Cor 4:1-5
- Parents are the first and primary teachers of their children. They are the stewards of the Gospel to their children.
- The Church is the steward of the sacraments, including Matrimony.

Gospel: Matthew 6:24-34
- Husbands and wives need to trust in God’s plan for marriage—NFP.
- Modern families are giving the material world priority.
- God provides for our physical needs so that we can concentrate on our spiritual needs.
- Earthly possessions can threaten a love for God.

Food For Thought:
Children need mothers and fathers who love each other. The grace from the Sacrament of Matrimony strengthens the family bond and enables parents to raise their children to lead happy and holy lives. Mothers and fathers can become distracted by electronics, material things, work, and the “ladder to success.” These distractions can damage their marriages and their family lives. The hierarchy of priorities is: God, spouse, children, and work. A reordering of priorities causes difficulties at home. Children learn this hierarchy of priorities from observing their parents.

Story:
The popular Harry Chapin song “Cat’s in the Cradle” addresses a father who was too busy with his career to spend time with his son. The son learned from his father to prioritize work over family. The son grew up and was too busy to spend time with his father.

Petition:
For a renewed emphasis on the Sacrament of Matrimony and a renewed focus on family life, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Consider your daily life. How many minutes do you spend with your spouse? Your children? Do you spend more time in front of your TV or computer than you spend with your family? Consider unplugging from electronics and plugging in to your family.
9th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Deuteronomy 11:18, 26-28, 32

- Religious education/formation of children is the responsibility of parents and one of the objectives of marriage.
- God gives us a choice to follow Him.
- God is giving His chosen people yet another chance to choose His will over theirs.
- Our first parents chose pride over God’s will.

Second Reading: Romans 3:21-25, 28

- The Old Covenant and the prophets prepared the Jews for a Messiah that would conquer the Devil, make atonement for sin, and renew the heart of man through a New Covenant.
- All people are born with original sin—Adam and Eve, Mary, and Jesus are the only exceptions.
- Jesus paid the ransom for the sin of our first parents.
- Faith is a gift that moves us toward God.
- Man cannot merit justification on his own. Baptism is necessary and open to all.

Gospel: Matthew 7:21-27

- Conversion of heart and the disposition to do the will of God are necessary for salvation.
- Union with Christ and fidelity to the Church builds on the rock that gives us strength in the face of adversity.
- The house built on the solid foundation is like the soul that is maintained through Christian living and fidelity to the teachings of the Church.
- Reference is made to building a house during the dry season. Houses built during the wet season would crumble.
- Solomon was a wise man who built the Lord’s house on a great foundation stone.

Food For Thought:
Families thrive when built on the solid foundational teachings of the Church. From the Sacrament of Matrimony, to the baptism of the children, to the formation of the children in the Christian household, a family that strives to live within the freedom of the teachings of the Church is built on a strong foundation. Outside forces of the world sometimes invade the most grounded of families, but families committed to Christ and His Church can rebound and regain strength in times of adversity.

Story:
Father Donald Calloway, MIC, led a hard life when he was young. His book No Turning Back: A Witness to Mercy describes his troubled youth which included: drug abuse, promiscuity, time in jail, and being thrown out of a foreign country. Fr. Calloway’s mother describes that her husband and she continuously turned to the Lord, the Blessed Mother, and St. Joseph. They simply were
committed to hanging in, praying, trusting, and practicing the faith. Fr. Calloway was accepted into the Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception and was ordained a priest in 2003. He has since written several books and speaks all over the world.

"The road [for Fr. Donald] has been long, with many a winding turn. But out of the darkness there was always the light of the Lord holding out His arms,” states Mrs. Calloway. "We must always hope in the promises of Christ and His unfathomable mercy. Blessed be God forever!"

**Petition:**
That families who are struggling keep their minds and hearts faithful, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Is your family struggling? Why not intentionally pray as a family for healing? As Servant of God Patrick Peyton proclaimed, “The family that prays together stays together.”
10th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Hosea 6:3-6
- Hosea is addressing the idolatry of the northern kingdom of Israel.
- God desires our love and faithfulness rather than empty gestures or programmed, obligatory efforts.
- For an outward sacrifice to be genuine, it should be an expression of an inward sacrifice.
- Marriage and family life require inward sacrifices that are expressed in outward sacrifices.

Second Reading: Romans 4:18-25
- Abraham’s faith in God mirrors our faith in the resurrection of Christ and the faith in our own bodily resurrection at the Last Judgment.
- The grace of salvation comes to us through the passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.
- Abraham relied on God’s plan for his family, just as we should rely on God’s plan for our families.

Gospel: Matthew 9:9-13
- Tax collectors were considered ‘sinners’ by observant Jews because they had contact with gentiles and were also guilty of collecting more taxes than were owed and pocketing the difference.
- Matthew drops everything and follows Jesus. After discernment in prayer, we should follow Jesus just as Matthew did.
- Christ likened the mercy shown toward sinners to the mercy of God.
- Christ referred to Hosea 6:6—the Pharisees were like the idolatrous northern kingdom.
- Mercy toward family members is needed for healthy families.

Food For Thought:
The sacrifice of Jesus is the ultimate sign of God’s infinite mercy. We show our love for Christ and others when we are merciful. Healthy marriages and families require that everyone show mercy toward each other. It is sometimes very difficult to forgive family members because violations of any type against family members are especially hurtful.

Story:
The book of Genesis communicates the narrative of Joseph and his eleven brothers. The brothers were jealous of Joseph and sold him into slavery in Egypt. Joseph became very powerful in Egypt and ended up saving his entire family from famine. His story of forgiveness for the transgressions of his brothers is a model for all families. (Genesis 37; 39-46)

Petition:
That all families may be examples of God’s mercy toward each other, we pray to the Lord.
**Bulletin Announcement:**
Are you struggling with forgiveness? Forgiving does not mean forgetting or excusing bad behavior. Forgiving means giving up your own hurt and anger and leaving justice to God.
**11th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**First Reading: Exodus 19:2-6a**
- This gathering occurs right before God gives the Law to the chosen people.
- The assembly of the chosen is a type of foundation of the church.
- The family is also a foundation of the church.
- The chosen are called to offer prayer and sacrifice as direct recipients of God’s Word.

**Second Reading: Romans 5:6-11**
- God’s unconditional love for us is shown by the death of His Son.
- Salvation can be described in three tenses: past, present, and future. The past refers to our baptism; the present refers to the reality when we allow grace to increase our virtue and holiness; and the future refers to the hope that we will be with the Lord in eternity.

**Gospel: Matthew 9:36-10:8**
- This is a turning point in Matthew – Jesus is gathering the Twelve for leadership.
- Jesus intimates that the Pharisees are not leading the chosen people.
- Jesus instructs them to preach to and heal the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” and to avoid everywhere else.
- We must also foster the faith within our immediate families.
- A faithful family can act as a Christian witness for other families.

**Food For Thought:**
Just as Moses was gathering the chosen people and Jesus was re-gathering the chosen, we are also called to gather and foster the faith in our own homes and families. The domestic church is the backbone of the universal church and we must take care to nurture those who are closest to us. The New Evangelization, in particular, is focused on those who are baptized but may have fallen away. Most families have fully initiated loved ones that have fallen away from the church. Charity starts in the home.

**Story:**
The entire story of salvation history is a story about the chosen people returning to God. Starting with the Fall in the Garden of Eden, God reached out to man to guide him and show him the way back to God. The exile to Egypt and the return to the Promised Land are metaphors for man turning from God and then returning back to God. The Babylonian exile is yet another metaphor for turning away from God and returning back to Him. In the time of Christ and His bride, the church, exile is living a life separated from the church. A return to the church and a life lived in communion with Christ is the ultimate earthly return to the Promised Land. The final Promised Land is in heaven.
**Petition:**
That the Light of Christ may shine in our homes and amongst our families and friends and that all families may witness to those who have strayed from the church, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Jesus tells us in Luke 15:7 that “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” The return of a person back to communion with the church is a miracle. If you have family members that have fallen away from the church, why not reach out to them and pray for their return?
12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Jeremiah 20:10-13
- We hear part of Jeremiah’s fifth ‘confession.’
- Jeremiah is relaying that he is surrounded by persecutors, but remains steadfast in the Lord.
- Marriage and the family are being attacked by persecutors, but like Jeremiah, the Church must remain steadfast in her teachings.

Second Reading: Romans 5:12-15
- The sin of our first parents, which is inherited by all, is known as “Original Sin.”
- Baptism forgives all sin, bestows sanctifying grace, and is necessary for salvation.
- Adam filled the world with misery and Christ redeemed the world from slavery to sin.
- Even though there was no Law before the time of Moses, the effects of the Fall (suffering and death) were present.
- We inherit the effects of the sin of our first parents just as we who are joined to Christ inherit His righteousness.

Gospel: Matthew 10:26-33
- We need to have a childlike trust in the Lord and not fear those who persecute us.
- We should be most concerned with those who will destroy both the soul and the body.
- We should have a fear of the Lord in order to avoid sin and its consequences.
- Jesus is the pathway to the Father.
- Families need to remain faithful to the church in the midst of the secular culture.

Food For Thought:
Marriage and the family are under tremendous attack by the secular world. The Catholic faithful must continue to remain strong in the teachings of the church and must not give in to fear from the outside world. This includes many aspects of day to day life: the primacy of Mass attendance, voting, various issues related to human sexuality and education, and religious freedom, etc.

Story:
St. Thomas More was a scholar and lawyer who became the Lord Chancellor to King Henry VIII in 1529. He was also a husband and father to four children. More resigned his position in 1532 when King Henry VIII persisted in maintaining his own opinions regarding marriage and the supremacy of the Pope. In 1534, St. Thomas More was banished to the Tower of London for refusing to swear allegiance to King Henry VIII as the Head of the Church of England. Although More was tried and convicted of treason and finally beheaded on July 6, 1535, he left us his legacy in his final words: “the King’s good servant – but God’s first.”
**Petition:**
That our families remain strong in the faith, that their minds and hearts be always turned toward the Lord, and that they always trust in Him, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
“Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” (Ephesians 6:10-11)
13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

**First Reading: 2Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a**
- The Shunammite couple served God by providing for Elisha.
- This is an example of a miraculous pregnancy in old age.

**Second Reading: Romans 6:3-4, 8-11**
- Baptism is a sharing in the death of Christ.
- Full immersion baptism illustrates this; “going under” symbolizes death and “rising out” of the water symbolizes new life.
- We unite ourselves in Christ’s death in the hopes of uniting ourselves to His Resurrection.
- Christ destroyed death by His own death. His risen humanity is the eternal victory over death.

**Gospel: Matthew 10:37-42**
- To answer God’s call, everything must defer to it.
- Parents and family must defer to their adult children’s discernment of vocations.
- Discipleship sometimes requires martyrdom. Most often it requires Christians to bear witness to and suffer for Christ.
- One of the best places to witness discipleship is in the family.

**Food For Thought:**
Discipleship sometimes comes at an earthly cost. In the case of the call to holy orders or religious life, families can provide tremendous support to those in discernment. Families are also a tremendous source of providing living witnesses of discipleship.

**Story:**
A watchmaker and a lace maker were married in Alencon, France on July 12, 1858. The watchmaker, Louis, had wanted to become an Augustinian monk, but was rejected because he did not succeed in learning Latin with the required proficiency. The lace maker, Zelie, had wanted to become a Sister of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul but was rejected because of on-going respiratory illness. The couple had nine children, but only five daughters survived infancy. The couple raised their children in a home of deep Catholic faith. Zelie died of breast cancer in 1877. Louis and the five daughters moved to Lisieux where Louis continued to raise his daughters in the Catholic faith. Eventually all five daughters entered religious life, with the youngest, Therese, canonized in 1925. Louis and Zelie Martin were canonized by Pope Francis on October 18, 2015.

**Petition:**
That those discerning a call to the priesthood or religious life have the prayerful support of their families, we pray to the Lord.
**Bulletin Announcement:**

“He said to them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray, therefore, the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.’” (Luke 10: 2)
14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Zechariah 9: 9-10
- The prophet foretells the coming of a new king for Jerusalem!
- This savior king will arrive, not in a royal caravan, but on a humble donkey, a beast of burden.
- He will come with meekness and justice.
- He will rule the earth and there will be no more war.
- How can this king be greeted with anything but great rejoicing?

Second Reading: Romans 6:9, 11-13
- Rather, we belong to Christ; the Spirit of God dwells within us.
- Filled with the Spirit, we have a new yoke, the sweet yoke of grace that sets us free!

Gospel: Matthew 11: 25-30
- Jesus is that meek and humble king who calls us to come to Him, to lay upon Him our heavy burdens.
- In learning from Jesus, we will find rest.
- The wise and the strong want to do it on their own; they trust in their own powers. Those who “give it to God” will find true and lasting serenity.

Food For Thought:
There are some things we can’t do on our own (i.e. dealing with addiction). As much as we pride ourselves on being independent and self-reliant, we need God’s help. We need a Savior. And we need each other. We need the support of family, friendship, community, and church. As Adam learned in the Garden of Eden, we need a helpmate.

Story:
Visit St. Patrick’s Cathedral in NYC at Christmas and compare two images: one is the statue of the infant Jesus in the manger inside the church and the other is the hulking statue of Atlas outside, across the street facing the Cathedral’s front doors. Atlas is heavily burdened. He’s carrying the whole world by himself. But the infant Jesus is smiling and kicking His feet, surrounded by family and visitors. Which are we more like? Which do we want to be?

Petition:
That those who are heavily burdened with chronic illness, disability, depression, and addiction will find support and encouragement from family, friends, and this parish community, we pray to the Lord.
(This might also be a good week to conclude the General Intercessions with the Serenity Prayer.)
Bulletin Announcement:
What burden have you not shared, not given to Christ?
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 55:10-11
- God’s Word will be planted and cultivated within the hearts of people.
- It will be like food for the hungry.
- God’s Word will not be defeated! It will achieve its purpose.

Second Reading: Romans 8:18-23
- The following words of St. Paul could easily be headlines in today’s newspapers: “sufferings of the present time;” “subject to futility;” “slavery to corruption;” and “all creation is groaning.”
- But Paul assures us there is a glory that awaits us.
- We will share in the freedom of God’s children.
- This is God’s plan for us.

Gospel: Matthew 13:1-9 (short form)
- Jesus tells a story meant to make us smile and laugh and finally burst into applause!
- A most happy farmer flings seed everywhere. How wonderful that he is not stingy with it and is not planting it carefully and cautiously in a neat straight row!
- The seed lands where it meets challenges – a scorching sun, not enough soil, and thorny company that crowds it out.
- But it’s not the end of the story! The story ends with a gush of good news: the harvest is great, enormous, a hundredfold!

Food For Thought:
Maybe it’s time to look at the Word of God with new, fresh eyes! Maybe it’s time to stop complaining that a hundred years ago we Catholics were told not to read the Bible. Maybe it’s time to really feast on the Scriptures as the Second Vatican Council called us to. Maybe it can begin at home or in our closest relationships. The Word of God will achieve its purpose. It can help us face and deal with the many challenges and struggles of daily living with a new hopeful, fearless and joyful perspective.

Story:
A college freshman named Sam noticed that long after he and his roommate had closed their books, turned out the lights and gone to their respective bunks, his roommate would continue reading something in bed by the light of a small book lamp. After a few weeks of this, Sam’s curiosity got the best of him, and so one morning on his way to breakfast, Sam asked, “So, John, what do you read every night?” After some coaxing, John sheepishly admitted that he reads the Bible. It turned out that he was too embarrassed to read it out in the open, so he hid the Good Book under the covers. Sam was also embarrassed when he realized that he himself never read the Bible.
**Petition:**
That our homes will be places where God’s Word is welcomed with great joy, taking deep root in our hearts and in the hearts of all we love, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
How is the Word of God received in our households? Is it read and received? Perhaps this would be a good week to begin reading the Gospel together before coming to Mass. Having already read it, we can give it deep root in our hearts when we hear it proclaimed on Sunday.
16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Wisdom 12:13, 16-19
- God cares for people.
- God’s might is in His mercy and forbearance.
- It takes a greater strength to show kindness and clemency than retribution.
- God’s people must be kind as He is.

Second Reading: Romans 8:26-27
- When we cannot find the words, the Holy Spirit speaks them for us.
- When we cannot pray as we want, the Spirit intercedes for us.
- What kind of God would do this? One that searches and knows our heart.

Gospel: Matthew 13:24-43
- We’re back to seeds … and now, to complicate things, weeds!
- A trusting farmer let the wheat and the weeds grow side by side.
- The tiny mustard seed will grow and will become large enough to welcome every sort of bird.
- And inside the house on the kitchen counter, yeast rises to teach us something of the bigness of God’s Kingdom.

Food For Thought:
We can be so impulsive, so quick to judge, so ready to rip out anything we think is wrong, deformed and ugly within ourselves and others. How many times are we too quick to point out a fault in a loved one? A husband points out a fault to his wife and vice versa, parents to kids and vice versa, kids to kids, friends to friends, bosses to workers. We want what’s best for our loved ones, but sometimes we don’t have the patience to let that develop. Jesus tells stories about things that take time and He says the Kingdom of Heaven is like that. Can we cultivate in our marriages and relationships and families an environment of acceptance and patience? And how about with God? God is so patient with us! How patient are we with God?

Story:
Ethel Horner had a big garden in her backyard: rows of corn, peppers, radishes, beans of every kind and, of course, tomatoes. She lived in Jersey, after all! Here’s the thing: she never watered any of it. She didn’t have a hose long enough and buckets of water were too heavy to carry. “If God wants me to have a garden this year,” she’d say, “He’ll send some rain.” Sometimes God wanted her to have a garden … and sometimes He didn’t. Ethel always seemed content and happy either way.
**Petition:**
That we cultivate in our marriages, friendships and families an environment of patience and acceptance, allowing each other to grow and mature and become the person God created each of us to be, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Plant some seeds of kindness, encouragement, affirmation and hope this week. Someone you know or live with needs one of those seeds. Even if you never see them flower, you’ll have planted something good and holy. That’s how the Spirit grows the Kingdom.
First Reading: 1 Kings 3:5, 7-12

- It’s better than a genie in a bottle: God tells Solomon to ask for anything, and it will be granted.
- Solomon asks for an understanding heart, and God is pleased, naturally.
- With such a heart Solomon will know right from wrong, and that will bring him happiness.
- All this happens in a dream, and now comes the hard part for Solomon and us: making the dream a reality.

Second Reading: Romans 8:28-30

- If there is a top ten list of favorite St. Paul quotes, surely Romans 8:28 would make the cut: “We know that all things work for good for those who love God.”
- How do we know this? Because this is God’s plan of salvation.
- Furthermore, those “conformed to the image of Christ” would always want “whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious…” (Philippians 4:8)

Gospel: Matthew 13:44-52

- Jesus continues on His parabolic roll.
- God is lavish in the sharing of His Word (15th Sunday). God’s mercy is bigger than we can imagine (16th Sunday). Now, on the 17th Sunday, we see how big and total must be our response to the presence of God’s Kingdom.
- When you find it, buy the whole field, not just the clump of earth where the treasure is buried. Sell everything you’ve got to buy the pearl.

**Food For Thought:**
What is your treasure? What is your pearl of great price? What would you sacrifice everything for? Most of us are likely to answer: our loved ones, our relationships and the people who are most important to us. But sometimes what we say we value most and what we spend the most time and energy on are not the same thing. Being a spouse, a parent, even a good friend, much like being a disciple of Jesus Christ, requires more than half-hearted attempts at helping, listening with one ear, and paying lip service. We need to put down the phone and look into one another’s eyes, to give of ourselves completely to the other. There’s where and when we’ll find the pearl of great price.
**Story:**
In his book *The Road to Character*, David Brooks writes in the introduction: “Recently I’ve been thinking about the difference between the resume virtues and the eulogy virtues. The resume virtues are the ones you list on your resume, the skills that you bring to the job market and that contribute to external success. The eulogy virtues are deeper. They’re the virtues that get talked about at your funeral, the ones that exist at the core of your being – whether you are kind, brave, honest or faithful; what kind of relationships you formed.”

**Petition:**
That the members of our families have the wisdom of Solomon to want understanding hearts and the willingness to live for something more than their own personal happiness - to live for the Kingdom of God, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
If God says to you “I’ll give you whatever you think your family needs most right now,” what would that be? What would you ask for? How much of yourself are you willing to invest in making that wish a reality?
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 55: 1-3
- You may have heard this Scripture, months ago, at the Easter Vigil.
- God wants to give drink to the thirsty and food to the poor.
- We waste too much of our money on what will not satisfy our deepest thirst and hunger.

Second Reading: Romans 8: 35, 28-30
- Here’s another winning verse on St. Paul’s list of greatest hits: “Nothing can separate us from the love of God that comes to us through Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:35). You may have heard it recently at a funeral because it brings comfort and hope.
- Christ’s death and resurrection is a victory over sin and death, over any power that might try to separate us from Him.
- Truly, because we are united to Christ, who or what can harm us? What do we need to fear?

Gospel: Matthew 14: 13-21
- We’ve seen the pattern many times throughout all four gospels: Jesus sees and is moved to compassion. When He feels compassion, Jesus always acts.
- In Matthew 14, it’s the suffering of the crowd He sees and He cures their sick. Jesus then turns His compassion to His disciples, and to us.
- But the disciples don’t see the needs of the people – they see the people as a really big problem. For Jesus, people are never problems. He feeds them with whatever is available.

Food For Thought:
It’s our turn. After the crowd is fed, there are twelve baskets of food left. The number twelve represents the Church. It’s our turn to see the people and to be moved with compassion. It’s our responsibility to act. It’s our turn to take what’s available—however little there is—and do great things with it for Jesus, and for the Kingdom of God. Even with very little, even out of our own poverty, God can do things we thought impossible. The seeing, the moving to compassion, the taking action begins at home. So often we are blind and do not see or are slow to action. Many of our children are hurting inside. They are addicted. They are lost or afraid. They have little hope for their future. Often we focus on what we do not have instead of what needs to be done. We focus only on the problem and not the person.

Story:
About five years ago, a hospital in a mid-size town in Pennsylvania closed its doors for good. Rather than bemoan another vacant building, a private citizen bought the place and renovated it. Just two years ago, he opened a rehabilitation center for those with substance abuse problems.

Petition:
That we will recognize, affirm and nurture the unique gifts and personalities of each member of our family, let us pray to the Lord.
**Bulletin Announcement:**
It’s our turn to do great things for the Kingdom of God. These “great things” begin in small ways by taking small steps. What is one thing you can do this week to help turn a problem into a possibility?
19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: 1 Kings 19: 9a, 11-13a
- Where can we find the Lord?
- God is not in the wind, not in the earthquake, nor is He in the fire.
- Elijah finds the Lord in the tiny whispering voice.

Second Reading: Romans 9: 1-5
- Paul expresses his heartfelt anguish for the Jewish people who do not recognize Christ as their own.

Gospel: Matthew 14: 22-33
- During the fourth watch of the night, Jesus walks on water during a storm.
- He urges us to have courage.
- Peter wants to walk on water but quickly sinks like a rock. Peter calls out to Jesus and Jesus saves him.
- The disciples now recognize that Jesus is the Son of God.

Food For Thought:
In the midst of marital troubles and turbulence in the family it is easy to miss the presence of the Lord. The disciples were terrified by the storm and initially failed to recognize Jesus. They shouted with fear, “It is a ghost!” (Matthew 14:26). Our worries, anxieties and fears can easily cloud our vision and rock our faith. We may even want to abandon ship. Like Peter, we can find ourselves sinking, perhaps even nearly drowning in hopelessness and negativity. We find it difficult to hear the light, gentle sound of God’s voice telling us, “Take courage! It is I. Be not afraid” (Matthew 14:27).

It is our faith in the unshakable presence of Jesus Christ that gives us strength and helps us to ride through the storm in the boat with our family and friends.

Story:
Charlie Brown and Snoopy are sitting in a chair watching TV. Charlie Brown holds the remote and turns to Snoopy and says “Wouldn’t it be nice if life were like a DVD and you could fast-forward through the crummy times!” Nice indeed, but not realistic. Ask someone who has weathered the storm of a spouse’s unemployment or depression. Ask parents who have accompanied their son or daughter through a long-term illness and multiple hospitalizations.

Within the sacrament of marriage and, as Pope Francis calls it, “the vocation of the family,” disciples of Jesus Christ are called to love one another as God loves us. We are called to have courage in good times and bad, in sickness and in health. In Matthew’s Gospel, let’s not forget, Jesus gets in the boat. When we love each other that’s where we belong. (See The Joy of Love, The Word Among Us Press, 2016, pgs. 51-72.)
Petition:
For the gift of perseverance and courage for marriages and families dealing with addiction, depression, and long-term illness, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Practice being still and silent this week. Find a time each day to sit and be still. Practice silence. This is how we hear God’s voice, in the midst of a storm, saying to us, “Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid” (Matthew 14:27).
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 56: 1, 6-7
- All of us are foreigners, joined to the Lord as His servants.
- Married couples, in a special way, are called to make their homes a joyful place and a house of prayer.
- How do we connect our homes with our family life in the Church? How does family prayer, such as grace before meals or night-time prayer with children, connect us with the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist?

Second Reading: Romans 11: 13-15, 29-32
- God showers gifts on each family.
- The call of God is irrevocable, that is, always present and inviting within married life.
- How do you understand marriage as a vocation?
- How do you become an agent of mercy within your married and family life?

Gospel: Matthew 15: 21-28
- The Canaanite woman debated with Jesus because she had faith.
- She was advocating and looking out for her daughter, as any parent would.
- Her faith was remarkable to Jesus because she was not an Israelite, but a Gentile.
- Would others describe our faith as remarkable? Would we find a special fire and energy of faith when our children were at stake, for example, if they were sick?
- Now, how can you adopt that passionate faith in your married and family life every day, even when no one is particularly sick? Do you put your faith to use each day?

Food For Thought:
God is present in each of us as His creation. In our roles as parents and members of extended families, do we consider ourselves partners in the continuing unfolding of His creation?

Petition:
For all husbands and wives, that their sacramental marriage remains a source of God’s grace and that they embrace the sacred vocation of married life, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
The readings this week invite us to consider marriage as a vocation of service and as a foundation and source of passionate faith. This week, pray for those in your life who are married: friends, parents, and family. Ask God’s blessing and grace in their lives, so that they may take comfort in knowing that they are supported by the prayers of this parish community.
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 22:19-23
- The Lord’s Servant will be a father to the house of Judah, and will be a focal point of honor for his family. How do we reflect that honor on our families with our words and actions as parents? As children?

Second Reading: Romans 11:33-36
- The passages “Who has given the Lord anything that he may be repaid?” and “through Him and for Him are all things” remind us that each element in marriage is a gift from God, Whom we have no way to repay.
- The bride (wife), the groom (husband), and the children are gifts generously poured out by God. We have no currency in which to properly “repay” Him.
- These are gifts for which we can, at best, offer thanks, and we should do so each day.
- Tie this belief in the graciousness of God’s gifts with the Gospel question “Who do you say that I am?”

Gospel: Matthew 16:13-20
- Jesus asks His disciples two questions: “Who do people say that I am?” and “Who do you say that I am?”
- This second question is one that each person must answer for him/herself.
- Within the context of marriage and families, when we answer as Peter did “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” it changes EVERYTHING about our interactions with one another, for we must interact as sons and daughters of God, who adopted us through our baptism.
- When we make this declaration, we are obliged to make our homes Christian in their nature and to frame our family life in ways that reflect those same Gospel/Christian values.

Food for Thought:
Would a visitor in your home be able to recognize it as a “Christian household”? If not, then your own family may “forget” they are God’s beloved sons and daughters. Consider making a reminder, perhaps by means of a family project to select a crucifix and place it in your home where everyone will see it daily.

Petition:
That in each household in our parish, the family members together affirm in their lives each day the answer to Jesus’ question “Who do you say that I am?” we pray to the Lord.
Bulletin Announcement:
This week’s Gospel has Jesus asking His first disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Would a visitor in your home be able to recognize it as a “Christian household,” or would they be able to guess your answer to that question in the 21st century? If not, then your own family may “forget” they are God’s beloved sons and daughters. Perhaps consider making it a family project to select a crucifix to be placed in your home as a reminder, somewhere that everyone will see it daily.
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Jeremiah 20:7-9
- The world of today mocks men and women, families of faith, much like the prophet Jeremiah was mocked for his words in ancient Israel.
- Do we, like Jeremiah, still see the glow of hope and continue to speak the words of God in our lives?

Second Reading: Romans 12:1-2
- “Do not conform yourselves to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may discern the will of God.”
- One of the biggest challenges facing families, married couples, and, in particular ways, young adults is the pressure to conform to the present age.
- Family life is not only the foundation but also the focal point for lives that are lived distinct from the political correctness the world might encourage.

Gospel: Matthew 16:21-27
- When Jesus rebukes Peter, He tells him that he is “…thinking not as God does but as human beings do.”
- It is also our tendency to respond to the world’s definition of success at the expense of Jesus’ mandate to go forth each day and live the Gospel.
- The Gospel and the second reading are easily linked in this context of choosing to be counter-cultural.

Food for Thought:
Every married couple has the right to expect an extraordinary marriage. Such a marriage is possible only with the commitment of the couple to demand it of each other, of the Church, and of our loving Savior Jesus Christ. “Ask and you shall receive!”

Story: Petition:
That married couples strive to conform to the Gospel and Jesus’ plan for their lives before they strive for success as the world knows it, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
The readings today invite us to be counter-cultural, i.e., to respond to the Gospel instead of Manhattan advertising, in how we live in the world. Remember to pray for parents and families so that the authentic teaching of Jesus takes root and flourishes around every kitchen table in every home.
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Ezekiel 33:7-9

- Who is the “watchman for the house” of the Lord in your home?
- Parents need to fulfill this role, especially as their children discover the messages spread through entertainment, TV and movies that are counter to the teaching of Jesus.

Second Reading: Romans 13:8-10

- “Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another,” says St. Paul, for “love is the fulfilment of the law.”
- All love within families and between spouses is rooted in the love of God. Consequently, we need to reflect the love of God within all our family relationships.

Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20

- “Where two or more are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”
- Think about how often “two or more” gather in the name of God within family life. Begin with spouses, but extend that to include parents and children when they say grace before meals, nighttime prayers at a child’s bedside, and prayers with elderly parents/grandparents, especially when the elderly are hospitalized for an illness.
- All of these prayers are rooted in love and care for each other, which connects with the Second Reading.

Food for Thought:
When a couple marries in the sacrament of matrimony, the two become, through their life together, two gathered in Jesus’ name. This means that wherever you go as a couple, you bring with you a special guest, Jesus. He comes with you into your home. He goes with you when you visit family and friends, the soccer field, the beach, or the backyard barbecue. It is always good to recall that He is not just watching, but is with you in your midst.

Story: Petition:
That within each family and home, Saint Paul’s admonition to “love one another” becomes a channel of grace and peace, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
St. Matthew’s Gospel reminds us that wherever two or more are gathered in His name, He is right there, present in their midst. This message and promise of Jesus applies to every Christian marriage. Remember to put His grace to work in your lives so that the good work He has begun on your wedding day may come to fulfillment in your home.
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Sirach 27: 30, 28: 9

- Marriage and family life can be broken very quickly when we cannot forgive one another, especially those in our home who are closest to us.
- A great verse to consider is “Could anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from the Lord?” (Sirach 28: 3).
- We all need healing – physical, emotional and spiritual – so let go of any anger or vengeful feelings toward those you love most!

Second Reading: Romans 14:7-9

- What does it mean in our daily lives that “…we live for the Lord?” (Romans 14: 8). Does this make a difference in your daily actions, your conversations, your relationships within your family?
- Relate how living for the Lord relates to extending forgiveness to others … this is not optional, but required of faithful disciples.

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

- How often must I forgive? Seven times?
- When Peter asked that question, he thought he was being generous, as the prevailing wisdom in the Jewish teaching form the Old Testament was that you needed to forgive an offense three times.
- Jesus’ response of “seventy-seven times” is meant to imply offering an unlimited forgiveness; you could remember three times, or even seven times. But Seventy- Seven? It instructs us to not only to forgive, but to forget, and not to keep count. Forgiveness is rooted in love, and the love of God is unlimited.

Food for Thought:
Forgiveness is essential for successful marriages, as is the humility to ask for forgiveness. When we think of the vows shared in the Order of Celebrating Matrimony, we commit to better and worse, to good times and bad. When we make a mistake that is “the bad” or the “worse” moments. They are part of the whole package of a lifelong commitment, and making that lifelong commitment work and grow takes the humility and courage to ask for forgiveness, to say we are sorry.

Petition:
That within our homes we are generous with offering forgiveness to each member of our family, and merciful in both giving and receiving forgiveness, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Jesus’ response of “seventy-seven times” is meant to imply offering an unlimited forgiveness; you could remember three times, or even seven times. But Seventy-Seven? It instructs us to not only to forgive, but to forget, and not to keep count. Forgiveness is rooted in love, and the love of God is unlimited.
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 55:6-9
- “Seek the Lord while He may be found …” (Isaiah 55:6). “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.” (Isaiah 55:8).
- Isaiah gives spouses and families a challenge in this reading. If our human thoughts are too secular, too focused on the world, or perhaps focused inward on ourselves, how do we discover the Lord’s way?
- One answer – and there are probably others – is to remember that we do need to seek the Lord. Seeking Him is an active verb, something that we do intentionally. And seeking the Lord is counter-cultural. Perhaps, we should link this thought with the generosity of the Lord which we hear of in the Gospel parable.

Second Reading: Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a
- Consider sharing with people the connecting verses from Paul’s letter, “But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again” (Philippians 1: 25-26).
- Paul speaks of our lives here on earth, and offers the advice that living each day for the glory of Jesus; we do find joy in faith.
- In a particular way, spouses have the opportunity to remind each other of this joy, found by choosing to live with Christ as the center of our lives. Spouses know to say, “please” and “thank you,” to allow their words and actions to carry the kindness and patience of those in love. Consider how spouses might take the time to bless each other. Letting the one you love know that you are holding them in prayer is a reminder of that love. It also reminds them that Jesus desires each of you to find joy in this life, and to find it in each other.

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16a
- The parable of the landowner is one that speaks very directly to the generosity of God; both those who turn to Him early, and those who turn to Him late are welcomed with the fullness of His love, mercy, forgiveness and abundance.
- Sometimes in family life, we tend to keep score. We may not do this consciously, but occasionally spouses might find themselves thinking, “I took care of that the last time. It is his/her turn now!”
- There are many problems with that type of thinking, not the least of which is that we never have the full score, and we never will. How many times have you done something for your spouse when they weren’t around? Of course you have, but they may not know of those actions, just as you may not be aware of when they have done the same for you.
A relationship rooted in God’s love cannot be based on keeping score of the kindnesses nor the mistakes. It must be rooted fully in the generous heart of one who gives without counting the cost, whose actions are done purely out of love for each other. That authentic love is what we heard about in the first reading, too. It is counter-cultural, and is overflowing with generosity.

Food for Thought:
Many of us keep score, usually not intentionally, but nevertheless we know whose turn it is to take care of the chores in our homes. We can feel hurt because we are doing more than our fair share. Saint Matthew’s Gospel today reflects on the generosity of God through the parable of the landowner, who paid the same for a full day or a single hour of work. This carries an especially important message for married couples. The success of your marriage, indeed the potential for an extraordinary marriage does not rely on a fifty percent partnership nor an equal amount of give and take. Instead, it relies on a one hundred percent commitment to each other. To truly and lovingly give one hundred percent each day requires that we stop keeping score, and fully commit to give our all to the spouse and family who we love so deeply.

Petition:
With gratitude for Jesus who gave His all for us, we pray that within each family, spouses and children give without counting the cost, offering the fullness of their love to each other, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Many of us keep score—knowing whose turn it is to take care of the chores in our homes, or perhaps feel hurt because we are doing more than our fair share. Saint Matthew’s Gospel today reflects on the generosity of God through the parable of the landowner, who paid the same for a full day or a single hour of work. This carries an especially important message for married couples. The success of your marriage, indeed the potential for an extraordinary marriage does not rely on a fifty percent partnership nor an equal amount of give and take. Instead, it relies on a one hundred percent commitment to each other. To truly and lovingly give a hundred percent each day requires that we stop keeping score, and fully commit to give our all to the spouse and family who we love so deeply.
26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Ezekiel 18:25-28

- Honesty is a basic for marriage and family life. When we view the other person as honest, we can build the rest of our emotional lives together. But if honesty is absent, we question everything … even the true parts of conversation, life and relationships are called into question.

- Ezekiel reminds us, however, that it is a great gift when one turns from dishonesty to a life of righteousness. This is a wonderful conversion!

- But remember that conversion within a family relationship takes time. Forgiveness for past breaks with honesty and trust is called for, but can be extremely challenging. Forgiveness becomes the catalyst for loving relationships to grow with renewed energy.

Second Reading: Philippians 2:1-11 or 2:1-5

- Consider the words “… complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory.” (Philippians 2: 2-3).

- When linked with the Gospel, we can consider this reading as a loving reminder that it is not simply our actions, but the underlying reasons for our actions which shape who we are.

- Paul links the words joy, love, heart and mind together. These become the strong roots for growing as a couple, sharing dreams of the future together and working toward making those dreams a reality.

Gospel: Matthew 21:28-32

- “No, I won’t go!” says the son, but he goes anyway, while the other son says he will go and doesn’t. Who does the father’s will? The former, but he starts out with an attitude. The second son lacks the attitude, but also lacks truthfulness.

- When we say the first acted as Jesus’ would teach us, we are also saying that acting with dishonesty is wrong. That is certainly true within the relationship of a husband and wife, and between parents and children. “Honesty is the best policy” is more than a cute phrase. It is an essential to any relationship.

- Consider for a moment the promises that are made in marriage and by the families within our Church. We promise to love for better and worse, for richer and poorer, in sickness and health. We also promise to teach our faith to our children when we present them for baptism. We vow to be our children’s first teachers in the ways of faith.

- Now ask yourself if you are doing each of these things to the best of your ability? If not, think of ways to change so that your actions reflect the sacred covenants which you have already made to God?
Food for Thought:
When young couples – or not-so-young couples – prepare for marriage, they enter into a new way of doing just about everything. The mundane chores around the house and shopping become different when you are figuring out how to share the tasks as a married couple. We hear from Saint Paul today, “...complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart…” (Philippians 2: 2). What a great blessing it is for parents to be of the same heart in raising their children. That blessing becomes rooted in the earliest days of marriage, as newlyweds become of one mind and heart, united in sacramental marriage.

Petition:
For married couples in our parish community, that the challenges of sacramentally living for better and for worse, in sickness and in health is supported and strengthened by our prayers, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement
In both St. Paul’s letter and the Gospel this week, we find the message of love being grounded in trust. This trust may not come easy for everyone, and always takes time to mature. When young couples – or not-so-young couples – prepare for marriage, they enter into a new way of doing just about everything. The mundane chores around the house and shopping become different when you are figuring out how to share the tasks as a married couple. We hear from Saint Paul today, “...complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart…” (Philippians 2: 2) What a great blessing it is for parents to be of the same heart in raising their children. It is a blessing grown in the earliest days of their marriage as newlyweds work and pray together to become of one mind and heart, united in sacramental marriage
First Reading: Isaiah 5:1-7
• The owner of the vineyard invested time, care, and effort to help his vineyard flourish.
• He expected good results for his efforts, but was disappointed when his expectations weren’t met.
• The owner represents God and the care he lavishes on us; we are the vineyard and don’t always produce good fruits.
• The story might also represent our personal relationships. We may invest time and effort in our families and yet find ourselves disappointed when our loved ones don’t live up to our expectations.

Second Reading: Philippians 4: 6-9
• We’re encouraged to entrust our wants and needs to God with a grateful heart.
• St. Paul assures us that if we do, we’ll experience the peace of God, which is beyond our understanding.
• Notice Paul says our peace comes from God—not from our families, friends, or loved ones.
• Paul also encourages us to focus on what is true, good, lovely, and worthy of praise, in other words, to focus on the positive.
• Negativity finds its way into our attitudes all by itself, but we need to be pro-active in focusing on what is good—especially about the people we share our lives with. It is easy to criticize, but when we look for the good, we find it.

Gospel: Matthew 21:33-43
• In the Gospel parable, the owner also did everything he could to help the vineyard flourish, but then left the vineyard in the care of tenants.
• These tenants didn’t care about the vineyard or their relationship with the owner; they focused on what they could get out of it for themselves.
• The tenants selfishly tried to get what they wanted by force. Not only was it wrong, it didn’t even get them what they wanted. All it did was antagonize the owner.
• We can be just as short-sighted in our relationships. We can hurt each other and damage our relationships by our selfish demands. God, our vineyard owner, wants us to love, forgive, and treat one another the way he loves, forgives, and treats us.

Food For Thought
In today’s first reading and Gospel, both owners did everything they could for their vineyards. They expected good results but were disappointed by rotten fruit and selfish tenants. These parables represent God’s loving care for us and our sometimes disappointing responses. The parables also offer insight into our relationships with each other.
For example, a bride and groom brimming with love and anticipation invest time and effort in their marriage. Then day-to-day challenges take their toll. Frustrations, impatience, and sharp words puncture their expectations. Someone said an expectation is a pre-meditated resentment. We’re bound to be disappointed when others don’t live up to our expectations. Of course, we don’t always live up to others’ expectations either.

St. Paul said that if we focus on what’s good and ask God for what we need and want, we’ll experience God’s peace. Notice Paul doesn’t say our peace comes from our spouses, parents, children, or friends. God’s peace doesn’t depend on others doing what we want.

**Story:**
Imagine a couple on their wedding day, brimming with love and anticipation. As newlyweds, they treat each other with care and consideration. Then reality sets in. Day to day frustrations take their toll. A sharp word here, an eye roll there—made all the worse because of their expectations.

- I worked so hard to fix a nice dinner. The least he could do is take out the garbage without being asked.
- I want to tell her what happened at work but it’s not worth it to interrupt her while she’s watching Downton Abby. I tried that once. Never again.

It’s easy to take each other for granted. This goes for all types of relationships: parents and children, co-workers, and friends. We all get tired. We all have bad days. When our efforts don’t get the response we want, we’re tempted to stop trying. We can fall into a “what’s in it for me?” attitude—almost like the tenants in today’s gospel. When we’re selfish, we stop bearing “good fruit.” We can end up killing courtesy in our relationships one little insult at a time.

So what can we do instead? St. Paul encourages us to focus on whatever is true, lovely, noble, and worthy of praise—in other words, to focus on the positive. Negativity finds its way into our thoughts and attitudes all by itself. We need to be proactive in focusing on the good qualities our loved ones have. If we look for the good, we’ll find it.

**Petition:**
That those struggling with the challenges of family life draw on God’s love for the nurturing they need, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
As we receive God’s love, we have more to share with others. We can nurture love by focusing on the positive.
28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 25: 6-10a
- Isaiah described the coming kingdom of God as a rich banquet prepared for all people.

Second Reading: Philippians 4: 12-14, 19-20
- Paul affirmed that he had learned how to face having either too much or too little through the power that Christ provides.
- Paul took great pride in being self-sufficient on his missionary trips. He pointed out in several letters that he worked to provide for his own needs. Nevertheless, he accepted help from the Philippians on more than one occasion. In this letter Paul expressed his warm gratitude for their generous gift to him during his imprisonment.

Gospel: Matthew 22: 1-14
- Jesus described the kingdom of heaven as a wedding feast, much like the feast Isaiah described in the first reading. When those originally invited chose not to attend, the King opened the invitation to all—good and bad alike.
- Although all were invited to the feast, one guest arrived without wearing appropriate wedding clothes and was cast out. This isn’t the work of the fashion police; it addresses the sincerity involved in accepting God’s gracious invitation.

Food For Thought:
In today’s Gospel, we hear the kingdom of heaven compared to a rich feast provided by a generous host. Those originally invited refused to attend because they had better things to do. As instructed, the king’s servants went to the highways and invited whoever they found, opening the invitation to all people. Although all are invited, one person accepted the invitation but showed up improperly dressed and was cast out. (Some scholars believe that, in that culture, wedding clothes were provided by the host.) The point of the story is not about fashion, but about a sincere response to God’s gracious invitation.

We’re invited—not by merit, but by God’s grace—to come enjoy the lavish banquet of God’s love. Accepting this invitation calls for an appropriate response. We show our sincerity and gratitude by loving God in return and by sharing His love with others. To do any less reveals us as not “suited” to participate in a love feast.

Story:
Something in us connects by breaking bread together. Jesus knew that. We come together as His family to share the Eucharist, to be nourished at His love feast.

Coming together with our loved ones often involves a meal. From happy times over a pizza to the repast after a funeral, we’re sustained and renewed by the shared warmth and conversation as well as by the food. Crowded schedules can make it challenging for families to share a meal together. When Ben’s wife has to work late, Ben races from work to pick up their son Tyler. Ben and Tyler grab dinner at Burger King. Later, when she gets home, Mom heats up a Lean Cuisine. Imagine if, when she does, Ben puts down the remote and joins her for a cup of coffee. Imagine Tyler putting the video game on pause and heading to the table to tell Mom what happened at school. They talk
about their day—the good, the bad, and the ugly. It’s not necessarily about eating simultaneously, but about enjoying the nourishment of shared love.

In today’s second reading, St. Paul thanks the Philippians for the gift he received from them while imprisoned. He made it clear that he had learned how to face good times and bad through Christ’s power. Paul prided himself in working to pay his own way. Nevertheless, Paul accepted help from the Philippians. None of us are self-sufficient. Sometimes we’re in a position to help others. Sometimes we need help ourselves. That’s why God gives us each other and opens his love feast to all who want to participate. All we have to do is share what we’ve received.

*Petition:*
That families who receive the nourishment of God’s love share that nourishment with others, we pray to the Lord.

*Bulletin Announcement:*
God provides a rich banquet of love for all people; all we have to do is accept His generosity and share it with others.
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 45: 1, 4-6

- Although a pagan king, Cyrus is referred to as anointed, a term reserved for kings of Israel.
- Cyrus, who after conquering Babylon allowed the captive Israelites to return to their homeland, is seen as an agent of the Lord.
- God has sovereignty even over earthly rulers.

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-5

- In his letter, St. Paul warmly lets the Thessalonians know he is praying for them.
- He affirms the Thessalonians’ practice of their faith, their hope in God, and the love their hard work demonstrates.
- Paul reminds them that they belong to God, who loves them and chose them to be his own.
- Paul also reminds them that he and his companions shared the Good News with them, not only with words, but with power and the Holy Spirit.
- Paul calls to mind how he and his companions lived, setting an example for the Thessalonians.

Gospel: Matthew 22: 15-21

- The Pharisees tried to trap Jesus with a question designed to force Him either to support paying a tax to the oppressive Roman government that the Jewish people resented or to speak against paying taxes, which would get Jesus in trouble with the Roman authorities.
- Jesus refused to take sides. He asked his questioners for a coin (which He Himself didn’t have.) That his questioners had a Roman coin handy implied they used and benefited from Roman currency, even though the coins had a graven image, which was a violation of Jewish commandments.
- Therefore, Jesus told them to repay to Rome the benefits they gained from using the pagan monetary system but to pay to God what is due Him by His sovereignty over their lives.

Food For Thought:

Today’s readings confirm God’s dominion over the whole world, including authorities. In the Gospel, Jesus refused to debate separation of church and state, but honored God’s sovereignty by telling His listeners to pay “to God what belongs to God.”

What belongs to God? For one thing, we do. In today’s second reading, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they are loved and were chosen by God to be his own and that he prays for them. With warmth and encouragement Paul affirms how the Thessalonians put their faith into practice, how their love is manifested in their hard work, and how their hope is in the Lord.
When we’re bumping into the day to day irritations that happen while living together under one roof, it can be challenging to notice—let alone affirm—the faith, hope, and love our loved ones demonstrate.

Do we pray for our families every day? Why not let them know? Why not tell the people we live with when we notice them living out their faith? Have they expressed hope or cynicism today?

Can we share a reason to hope with them or affirm a time when their hope was justified? Perhaps we can remind them of a time when things didn’t go as they wanted, but ended up—in God’s time—working out just fine? Can we thank them for a task well done, and appreciate the love behind it? Can we set an example? When we share God’s love with others, that’s giving to God what belongs to God.

**Story:**
Hank was a teacher, so he knew the importance of preparation and the responsibility his students had to study. Hank also remembered how nervous he always got before a big test at school when he was a child—even if he studied hard. Whenever that happened, his mother would always give him a hug on the morning of the big test and tell him she was praying for him. Hank said that helped him calm down. When he got to school, thinking of his mom’s prayers gave him the boost he needed to tackle the test. That didn’t mean Hank didn’t study, just that he knew he wasn’t alone. With that simple affirmation, Hank’s mother reassured him of her love for him. It affirmed his love for her in wanting to do his best, his faith in the power of prayer, and the hope of conquering his fear. Hank did the legwork beforehand, because his mother had also set a good example of fulfilling her responsibilities. It’s also true that affirming his faith, hope, and love made a difference.

**Petition:**
That all believers, by their faith, hope, and love pay to God what belongs to God, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
One way we can pay to God what belongs to Him is by sharing our faith, hope, and love with one another.
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Exodus 22: 20-26
- God ordered the Israelites to have compassion for the most vulnerable people in their society—widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor.
- Having been foreigners themselves in Egypt, the Israelites had reason to empathize with foreigners. Nevertheless, God calls the Israelites to be compassionate because He, their God, is compassionate.

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1: 5-10
- St. Paul expressed gratitude for the Thessalonians’ endurance and labors of love that witnessed to the power of the gospel and the Holy Spirit.

Gospel: Matthew 22: 34-40
- When asked which commandment was the greatest, Jesus united loving God with loving our neighbors and ourselves.
- God is love. We can’t love God without participating in the community of love.
- We’re called to love our neighbor as ourselves, not instead of ourselves.
- Loving God, neighbor, and self is the basis for all the other commandments. When we love God, we don’t make idols of other things and we don’t treat His name cheaply. When we love others, we don’t hurt or take advantage of them. When we love ourselves, we don’t abuse our bodies or our characters.

Food For Thought:
God commanded the Israelites to have compassion for the most vulnerable members of their society and affirmed that He is compassionate. In today’s gospel, Jesus equates loving God with loving our neighbor as ourselves. This God who calls us to love Him, ourselves, and each other is a far cry from a demanding czar of heaven.

If we love God, we will want to please Him. God makes it pretty plain that what pleases Him is showing compassion and concern for others—especially the vulnerable. If we don’t show love through our actions, our words are meaningless.

Commanding us to love can’t mean commanding us to feel affection. God, who gave us our emotions, knows that we can’t force ourselves to feel a certain way. Love is a choice, a decision to act in the best interest of others no matter how we feel.

Story:
Home is the first training ground for learning how to love. For better or worse, what we see as children speaks louder than whatever we hear about being kind, loving, and forgiving. Is the dinner table a place of conversation or a battle ground? Is it safe to share our honest feelings at home or are we told we “shouldn’t feel” anger or fear?

Living under one roof isn’t always easy. Quarrels between spouses and siblings are bound to happen. Hard feelings are bound to arise. What great opportunities to learn to love others and ourselves, to work through our feelings, and to act in each other’s best interests regardless of how
we feel. We can practice forgiveness and compassion when we reconcile with our family members after a disagreement. What a great chance to learn the conflict resolution skills that we all need in the world!

We also learn about reconciling with God. Feeling angry with God during hard times doesn’t mean we don’t love God. Feelings come and go—that’s the nature of feelings. Love goes deeper than feelings. There’s room for compassion in honest relationships. Spouses learn to “kiss and make up.” Brothers and sisters learn to apologize and make amends. We can do the same with God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We can recognize the harm we’ve done to others, to ourselves, and to God’s compassionate heart by our selfish or angry outbursts. We can say we’re sorry. We can ask for the grace to choose love in the future.

**Petition:**
That families respond to God’s overflowing love by loving each other with compassion, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Love and compassion, like charity, begin at home.
31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Malachi 1: 14b - 2: 2b, 8-10
- The Levitical priests didn’t take God’s commandments to heart. They broke the covenant with God by not obeying God’s commandments.
- This showed disrespect for God and indifference for the well-being of His people, who were led astray by the priests’ example.
- It’s presumptuous to think we can worship God with indifference. What we offer God doesn’t have to be perfect, but it does need to be sincere.
- All of us, especially those in authority—including religious leaders, teachers, and parents—have a responsibility to pass on our faith, not only by what we say, but by our example.

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2: 7b-9, 13
- St. Paul and the other apostles shared the Good News with the Thessalonians, by nurturing them and using encouraging words, as a parent nurtures a child.
- Out of concern for these believers, Paul and his companions also set an example by working to pay their own way rather than burdening the believers by demanding financial support.

Gospel: Matthew 23: 1-12
- Although He recognized and respected the authority of the religious leaders’ teachings, Jesus warned his listeners not to follow their example. In spite of their knowledge of the Law of Moses, the scribes and Pharisees didn’t live it.
- The Pharisees burdened the people with exacting legal requirements. They were more concerned with elevating themselves than following the heart of God’s commandments. They basked in the honor and respect they got from empty, external religious observance.
- Jesus warned his followers against hypocrisy and the spirit of superiority that titles of honor encouraged.

Food For Thought:
Today’s readings address the responsibilities of sharing the Good News with the world, something all of us, through baptism, are called to do. The Good News we share is the powerful word of God, Creator and Lord of the Universe. Lip service is not enough. The prophet Malachi had strong words against hypocritical religious authorities who misled many by their example. Jesus also had strong words for the religious experts who didn’t “walk the walk.” Jesus warned His followers, as He warns us, not to follow their example of empty religious observance motivated by the desire for honor and admiration.

In contrast, Jesus tells His followers that those who want to be great must be the servant of others. True spirituality is not about ego-building or the false humility of putting ourselves down, but forgetting about ourselves and being useful to God and the people He puts in our path every day.
**Story:**
In contrast to the hypocritical religious leaders we hear about today, St. Paul’s work with the Thessalonians sounds remarkably like parenting. Paul and his companions nurtured the new believers like a mother caring for her children. The apostles didn’t just share the word of God. They shared themselves through their actions.

They worked to support themselves instead of expecting to be supported. Isn’t that just what parents do? They nurture their children while setting an example for them. Parents, the first to introduce their children to God, influence them more by what they do than by what they say. Growing up in 1950’s rural America, Debbie watched her mother when people in need would stop by the house to ask for a handout. Debbie’s mom never gave money—she didn’t have it to give—but she never sent anyone away hungry. Anyone asking for food always left with a sandwich and some water. When Debbie grew up and married, she lived in the suburbs. No such people came around and it wouldn’t have been wise to open the door to strangers anyway. Nevertheless, once a month Debbie took her daughter Jen with her when she volunteered at the soup kitchen downtown. When Jen grew up and had a family of her own, she worked full time and went to school nights. She didn’t have time or energy to volunteer at a soup kitchen, but her son watched her donate groceries every time their church collected for the local food pantry. Three generations learned about caring for the poor without a single word being spoken.

**Petition:**
That parents teach their children about God’s love through actions as well as words, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
God’s love for us calls us to respond with love that shows itself in what we do as well as what we say.
32nd Sunday in Ordinary

First Reading: Wisdom 6: 12-16
- Wisdom shines and is found by those who seek her.
- Whoever persists in looking for wisdom finds peace of mind.

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18
- Thessalonian Christians worried about the fate of those who had died before Christ’s return, which they thought would happen soon.
- St. Paul reassured them that the faithful departed would enjoy union with Christ along with those living when Christ came again. There was no need for a sense of urgency about Christ’s return.

Gospel: Matthew 25: 1-13
- The parable of the ten virgins addresses the end times, when the kingdom of heaven will be ushered in with Christ’s second coming. Jesus compares this event to a wedding. Some awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom were wise; some were foolish.
- Although none of the ten virgins knew exactly when the bridegroom would arrive, the wise ones brought extra oil. They were in it for the long haul, if need be. They adjusted themselves to the bridegroom’s schedule, not the other way around. The others, perhaps impatient or short-sighted, were unwilling to invest in long term preparations.
- When the bridegroom finally arrived, those not prepared didn’t have enough resources to sustain them. They couldn’t get what they needed from others, but had to get it for themselves. Their last minute efforts were too little, too late.
- Maybe it seems selfish of the wise virgins not to share, but the oil in this parable represents the faith that sustains us. We can encourage others to grow in faith, trust, and perseverance, but we can’t give these qualities to anyone else, no matter how much we might like to. God gave us each free will and it is up to us to use it. We are responsible for the choices we make.
- The wise virgins were wise enough to avoid a co-dependent relationship with others. They knew better than to try to give them what they could not. It does not help anyone when we do for them what they can and should be doing for themselves. Making up for someone else’s shortcomings disrespects the God-given dignity of their free will and deprives them of opportunities to grow.

Food For Thought:
Wisdom shines like the light in the lamps of the wise virgins in today’s gospel. This parable deals with the end times, when Christ will come again and usher in the Kingdom of heaven.

The foolish virgins, perhaps short-sighted or impatient, didn’t bring extra oil for their lamps. The wise virgins were committed for the long haul and prepared to cope with short term discomfort. They adjusted themselves to the bridegroom’s schedule, rather than expecting him to follow theirs.
Maybe it seems selfish that the wise virgins refused to share their oil, but this is a parable. The lamp oil represents faith that sustained them through the darkness. God has a direct relationship with each of us. We can’t give our faith to someone else. Although we can encourage others, each one of us has to grow in our own faith. We are each responsible for our choices.

There are some things we each need to do for ourselves. It’s disrespectful to do for our loved ones what they can and should do for themselves. Obviously we need to guide and protect children, but we don’t do anyone any favors when we take over their responsibilities.

**Story:**
Enabling irresponsibility can be as subtle as becoming a middleman in other people’s relationships. Ellen and Dan had been married for years. Dan had issues with his mother but never addressed them directly. Ellen acted as go-between. One day Dan’s mother, legally blind, called to ask Dan to take care of a banking matter. Dan refused to get on the phone or go to his mother’s house. Ellen, who answered the phone, was caught in the middle. She told Dan’s mom they’d see her later and hung up. Ellen coaxed. She urged. She nagged. Dan still refused. So Ellen drove to her mother-in-law’s house alone and tried to think up an excuse. Her mother-in-law thanked her for coming but insisted she wanted Dan.

Ellen, tempted to lie, told the truth as gently as she could. “Dan doesn’t want to come,” she said. When Dan’s mother asked her why, Ellen responded, “You’ll have to ask him.” Ellen wisely saw she couldn’t continue to make up for the lack of relationship between Dan and his mother. What she could do was tell the truth with love and leave the responsibility for their relationship where it belonged. She accepted the short-term discomfort of an awkward conversation for the sake of changing what she could about the long-standing issue.

It’s like that with faith, too. Although we can lead by example, encourage others, and point them to resources to nurture their faith, we can’t control someone else’s relationship with God. We are each His children. When we’re in it for the long haul, our faith will sustain us no matter what others do or don’t do.

**Petition:**
That, through mutual respect, spouses will encourage each other on their faith journey, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Faith that shines through the darkness is available to us all, but we each have to walk our own faith journey.
33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Proverbs 31: 10-13; 19-20, 30-31

- The woman described in Proverbs showed her love, stemming from her devotion to God, through her actions. The loving service with which she performed ordinary household tasks benefited her family and the larger community.
- Performing our everyday tasks with love is something we’re all capable of.

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-6

- St. Paul reminded the Thessalonians that Christ’s return and the end times would come unexpectedly, “like a thief at night.”
- Paul encouraged believers to live in God’s light and remain alert and prepared because the time of Christ’s return was unknown.
- Mindful that Christ will come again at the end of time—no matter when that might be—calls all of us to guard against complacency and to act accordingly. As members of God’s kingdom, we prepare for that day by loving God, our neighbors, and ourselves as we go about our daily lives.
- Our faith, hope, and love is expressed through our practical, day-to-day actions.

Gospel: Matthew 25: 14-30

- The parable of the man leaving on a journey represents Christ’s ascension until His return. Like the servants in the parable, we’ve all been given different talents and are expected to use them rather than hide them out of fear.
- Gifts were given according to each servant’s ability. Because they didn’t start with the same amount they weren’t expected to yield the same results as one another. Nevertheless, all were expected to do what they could with what they had.
- It’s the same with us. We all start out with different inherent abilities and different experiences in our formative years. Comparing ourselves to one another doesn’t make any sense. There is no level playing field. Comparisons might inspire the fear that we’re not good enough.
- The man in the parable with only one talent didn’t use it but hid it out of fear. What talent do you have that you’re keeping hidden out of fear? What would it take for you to overcome that fear? How can you find a support network to encourage you to explore and use of your talents?
- Families support their members in discovering and using their God-given talents when they encourage each other to try new things without fear of failure and when they recognize and praise efforts regardless of the results.
Food For Thought:
No one knows when Christ will come again. Until that time, we’re called to live as today’s readings invite us to: to show our love for God, our neighbors, and ourselves through our actions, using the talents God gave us. Families can create a safe environment that nurtures healthy self-esteem and confidence. They can encourage all family members to explore their abilities and use those abilities to help others.

Being human, we don’t always give our loved ones the support needed to develop their capabilities. Some parents might be so invested in their child’s success in academics or sports that the child feels tremendous pressure and fears not living up to their parents’ expectations. Some spouses might feel threatened by their partner’s talent or success and become overly critical. In contrast, the safety of unconditional love nurtures family members as they explore their God-given talents. Even if those talents seem unspectacular, like the woman in today’s first reading, humble service is worthy of praise. We can all develop our ability to do our daily tasks with great love and appreciate each other’s efforts.

Story:
Donna, a young wife and mother, had a successful career teaching at the college level. When her children became school age, Donna and her husband, unhappy with the culture permeating schools in their area, decided they could get by on one paycheck. Donna gave up her prestigious career to homeschool her children. Some might argue that Donna was hiding her God-given intellectual ability. Donna wouldn’t have cared. She valued her children’s development and invested her time and energy in their elementary and high school education.

As the children grew and needed less supervision, Donna’s other talents rose to the surface and found a home where they were needed. Her organizational skills, talent for public speaking, and personal experience as a faith-filled Catholic wife and mother made Donna ideally suited to share her faith. She became active in a number of ministries at the parish, diocesan and eventually archdiocesan level. Today, her presentations and training workshops help Donna carry the message of God’s plan for marriage and family life to those who need to hear it. Her openness to using her time and talent for the good of her family and the world beyond is evidence of her relationship with God, who gave her that time and talent.

Using our talents for the good of God’s kingdom might not look like what the world calls success. That’s okay. No matter whether we are called to use those talents—in the world at large, under our own roof, or both—if we’re doing what we can with what God gave us, we can rest assured.

Petition:
That God bless families with the generosity to encourage each other in exploring and using their talents, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Although we don’t know when, Christ will return. How can you make better use of your God-given talents meanwhile?
The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King

First Reading: Ezekiel 34: 11-12, 15-17
- When a man and a woman enter into the Sacrament of Matrimony, the Lord binds them to Himself and will protect them from the wilderness of life.
- Couples married in Christ must guard their marriage as the Good Shepherd guards His sheep.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15: 20-26, 28
- We are given new life as baptized sons and daughters of God. Each of our sacraments feeds and strengthens that new life.
- Couples married in Christ live that conviction that Christ is in the world and works through all the baptized, especially those who live out their vocations.

Gospel: Matthew 25: 31-46
- Our Gospel reminds us that before we can reach out to the world in need, we must have the eyes to see those in need within our own families.
- To feed the hungry means the one who sits at the breakfast table and hungers to be heard.
- To cloth the naked does not only mean to go through closets for clothes we do not use anymore, but to be able to place the robe of human dignity upon those who experience being stripped by the world.
- The little ones are all around us.

Food for Thought:
Often when this Gospel reading is proclaimed, we hear about the ministries that feed the hungry and cloth the naked. The social gospel of service fits very nicely with such a reading. But before we feed the world or shelter the homeless, we must also feed those within our families that hunger to be heard or feel alien in their own skin. The “least brothers of mine” could be across the breakfast table or down the hall at work.

Story:
I remember seeing a commercial for something, can’t remember the product, with a man in a beautifully appointed dining room, talking about all he has done for his family—how hard he has worked and the sacrifices he has made to give his family the finer things in life. A steak dinner sits before him, and before the commercial ends, he takes the dish and places it on the floor for the dog. There is no one at his table. He is eating alone. He placed the food on the table, but did not feed his family what they really needed.

Petition:
That married couples will allow Christ to work through them to heal the hurts that arise in family life and that they will be strength for each other as they live their vocation of matrimony, we pray to the Lord.
The Most Holy Trinity

First Reading: Exodus 34: 4b-6, 8-9

- The Lord speaks to Moses on Mount Sinai. He identifies Himself as “The Lord, the Lord is a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity.” (Exodus 34: 8-9).
- Moses hopes to have God on His side in dealing with the Israelites – a stiff-necked people.

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 13: 11-13

- The conclusion of this letter offers an exhortation to peace and unity among their numbers and it shows unity with Paul and the other early leaders of the Church stating that “All the holy ones greet you.” (2 Corinthians 13:12).
- The final verse, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the holy Spirit be with all of you.” (2 Corinthians 13:13) is one of the clearest Trinitarian passages in the New Testament.
- “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (2 Corinthians 13:12) is a repeated encouragement given by Paul in a number of his letters. It is quite possibly given as the opposite of Judas’ kiss of betrayal.

Gospel: John 3: 16-18

- The famous verse “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him, might not perish but might have eternal life.” (John 3:16) begins this passage.
- Salvation and eternal life comes through believing in Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus came into the world not to condemn but to save.

Food For Thought:

Almost inexplicably, God continues to provide for His people, unworthy as we might be. He hears Moses’ prayer and finds favor with him and gives him the rules to live by, establishing this covenant with Moses and the people. The all merciful, gracious God who is rich in kindness will stay true to His people.

Paul prays for the church in Corinth, that they will live in the peace and harmony that comes with and from the love of God. He offers the Trinitarian formula familiar to us in the greeting at the opening of Mass. At the beginning of Mass we pray that “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the holy Spirit be with all of you.” (2 Corinthians 13:13). As Father, God is willing to sacrifice for His people, by sending His only Son. As a good Father, He realizes our limitations, weaknesses and poor record in keeping the covenant. And yet, He is still merciful and does not condemn us. Rather, He offers us salvation through belief in His Son.
**Story:**
Her son’s killer stood on a chair on the gallows, his hands shackled, the noose around his neck,” reported Amir Vahdat and Adam Schreck in a story for the Associated Press. “Hundreds crowded outside the jailhouse in the northern Iranian town of Royan to see whether the mother would exercise her right to kick the chair out from under the condemned to let him hang.”

On April 15, 2014, that mother, Samereh Alinejad, who had dreamed of revenge for seven years following her son’s stabbing death in a street brawl, walked slowly toward the gallows. A blindfolded Bilal Gheisari, weeping, begged her one last time: “Forgive me. Show your mercy.” “Did you show mercy to my son?” asked Alinejad. “You have taken happiness away from us.

Why should I have mercy toward you?” Alinejad slapped Gheisari across the face. But, instead of kicking the stool out from under him, she burst into tears and then motioned to her husband to help slip the noose off Gheisari’s neck. Gheisari’s sentence was immediately commuted to 12 years in prison, half of which he had served already.

“This slap made me feel as if all the blood that had accumulated in my heart over the years suddenly burst and poured out,” Alinejad told AP reporters. “I became peaceful. I do not think about revenge anymore.” Banners in the streets now commend the family for their show of mercy.

**Petition:**
That those who suffer judgment and condemnation be shown mercy, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
God’s relationship with His creation is faithful and merciful. With whom are we in relationship? Are we faithful? Do we show mercy? God’s grace, love and fellowship are offered to us all through the Holy Trinity.
The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

First Reading: Deuteronomy 8: 2-3, 14-16

- Moses speaks strongly to the Israelites and reminds them of so many good things the Lord has done for them.
- The Lord tested the Israelites, but delivered them from slavery in Egypt.
- He fed them with manna in the desert and brought forth water from the flinty rock for them to drink.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 10: 16-17

- The questions Paul asks are right on target.
- In Christ, His body and blood, we find our unity as His body.
- This is a way of describing the Mystical Body of Christ.

Gospel: John 6: 51-58

- Jesus offers participation in eternal life to the crowd. Many cannot accept it.
- Jesus speaks of himself as “the living bread that came down from heaven.” This is much more than manna in the desert.
- Jesus’ body and blood are His life. He offers it to us to enter into completely with Him.

Food For Thought:
The Eucharist is all that and more. Some might know that “eating the body of Christ” at the Lord’s Supper is best understood as a symbol of the Lord’s love and presence among us. But that’s not enough. The genteel, young, Southern fiction writer Flannery O’Connor must have shocked her companions when, in conversation about the Eucharist, she once objected, “Well, if it’s a symbol, to hell with it.” In one of her letters, she wrote that the Eucharist “is the center of existence for me; all the rest of life is expendable.”

The meaning of the Eucharist resists taming; it refuses to be reduced to a mere anything. William Carlos Williams maintained that in a poem there are “no ideas except in things.” The Eucharist is not an abstract idea. It is an experience of mystery that will always be more than our struggle to articulate it. It is a “more” that is always shocking. (From “Sign and Sacrament” material; Prepare the Word: Whole Parish Evangelization)
**Story:**
In a small town many miles north of Fatima, Portugal, a young woman suffered a debilitating and paralyzing spinal cord injury while escaping from the attack of a man who was trying to molest her. The fourteen year old girl, Alexandrina Maria da Costa, was in constant and terrible pain. Any movement caused her extreme discomfort. She was confined to bed. Alexandrina received Holy Communion every day, and her thoughts often turned toward Jesus in the tabernacle. When she was twenty-seven, she went into her first ecstasy upon hearing Jesus say to her, “Love, suffer, and make reparation.” She soon realized her vocation was to take on the suffering of others and to become a victim soul for the reparation of others. The year was 1931. Jesus asked her to keep Him company in the Blessed Sacrament. Four years later, Jesus said to her, “You will not take food again on earth. Your food will be my Flesh; your drink will be my Divine Blood.” For more than thirteen years, Alexandrina maintained this absolute fast, exhibiting no adverse physical symptoms or loss of her mental capacities. She lived this way until her death. Alexandrina Maria da Costa was pronounced Blessed by Pope John Paul II and is regarded as a sign given to the world by Jesus to remind us of His real presence in the Eucharist.

**Petition:**
That those who suffer from hunger of any kind find the nourishment they need, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Jesus is the Bread of Everlasting Life. More than just a memorial or symbol, the Eucharist offers life eternal. Do we truly believe or is it too hard?
**Contributors**

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*Holy Week, Triduum, Easter Sunday*

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*Mary Mother of God, Epiphany, Baptism of the Lord and the 20\textsuperscript{th} – 26\textsuperscript{th} in Ordinary Time*

Mrs. Barbara Hosbach  
*27\textsuperscript{th} - 33\textsuperscript{rd} Sunday in Ordinary Time*

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*Advent and Christmas*

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