Table of Contents – Cycle C

1\textsuperscript{st} Sunday of Advent .................................................................................................................. 1
2\textsuperscript{nd} Sunday of Advent .................................................................................................................. 3
3\textsuperscript{rd} Sunday of Advent .................................................................................................................. 5
4\textsuperscript{th} Sunday of Advent .................................................................................................................. 7
The Nativity of the Lord – Vigil Mass .............................................................................................................. 9
The Nativity of the Lord – Mass at Midnight ................................................................................................. 11
The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph ................................................................................................. 13
January 1\textsuperscript{st}, Mary, the Mother of God ............................................................................................. 15
January 6\textsuperscript{th}, The Epiphany of the Lord ......................................................................................... 17
The Baptism of the Lord .................................................................................................................................. 19
Ash Wednesday ............................................................................................................................................. 21
1\textsuperscript{st} Sunday of Lent .......................................................................................................................... 22
2\textsuperscript{nd} Sunday of Lent ........................................................................................................................ 24
3\textsuperscript{rd} Sunday of Lent ........................................................................................................................ 26
4\textsuperscript{th} Sunday of Lent ........................................................................................................................ 28
5\textsuperscript{th} Sunday of Lent ........................................................................................................................ 30
Palm (or Passion) Sunday ............................................................................................................................. 32
Holy Thursday ............................................................................................................................................... 34
Good Friday ................................................................................................................................................... 36
Easter Vigil (Holy Saturday Evening) .......................................................................................................... 38
Easter Sunday (Resurrection of The Lord) ...................................................................................................... 41
2\textsuperscript{nd} Sunday of Easter ...................................................................................................................... 43
3\textsuperscript{rd} Sunday of Easter ...................................................................................................................... 45
4\textsuperscript{th} Sunday of Easter ...................................................................................................................... 47
5\textsuperscript{th} Sunday of Easter ...................................................................................................................... 48
6\textsuperscript{th} Sunday of Easter ...................................................................................................................... 50
7\textsuperscript{th} Sunday of Easter ...................................................................................................................... 51
Ascension of the Lord .................................................................................................................................... 52
Vigil of Pentecost ......................................................................................................................................... 54
Pentecost Sunday .......................................................................................................................................... 56
5\textsuperscript{th} Sunday in Ordinary time ........................................................................................................ 58
3\textsuperscript{rd} Sunday in Ordinary Time ........................................................................................................ 60
4\textsuperscript{th} Sunday in Ordinary Time ........................................................................................................ 61
5\textsuperscript{th} Sunday in Ordinary Time ........................................................................................................ 62
6\textsuperscript{th} Sunday in Ordinary Time ........................................................................................................ 63
7\textsuperscript{th} Sunday in Ordinary Time ........................................................................................................ 64
8\textsuperscript{th} Sunday in Ordinary Time ........................................................................................................ 65
9\textsuperscript{th} Sunday in Ordinary Time ........................................................................................................ 67
10\textsuperscript{th} Sunday in Ordinary Time ......................................................................................................... 69
11\textsuperscript{th} Sunday in Ordinary Time ......................................................................................................... 71
12\textsuperscript{th} Sunday in Ordinary Time ......................................................................................................... 73
13\textsuperscript{th} Sunday in Ordinary Time ......................................................................................................... 75
14\textsuperscript{th} Sunday in Ordinary Time ......................................................................................................... 77
15\textsuperscript{th} Sunday in Ordinary Time ......................................................................................................... 78
16\textsuperscript{th} Sunday in Ordinary Time ......................................................................................................... 80
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31st Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Most Holy Trinity</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of the Lord (February 2nd)</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Joseph (March 19th)</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annunciation (March 25th)</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nativity of St. John the Baptist (June 24th, Vigil)</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nativity of St. John the Baptist (During the Day)</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS. Peter and Paul (June 29th, Vigil)</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS. Peter and Paul (During the Day)</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfiguration (August 6th)</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15th, Vigil)</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Day)</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exultation of the Cross (September 14th)</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Saints Day</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Souls Day</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanksgiving</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (December 8th)</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12th)</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributors</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16

- Because of our baptismal covenant with God, we can rely on God’s faithfulness to us. He will keep His promises to us no matter what.
- Baptism and marriage are both covenants. They are promises to be faithful no matter what the circumstances and no matter what the cost. The ultimate goal of marriage is to bring Christian spouses into union with Christ in the glory of heaven.
- Making a marriage fruitful and sanctifying is all about keeping promises. The spouses promise to be true in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, and to love and honor each other until death.

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2

- In both marriage and parenting, our hearts often need strengthening. Sometimes our feelings of unhappiness or disappointment can weaken our resolve to continue to strive for holiness.
- Through the sacraments, our faith communities, our Christian friendships, and our Catholic families, God seeks to strengthen our hearts to persevere in virtue and hope when we would otherwise falter.


- Jesus describes the terrifying calamities and imminent tribulations that will assault everyone on earth at the coming of the Son of Man and encourages His disciples to “stand erect and raise your heads, because your redemption is at hand.”
- When life gets scary and overwhelming, as it sometimes does, Jesus tells us that we believers have reason to take courage and stand strong and firm in hopefulness.
- Sometimes family life is the very cause of life feeling scary and overwhelming, and sometimes it’s the source of our courage and strength.

Food For Thought:
I have a friend who often says, “Marriage is hard. That’s why the Church makes you take vows. Sometimes those vows are the only thing holding my marriage together.” After fifteen years of marriage, three children, and everything in between, it’s true. All marriages have bumps and rough patches. You can’t always see them from the outside, but they are there. And it is not an accident that in the celebration of the sacrament of marriage, the words of the bride and the groom as they profess their vows are the very instrument God uses to effect the sacramental union. The spouses and their promise to one another are both the matter and the form of the sacrament of marriage. The spouses are the ministers. At its very core, every Christian marriage is built on a promise. Living this promise faithfully until death takes courage, strength, perseverance, and grace.
**Petition:**
That the witness of faithfulness in the sacrament of Christian marriage will encourage all believers to be faithful to our covenant relationship with God through our baptism, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
God is ever faithful to us. How are we faithful to God? How could we be more so? Are you a man or a woman of your word?
2nd Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Baruch 5:1-9
- The holidays can be a difficult season for many people who may feel they are clothed with “mourning and misery.”
- We are all “remembered by God” because we are His children.
- No matter how far away from God or the Church we may feel, God will clear a path to us so that we may “advance secure in the glory of God.”

Second Reading: Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11
- St. Paul writes, “I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.” God is in the midst of fashioning and refashioning us into the people He created us to be. The ongoing work of conversion is not one-sided. It is not all on us. It is what God does in us.
- God wants us to increase more and more in love and in knowledge so that we may “discern what is of value.” What does discernment mean? How do we engage in the process of discernment? What is of value? This time of year our society answers that question in a very materialistic way. How do we answer that question as people of faith?

- This Gospel reading locates God’s action at a precise and verifiable moment in human history when John the Baptist began preaching in the desert.
- Many people believe that God chose to enter into human affairs “back then,” but those times are over, and we are on our own now. Catholics believe that God breaks into human time and space every time we celebrate Mass, every time we go to confession, and every time we receive a sacrament. These gifts bring us the word of God here and now and give us the grace to respond to God’s word in faith and love.

Food For Thought:
It has been said that you can tell what peoples’ priorities are—what they truly value above all else—by looking at their calendar and their checkbook. How do they spend their time? How do they spend their money? Today’s second reading challenges us to increase in love so that we can discern what is of value. Without love, our priorities can quickly shift from being directed outward toward others to being directed inward toward ourselves. Do we spend most of our time after work with our friends and family? Can we use some of that free time to volunteer at church, with Scouts, or at an agency that serves the needs of children and the poor? Are most of our purchases for things we want but don’t really need? Are there bills for items we can and should do without? Are we spending so much to cover consumer debt that we haven’t donated any significant amount to help the poor?
**Story:**
At this time of the year many parents notice that it is difficult to shield their children from materialism. Young children are sometimes completely overwhelmed by the amount of gifts they receive from grandparents and other relatives. By the time Christmas morning is over and they’ve opened their gifts from their parents and St. Nicholas, they have almost lost the capacity to enjoy them. At a certain point it can become difficult for parents to step in and place a limit on what extended family can or should give and what they themselves should buy for their children. We can easily get carried away. In certain communities there’s almost an expectation that all sixth graders will return to school in January with a new iPhone or laptop or that all first-grade girls should receive an American Girl doll. How can we expect our children to begin to discern what is of value, as St. Paul says, if we ourselves cannot discern what is of value? Creating handmade gifts for family and friends, baking cookies, making Christmas ornaments, and caroling at a nursing home are ways that families can spend quality time together and share in meaningful holiday experiences rather than spending more money and feeding into materialism.

**Petition:**
That during this Advent season Catholic families will strive to discern what is truly of lasting value and invest time in meaningful family experiences, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
St. Paul prays that our love would increase so that we may “discern what is of value.” If a stranger looked only at your calendar and your checkbook, what would that person determine you value? Do you need to make changes in how you spend your time and your money to better reflect what you know you should value?
3rd Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-18
- Rejoice, the Lord is in your midst!
- The Lord rejoices over His people with gladness.
- God actually breaks out in song, renewing us in His love.

Second Reading: Philippians 4:4-7
- Rejoice in the Lord always, for the Lord is near.
- Have no anxiety about anything, but embrace God’s peace.

- What are we to do? How are we now to live? The Gospel must be practical. How do we live out this joy, this peace that comes from knowing that Christ is in our midst?
- John the Baptist makes the point that living out the Good News means something different for everyone. The crowds, the tax collectors, and the soldiers were each told something different.
- In whatever vocation we find ourselves, whatever career path, whatever stage of life, God calls us each to live out our faith in different ways. But this lived out faith is very specific and very concrete.
- Through a life of prayer and the sacraments, we must discern where God is leading us and follow Him in concrete ways every day.

Food For Thought:
Paul rejoices: “Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7). The peace that God brings doesn’t “make sense” according to worldly logic. It surpasses our understanding. It isn’t based on circumstance or condition. It doesn’t mean life is always going to be easy. Joy and peace run deeper than the surface conditions of our lives. They run as deep as our soul’s deepest longings for God. It is only a few verses later in his letter to the Philippians that Paul talks about living in hunger and poverty versus living in abundance and wealth, and how he has learned to rely on Christ in all things. Christ alone is the source of our peace and joy, and none of that depends on whatever happens to be going on in our lives. Peace and joy are not synonymous with ease and tranquility. Instead, they are inner dispositions of the spirit that stand firm in Christ no matter what life brings.

Petition:
May the peace that surpasses all understanding guard our hearts and minds as we rely on Christ alone, we pray to the Lord.
**Bulletin Announcement:**

Zephaniah tells us to let go of fear and discouragement. What are some sources of anxiety in your life right now? Are they preventing you from experiencing the deeper joy and peace that come from God? Do you think there might be a way in which you can reach out for support in these areas?
4th Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Micah 5:1-4a

- God uses the least among the clans of Judah to bring forth the Messiah.
- Micah prophesies that the Messiah will come from Bethlehem, where the line of King David comes from.
- The Messiah will come to bring about unity, protection, and peace.

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:5-10

- The sacrifices, offerings, holocausts, and sin offerings of the Old Testament prefigured Christ’s sacrifice once for all.
- The mystery of Christ’s Incarnation (“a body you prepared for me”) was the vehicle through which Christ’s sacrifice for people’s sins would be efficacious.
- Jesus’ offering of His body consecrates us to God.


- Two women who never thought they would be pregnant—one because of infertility and the other because of a vow of perpetual virginity—greet one another with joy. We see how they both must have marveled when they saw one another, and how God brought about what must have seemed impossible for both of them.
- St. Elizabeth prophesies when the Holy Spirit fills her upon Mary’s arrival, and she realizes that Mary’s child is the Messiah.
- St. Elizabeth praises Mary for her faith, and for believing that what God had said would actually come to pass. Mary’s faith is implicitly contrasted with Zechariah’s lack of faith when the angel of the Lord appeared to him and announced that he would conceive a child with his wife after many long and painful years of infertility. Yet both Mary and Zechariah submit themselves to the will of God.

Food For Thought:
The words of institution that the priest says at Mass, “This is my Body which will be given up for you,” echo the purpose of the Incarnation as given to us in the second reading, “a body you prepared for me.” The offering of the Body of Christ on the cross is made manifest again in the Eucharist and consecrates all of us to God. Yet the words of institution also ring true for both Mary and Elizabeth. In Mary’s case, she had already offered her body to God in a vow of perpetual virginity. Yet when asked to become the Mother of the Messiah, her body became a tabernacle for Christ to be conceived in the flesh. Her virgin womb became His holy dwelling place. Mary offered her body in sacrifice to God. Elizabeth’s long empty womb was also an offering to God. Carrying the tremendous physical and emotional burden of infertility brought her and Zechariah great sadness and shame, yet they remained faithful to God and offered Him worship and praise. Their infertility connects them to all the infertile couples in the Old Testament through which God established and affirmed His covenant with Israel: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Manoah and his wife (the parents of Samson), and Elkanah and Hannah (the parents of Samuel, who anointed David king). The son of their old age, John the Baptist, would announce and prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah.
**Petition:**
For those couples who are praying for the gift of a child this Advent and for those who are expecting, that God would use their hopeful expectations of parenthood as a way to open their hearts and minds to His will for their lives, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
The words we hear at Mass, “This is my Body which will be given up for you,” gently, but firmly ask: How can you enter more deeply into the mystery of the Incarnation during this last week of Advent? In what way can you unite your own brokenness, your own sacrifices, and your own penitence with the Eucharistic sacrifice?
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 battle. Good will completely conquer 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: 1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28

- Hannah had endured years of infertility and prayed to God for a child. When God granted her heart’s desire, she offered the child back to God in service at the temple.
- “I prayed for this child, and the Lord granted my request. Now I, in turn, give him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he shall be dedicated to the Lord.”
- Children are gifts from God and are on loan from God. They belong to Him. Part of our job as parents is to teach them that they are children of God and owe their very lives to Him.
- Whenever people ask kids what they want to be when they grow up, we can train them to hear that as, “What do you think God will ask of you when you grow up?” Their vocation is God’s choice. Their part is to hear God’s call and answer it. Parents need to train their kids to be good listeners.

Second Reading: 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24

- We are all God’s children. As such, we are to keep His commandments and do what pleases Him.
- God will reveal to us what He wants of us as we grow closer to Him. The way we do that is by believing in Jesus Christ and loving one another as He commanded.


- As a preteen, Jesus traveled to Jerusalem with his parents for Passover. Mary and Joseph headed home, assuming that Jesus was with them in the caravan.
- Jesus was in the temple talking with the teachers and elders, but didn’t tell Mary and Joseph what He was doing. He assumed they would know where to look for Him.
- Jesus didn’t mean to disobey His parents; He was off in His own world of doing the will of his Father in heaven. Of course, Mary and Joseph were terrified and they told Him as much when they finally found Him. Jesus didn’t understand why they were so upset. Mary and Joseph didn’t understand His response to them. It was a huge miscommunication. So huge, that when the original gospel writer was asking Mary about Jesus’ childhood, she retold this account.
- Even the Holy Family was subject to miscommunication. How often do simple miscommunications in family life get heated and cause difficulties? Whether it’s between husbands and wives, between siblings, or between parents and children, miscommunications can be the source of discord in family life. Do we take the time to communicate with our loved ones?
**Food For Thought:**
Today’s readings give us two couples as examples of godly parenting: Hannah and Elkanah and Mary and Joseph. Both couples were very concerned that their children follow God’s will. Hannah and Elkanah brought their son Samuel to the temple when he was a very young child and left him there to be raised by the priest Eli. From the time he was young, Samuel’s parents only saw him when they went to the temple to offer sacrifices to the Lord. It was more important to them that their son follow God’s will as a priest, even though it meant that they spent very little time with him. Mary and Joseph, on the other hand, accidentally left Jesus in the temple and He remained “lost” for three days (foreshadowing his death, from which He resurrected three days later). When they found Him, Jesus responded that He was doing His Father’s will.

**Story:**
Parenthood is an art, not a science. Most people have some idea of what kind of parent they’d like to be, but often they figure things out as they go. There are many different parenting styles, and people often feel very free to offer advice and opinions on what they think is the “right” way for parents to do things. But the truth is, God chooses parents for children, and children for parents. What works for one family doesn’t necessarily work for another family, and that’s okay. It’s important that Catholic families build one another up and support one another in the holy calling of parenthood. We should all remember one thing: no human parents are perfect. All parents make mistakes.

Many parents take it as a sign of encouragement that the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph actually lost Jesus for over three days. “I thought you had him!” “No, I thought he was with you!” Frantically searching through their relatives and friends, they discovered that he was lost. Even the holiest parents miscommunicate and make mistakes with their children. When we make mistakes, we take responsibility for them, own the consequences, and make amends. Allowing children to see that you are not perfect and that sometimes you need to apologize is a good thing. Children need to know that their parents aren’t perfect, and that they themselves aren’t perfect. They need to know that it’s okay to make mistakes and to seek forgiveness for them. God is the only perfect Parent.

**Petition:**
For Catholic families throughout the world, that they would encourage their children to answer God’s call to the vocations of priesthood, marriage, and religious life, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Do you take time to communicate with your family members? Basic things like sharing a meal, making eye contact, and using complete sentences in person—not texting or emailing—go a long way to solidify family relationships. Family time is precious. What can you do to be more present to your family members when you are with them?
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.
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 40: 1-5; 9-11

- “Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom.”
- The imagery Isaiah uses presents a loving gentleness that serves as a model of family life. With such love, parents create a home that is a haven of safety, of refuge, of peace, and of prayerfulness for their children.
- This is an opportunity to discuss how, through living as a Catholic family and witnessing the Gospel with our lives and choices, we actually become that voice crying out in the wilderness of the world, “Make straight a pathway for God!”

Second Reading: Titus 2: 11-14; 3: 4-7

- The last verse of Paul’s reading (Titus 3: 7) is a reminder that we are “heirs” of Jesus Christ, and our inheritance is the hope and promise of eternal life.
- We sometimes forget the value that is associated with membership in a family. Within many families, we still remember our coat of arms or the town or village of our ancestors.
- As a Catholic family, our coat of arms is the cross. A symbol that should be proudly displayed is our baptismal candle, which represents the fire of faith held within each person and nurtured within his or her home and family.


- In this account, we can see the root of passion in our lives. The love shared between husbands and wives should be a love that reflects the passion of Jesus for all of his baptized and should burn with fire and energy within us.
- FR. Ron Rolheiser described passion as “God’s fire within us.” Passion—true, authentic passion shared within a marriage—reflects and opens up the joy which God intends for husbands and wives. The secular world tells us otherwise. Our Christian faith needs to reclaim the proper place of passion in married lives as a way to celebrate our baptism in Jesus Christ and to reflect with our lives what God the Father declares: You are my beloved sons and daughters!

Food For Thought:
The image of a loving shepherd, so central to the first reading from Isaiah, presents a loving gentleness that serves as a model of family life. With such love, parents create a home that is a haven of safety, refuge, peace, and prayerfulness for their children.

Petition:
Grateful for the Father’s mercy, may each family member serve as a reflection of the Good Shepherd to one another, we pray to the Lord.
**Bulletin Announcement:**
We celebrate the Baptism of the Lord today, and, through Jesus’ loving action, we celebrate the baptism of each Christian! The power of baptism is perhaps taken for granted, especially in the busy, hectic lives of married couples. Remember that the voice of the Father that spoke to Jesus is the same voice offered to your spouse, saying, “You are my beloved [son or daughter.]” This week, let our parish pray for all recently married couples, that, recognizing God’s beloved in their beloved, their marriage flourishes as the continuing unfolding of God’s dream for each person and couple.
Ash Wednesday

First Reading: Joel 2:12-18
• “… sanctify the congregation; assemble the elders, gather the children….”

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2
• “So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were making his appeal through us.”

Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18
• “… pray to your Father in secret…”
• “… when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face….”

Food For Thought:
Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent. While many have traditions that “give up” something for Lent, making a sacrifice as part of an act of penance, more and more we hear encouragement from church leaders, like Pope Francis, guiding us to do something extra. What shape might “doing something extra” take on within a marriage and family?

I think the guidance for this is already in our readings: “assembling the elders and children” speaks to parents and children, gathered together in an act of prayer. Then, from Saint Paul we are instructed that we need to be ambassadors for Christ; what a great job! The question or challenge becomes this: how do husbands become ambassadors for Christ to their wives? Or wives to their husbands? Or, parents, how do you encourage your children to become ambassadors for Christ for you? Little extras during Lent within our homes can bring families together in all the best ways. How about catching each other doing something special for another family member, and giving out stars. What an incredible Lenten journey it would be in a family home if children were tasked with awarding stars to Mom or Dad each time they catch their parents doing something special or loving for their spouse. Parents will be amazed at how closely your children are watching you, and will be surprised to know that as they watch you interacting with each other, they are learning and you are teaching them what it means to be a loving couple.

Petition:
That as the season of Lent invites each person to do a little more for God, our homes may become the places where serving others as acts of love becomes the foundation for faithful discipleship, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
(Likely used the week BEFORE Lent begins, as there is no bulletin on Ash Wednesday.)

What will you do this Lent to encourage Jesus Christ to be present and visible in your homes? Perhaps instead of “giving something up” for Lent, you can make a project out of doing something nice for every member of your family, each of the next forty days. Our Gospel on Ash Wednesday cautions about glum faces and looking like we are in penance, so have some fun during Lent doing a little something more in your home and keeping track of (that is, noticing) the loving, positive acts family members make an effort to do.
First Reading: Deuteronomy 26: 4-10
- God’s people and God’s covenant began with one family.
- Our salvation history is a family history—the history of how God saved us through the generations.
- We are called as a family to live in gratitude for what God has given us and share it with others—giving it back to God.
- God takes our “small households” and makes them great. When we share what we have with others, we extend our families.

Second Reading: Romans 10: 8-13
- The “word of faith” is learned in the home first.
- It is through our families that we learn how to trust in God and how to share our faith.
- God promises that when we behave according to our beliefs, we will always be saved.
- We have to believe with our hearts first and then share with our words and actions.

- When Jesus was tempted in the desert, He knew the answers to what the devil was offering Him because He learned them from His parents.
- Jesus’ parents prepared Him to be what God called Him to be, and firstly to stand up to temptation by teaching Him the Scriptures.
- Jesus’ personal relationship with God the Father gave Him the strength to trust that God would give Him what He needed and He didn’t have to look elsewhere for it.
- Jesus valued His relationship with the Father over the things that (falsely) promised to take away His fears and immediate desires (food, authority, and certainty that people would follow Him when He went to lead).

Food For Thought:
From the beginning of God’s covenant with people, that covenant was passed down from family member to family member. It was always meant to be a “family affair.” In today’s first reading, God’s family, who was enslaved in Egypt, is shown how to offer sacrifice to God in thanksgiving. The second reading reminds us that in order for the Word of God to live in us, it must first take root in our hearts, and then be lived out in our lives. We learn this first in our families. In the Gospel, Jesus is tempted in the desert. For every temptation flung at Him by the devil, Jesus has a response from Scripture—which He would have learned first through Mary and Joseph’s teaching and example.
**Story:**
One of the most beautiful things about families is that it’s not always the parents teaching the child—sometimes children can teach their parents. A dad used to have a propensity to bad language when driving through a certain area that provided much frustration, danger, and delay. It began as a temptation to blow off steam by shouting words that no one would hear inside his car, and became a default for whenever he was driving and someone upset him. When he began transporting his children to school, his children, hearing the unfortunate words spewing forth from his mouth, would correct him. They echoed the words that he had so often spoken to them about how we must use our words carefully and be respectful to everyone, whether they can hear us or not—which is how God wants us to behave. Their example—their echoing what he already knew to be true—called him back into his responsibility. Their presence in the car with him helped him to resist the temptation to judge, yell, and curse. He took to praying in place of the other bad habits.

**Petition:**
That families will joyfully pass on God’s word and covenant to each next generation, preparing them to resist temptation wherever they go, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
God’s Word is placed in our hearts at our baptism. It is fostered and nourished in our homes. We learn gratitude and how to return some of what we are given by God back to God by how our families share what they have. We learn to resist temptation according to the values we are given at home. How does your family give you the foundation you need to go out in the world and live God’s Word? How has your family taught you gratitude and sharing?
2nd Sunday of Lent

First Reading: Genesis 15: 5-12, 17-18
- God made a covenant with Abram, promising to be Abram’s God and that Abram would be a great nation for God.
- God used the convention of the day for making a covenant—settling on terms, cutting up animals and walking through the dead animal path—to show that if one of the parties broke the covenant, the other party had the right to do to them what they did to the animals.
- Only God went down the path—this means that God took the consequences of the covenant upon Godself.
- God gave Abram a land that his descendants would one day call their home.

Second Reading: Philippians 3: 17-4:1
- Paul calls us “brothers and sisters” because we are God’s family.
- As God’s family, we need to imitate Christ in all of our circumstances.
- Our ultimate citizenship is heaven—if we choose that destiny with our actions on earth.
- Jesus is coming back to earth in His glorified (resurrected) form to bring us with Him to the Father and make us perfect.

- When Jesus took Peter, James, and John up the mountain to pray, they fell asleep.
- When Jesus transfigured, it woke them up and Peter immediately realized that he was in a privileged moment.
- God spoke to those present, reiterating the words spoken at Jesus’ baptism—that Jesus is God’s “chosen Son” and we should listen to him.

Food For Thought:
God always meets us where we are. Today’s first reading tells the story of how God used the normal procedure, at that time, for making a covenant with Abram. By putting Abram to sleep and going down the aisle alone, God took the burden of the covenant upon Godself. Abram and his descendants (that includes us) would not have to die for breaking it, but God would. Jesus’ death on the cross is the fulfillment of this covenant. It is the moment that God concludes our being bound by it, giving way for a new covenant. God, in the person of Jesus, died so that we could live—even though it was we who broke the covenant. The transfiguration is a foreshadowing of the glory in which Jesus would come in the resurrection. The covenant with Abram was not the final word—Jesus is. His sacrifice gives meaning to our baptism and offers us eternal life.
**Story:**
When my friend’s son was in first grade, his class was asked to write some things that they knew about Jesus. Her little genius wrote that Jesus “steals from the rich and gives to the poor.” His teacher thought it was so funny that she brought it to his mom in tears. He obviously confused Jesus with Robin Hood, but he wasn’t completely off track, either. God did, in a way, cheat the covenant that God made with us. By putting himself in harm’s way, He protected us from our sin. In a way, He stole the consequences that we would have brought upon ourselves with His death and resurrection and gave us eternal life instead. While a good deal of the theology of Jesus went over my friend’s son’s head, he was met by God where his little brain could manage to understand—in the story of Robin Hood. That image worked for him at the time and helped him to know that God does good things for him. It helped him to know that God made sacrifices for us. We are reminded to imitate Christ in our daily and family lives. If we take from what we have and share it with the poor (in material things or in spirit), we offer the hope and encouragement of God. God reveals Godself to us all the time. If we remember that we are in a privileged moment in every moment, we can be God’s presence and meet people where they are.

**Petition:**
That all families will know God’s grace and mercy and bring these gifts to a hurting world, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
God meets us where we are and protects us from ourselves. God offers us hope in dark times. Can you think of a time where you felt that God met you where you were? How can you meet people where they are?
3\textsuperscript{rd} Sunday of Lent

First Reading: Exodus 3: 1-8a, 13-15

- God reveals Himself to Moses, who hadn’t really known Him. God chose Moses to lead the people into freedom.
- God introduces Himself as the God of Moses’ ancestors (family). Moses is to know God in a covenant relationship.
- God is concerned with the suffering of His family and wants to relieve that suffering.
- God sends one of their own members to lead the people.
- God wants to be remembered and known as the One Who Is—the Father of our fathers.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 10: 1-6, 10-12

- The relationship between God and His people remains intact forever.
- God gave food to the Hebrews in the desert and continues to give us Food in the Eucharist.
- People who make poor choices can be examples to us and reminders of what we don’t want to do.
- We can learn from the mistakes of others, if we are willing to.


- Bad things don’t only happen to bad people.
- Bad things happening to someone are not a punishment from God.
- If we are not repentant of our sins, we risk spiritual death.
- We are temporal; we need to make our time here count.
- We are given many chances, but we each have only a finite amount of time to make a difference.

Food For Thought:
The name of God—I AM—says so much about the nature of God, and, therefore, about our nature. God’s introduction to Moses speaks of ancestry and heritage—that God is a family affair and that God is meant to be shared and passed down from generation to generation. As we come to know God better, and share God with others, we become more fully who we are meant to be—we become more fulfilled and free. To be—to really live—means to make choices from a place of authority, living with conviction and purpose, knowing that we always have God at our back. It is to live without fear or anxiety, but instead, trust in our loving God. When we accept our identity as children of the Living God, we will bear much fruit, because inspired by the love that God had for us first, we will share our faith and the good news of Christ with everyone we meet, thereby helping others to bear fruit in their lives.
**Story:**
For years, my friend had the following quote by Christine Aird taped to her desk: “If you can’t be a good example, then you’ll just have to be a horrible warning.” The quote reminded her on a regular basis that if her actions were not right—that if, as an agent of His Church, she did not represent God appropriately—then she would serve as a symbol of what others would not want to become. As a Christian—and one known well within her circle of friends as a Catholic—her words and actions were often scrutinized. Her friends often held her to a different standard than they held others or themselves, for after all, they weren’t religious. So, if she were to make a mistake, it would be much bigger news than if one of them made one.

**Petition:**
Inspired by the love God has for all mankind, may each family reflect that same love to bring Jesus into their homes, we pray to the Lord ….

**Bulletin Announcement:**
When we accept our identity as children of the Living God, we will bear much fruit, because inspired by the love that God had for us first, we will share our faith and the good news of Christ with everyone we meet, thereby helping others to bear fruit in their lives.
4th Sunday of Lent

First Reading: Joshua 5: 9a, 10-12
- God provided manna in the desert for the Hebrew people as they marched toward the Promised Land.
- When they were able to grow and find food, God stopped sending the manna (which they were sick of, anyway).
- They needed to start providing for themselves so that they could become the nation that God shaped them to be.

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5: 17-21
- In Baptism we become a new creation—we are reborn as children of God.
- God gave us a ministry of reconciliation.
- We are ambassadors for Christ—we represent Christ wherever we are.

- A son essentially says to his father, “You’re not dying fast enough for me—give me my inheritance now.” The father gives the inheritance to his son, and the son goes off to waste it.
- The father is out looking for the son’s return—that’s why he sees him coming.
- Reconciliation takes place because of the father’s great love—the son’s repentance is only surface-deep.
- The older brother finds out that the father is giving a party for the returning son. He resents that nobody told him or called him in.
- The older brother won’t forgive his little brother. He resents that he was left with all the work, and the grieving parents. He is angry that part of his inheritance was wasted, and that no one appreciates his faithfulness. The father is celebrating the son who did everything wrong, while he, who tried to do everything right, is being ignored.

Food For Thought:
Families can be a great source of mercy and forgiveness, or a breeding ground for resentment—today’s Gospel shows us both. We see a painful and realistic family dynamic. Often one sibling is left to take care of parents without help while another goes off and lives his life. And who do the parents cry for? The one who’s not there. That’s all the attentive child hears about, and when the missing one comes home, offering some surface help or no help at all, he is praised beyond reason by the parents. But, only a parent can understand this dynamic. Only a parent knows the ache they feel for their children, regardless of what they have done. Only a parent knows the distress of wanting that child back when they are absent. God, the First Parent, loves each of His children that way. It’s called unconditional love for a reason. As ambassadors of that love, God “appeals through us” to those who have walked off; we’re called to be that non-judging, unconditional love and invitation home.
**Story:**
When Joe’s grandmother was dying, the call went out for everyone to come and say goodbye. Joe made arrangements for the Sacrament of the Sick and everyone who could be there, was there…that is, everyone except Joe’s mother. She and his grandmother had been estranged, and while, on the grandmother’s part, there was a desire for reconciliation, the wounds were too deep. Joe’s mother didn’t trust that she would be accepted. His mother couldn’t step out in faith. His aunt had taken the entire responsibility for his grandmother’s care in her years of decline, and for many years his grandma needed a lot of care. As a result, although the sisters formerly had been best friends, there was much bitterness between them. The bitterness created a wide and deep chasm that neither would cross. The funeral was awkward; the repast was fractured. Joe’s mother went and had her own family meal. The relationship remains broken. The pain from this has rippled out among Joe’s siblings and cousins, and now to the next generation. We aren’t meant for division. We are meant to be agents of reconciliation, and receptors of mercy. If we can’t trust in mercy and have no hope of forgiveness, we become bereft. And it affects everyone around us and all of our relationships. God makes all things new—but we have to be willing to participate in that forgiveness and renewal for ourselves and be willing to extend it to others.

**Petition:**
That families will, whatever their circumstances, be agents of reconciliation to one another and our hurting world, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Today’s Gospel teaches one of the hardest lessons of them all. The story of the Prodigal Son is one everyone can relate to—either as one who has experienced mercy and forgiveness, as a mistreated sibling or child, or as a parent who wishes a child would come home. Where do you fit into this story? How do you reconcile your feelings? How does your place in your family and your feelings affect the way that you live the “ministry of reconciliation” that you were given at baptism?
5th Sunday of Lent

First Reading: Isaiah 43: 16-21
- We are not stuck in the past. God is doing something new.
- God makes a path for us where there wasn’t one before. God removes barriers from us so we can get to Him.
- Nature gives glory to God, and all things obey God.
- God formed His people and wants them to be a witness to the good that He does.

Second Reading: Philippians 3: 8-14
- Paul had to throw away everything that previously defined him when he accepted the Gospel.
- We have to conform ourselves to Jesus’ death in order to embrace the resurrection.
- We do not have to be perfectly “spiritually mature” to know Jesus. We just have to be open to being formed in Him.

Gospel: John 8: 1-11
- A woman was caught in adultery and used as bait to try to trick Jesus into saying something condemnable.
- The Pharisees, who see no problem with using people for their own gain, completely miss the fact that they are accusing a woman for using someone for her own gain.
- Jesus turns their sin back on them, not allowing Himself to get caught up in their judgment. He is the only one there qualified to judge.
- Jesus does not condemn her and tells her to “sin no more.”

Food For Thought:
We are so quick to hold people up as a symbol of sinfulness, acquitting ourselves (usually) of the same sins. Our judgment is a barrier to others finding a relationship with God, Who actively removes barriers so that we can get to Him. We do not have to be “finished” or “complete” to have a fulfilling, authentic relationship with God. We only have to allow God to shape us and to be open to God’s gentle correction and perfection. We can model this in our families by allowing people to grow at their own rate, removing obstacles to God by being merciful and kind, and by remembering that none of us has it all together. Jesus is the only one Who can judge, and we are blasphemous when we try to do it. We make ourselves God, and this is sure to be followed by a major knock-down when God exposes our sin.
**Story**
Danielle came from a family that, outwardly, looked like they had things together. In reality, her mom drank too much, her dad yelled too much, and the family fought too much. When she was away at college, she started drinking. Eventually, her drinking replaced useful activities, and she flunked out. She went home, labeled as a failure and a drunk. Danielle wasn’t offered any constructive help. She was just told to “get her act together.” She obtained and lost several menial jobs, always retreating into drinking.

Danielle hit a turning point and wanted to change. She signed herself into a treatment program and was gone for more than six months. When she returned, she was sober, driven, and ready to re-enroll in school and to work to pay for it. She made an authentic attempt to repair her relationships with her family, apologizing where appropriate. When she presented herself to her family as really and truly changed, they could not see progress. They continued to see her the way they defined her—as a drunk who wouldn’t amount to anything. Even after she had completed her studies and found her dream job, a house, and a fiancé, she was treated with suspicion and contempt whenever she went home.

As time went on, Danielle grew into a fully functional, fulfilled woman. Returning home was only a painful reminder of what stunted growth looked like. Her visits became fewer and shorter, and her relationships were only as deep as her family would allow. She had to discard any expectations of a healthy relationship with them and live independently (though hopefully) until they could grow as she had.

**Petition**
That families will be patient with one another’s faults and failings as they grow in relationship with God together, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement**
No one has it all together. We need to remember this when dealing with one another’s faults and failings. The way we define one another in our families and in ourselves can be a barrier to relationship when they hold us back from changing. God does not cause problems for us, but He works diligently to remove the barriers that we create so that we can more easily get to Him. God does not hold us stuck by sin, but He removes it so that we can be free to “sin no more.” How are you defined in your family? What do you need to let go of to make room for growth? What sin are you holding onto (yours or someone else’s) that prevents you from growing into a fulfilled relationship with God?
Palm (or Passion) Sunday

First Reading: Is 50:4-7
- This is part of “Servant Song” #3.
- The Servant trusts God, even in times of suffering and strife.
- We are all called to take part in suffering. It is in suffering that we are closest to Jesus.
- Many families suffer through the aches and pains of modern life. Keep close to Jesus and your suffering will not be in vain.

Second Reading: Phil 2:6-11
- Christ’s loving obedience to the Father shows the world the life-giving love of the Holy Trinity.
- The emptying (kenosis) of Christ to the Father’s will serves as an example of the emptying to God’s will to which we are all called, especially in terms of married life.
- St. Gregory of Nyssa said, “Christ emptied himself by compressing the glory of His Godhead within our smallness. What He always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what He assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature.”
- Death on the cross was the ultimate indignity in the ancient world.
- “Every knee should bow” alludes to the divine oath found in Isaiah 45:23.

- The Eucharist is instituted at the Last Supper.
- Jesus confers royal authority on the apostles and entrusts them with the Church on earth.
- The trial of Jesus parallels the trial of the prophet Jeremiah, who was accused of being a false prophet.
- Simon of Cyrene is sometimes seen as a symbol of faithful discipleship.
- The mercy that Jesus shows to his executioners parallels the mercy that parents must show to their children. Similar to the soldiers that mocked and killed Jesus, children and teenagers sometimes do not fully understand the consequences of their actions.
- Christ died for all of mankind and all of mankind is redeemed by his death.

Food For Thought:
The Passion of Our Lord is difficult to bear. As the season of Lent comes to a close, the Palm Sunday readings present us with an intense, tangible reminder of the pain and suffering that Jesus experienced so that we could obtain eternal life. The palms that we hold in our hands should remind us of both the triumphal entry into Jerusalem by the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and the great sorrow of His Passion. Imagine the pain of the Blessed Mother, a witness to the Passion of her Son! The sword that pierced the soul of the Blessed Mother (Luke 2:35) when she witnessed her Son’s Passion is felt in the heart of every parent in some way when a child is in pain or goes astray.
**Story:**
The final days of Pope Saint John Paul II were days of physical suffering. On March 20, 2005, for the first time in his 26 year pontificate, Pope Saint John Paul II was physically unable to celebrate Palm Sunday Mass. Over the next two weeks, the world mourned and prayed as the health of their beloved Papa declined. A few glimpses of him during this time revealed a man experiencing great physical suffering. His death on April 3, 2005, Divine Mercy Sunday, brought the world to its knees in sorrow. The witness of his suffering remains in the hearts of many.

**Petition:**
That our families, on this Palm Sunday, may work through their pain and suffering by turning to Jesus, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Are you a parent suffering because of a tragedy—or some other experience—one of your children is undergoing? Know that this suffering brings you closer to Jesus, who will heal your pain.
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. A husband should lay down his life for his wife and a wife should surrender herself to her husband. 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!
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.
First Reading: Genesis 1:1-2:2 or 26-31a (long form)
- All-powerful, uncreated God created all things, material and spiritual, out of nothing. He did this in an ordered and intentional way.
- This first creation account is not meant to be read in a literalistic manner. It is written in a poetic literary genre that reveals Truths.
- Our first parents were created in God’s image and likeness, with an intellect and will, in a state of original holiness. Their relationship with God, creation, each other, and with their own selves was perfect.
- The Fall of Man disrupted these perfect relationships, including man’s relationship with God. The Fall of Man is the root cause of disharmony in families.
- A Savior was promised in Genesis 3:15 that would redeem man, if man would freely choose to follow Him.

Second Reading: Genesis 22:1-18 or 2:1-2, 9a 10-13, 15-18 (long form)
- The binding of Isaac, in Hebrew the ‘Aqedah,’ prefigures the sacrifice of Jesus.
- Typology includes: Isaac carrying wood/Jesus carrying cross, ram with thorns/Jesus with crown of thorns, willingness of Isaac to do his father’s will/willingness of Jesus to do His Father’s will.
- This event occurred on the future site of the Jerusalem Temple.
- “The Lord will provide” a lamb for sacrifice in Jesus.
- Abraham’s obedience is rewarded with blessings for his descendants and the world.

Third Reading: Exodus 14:15-15:1
- The magnitude of this event is sometimes not considered in its fullness.
- The parting of the Red Sea is remembered as God’s mightiest act for the Chosen people.
- The chosen people believed in God and in Moses after this miraculous event.
- This event is seen as an allegory to baptism.

Fourth Reading: Isaiah 54: 5-14
- Marriage imagery is used. God is the husband and the chosen are the bride. Allegorically, this refers to Christ and the Church.
- The chosen are distraught, but God will redeem them.
- God will stay faithful to His covenant with Noah and will not rebuke mankind.
- Marriage imagery is common in Sacred Scripture, revealing how important marriage is to God.
- God’s mercy toward the broken chosen people, and His mercy toward us, should be mirrored in our merciful attitudes to our family members.
Fifth Reading: Isaiah 55: 1-11
- God is calling the exiles to a great feast.
- Sinners are called to repent and be saved.
- God’s ways are not like earthly ways. We will not be able to understand His mercy, but we are called to open ourselves to it.
- This great banquet allegorically refers to the celebration of the Mass, where heaven meets earth.

Sixth Reading: Baruch 3:9-15, 32-4:4
- Wisdom is praised.
- Baruch is lamenting the exile of the chosen people in Babylon.
- Wisdom is found in God.
- Wisdom is also found in the commandments.

Seventh Reading: Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28
- The Israelites defiled their own land and were scattered.
- The Israelites profaned the name of God in the scattered nations.
- God promises to restore Israel and return its people to their home.
- God will also cleanse Israel’s heart and restore Israel to Himself, prefiguring the coming of Jesus.
- God will restore His family after the chaos of exile. Our families are also called to restoration, with God’s help in communion with Him, after periods of chaos.

Epistle: Romans 6:3-11
- The baptized are cleansed of original sin and die to their “old” selves.
- Full submersion baptism alludes to burial. Coming out of the baptismal waters alludes to resurrection.
- Christ destroyed death by His own death.

- CCC 648: “Christ’s Resurrection is an object of faith in that it is a transcendent intervention of God himself in creation and history.”
- The fact that women were the first to discover the resurrection of Jesus is the highest affirmation of women in the New Testament.
- The two men in dazzling apparel were angels, calling to mind the two cherubim that were on top of the tabernacle in the temple of Jerusalem and the cherubim that were placed in the Garden of Eden to protect the Tree of Life.
- Peter, as the leader of the apostles, accompanied by John (Jn 20:3-9), went to verify that the tomb was empty.
- The resurrection of Christ points to the resurrection of our bodies on the Last Day.
Food For Thought:
The many readings from the Old Testament in this celebration lead us from creation through to the resurrection of our Lord. Our rebirth in Christ in the sacrament of baptism is mirrored in His resurrection. It is a day for great rejoicing and a time to start anew. With the celebration of the Feast of the Resurrection of Jesus on this night comes the potential for a time to celebrate afresh our families and our many blessings. It is an opportunity to put away the ‘old man’ that has gotten in the way of peace and harmony in our families.

Story:
An average couple from Ohio, Bob and Sue, married and raised a boisterous family of 10 children. Money was tight and there were moments of difficulty and moments of joy, as is the case with most families. The 10 children went to college. Some married and moved away and some stayed close to their parents. Bob became sick and his health slowly declined. The 10 children, their spouses, and the multitude of grandchildren became embroiled in the decision-making process that surrounded Bob’s illness, Sue’s declining health, and their family home. Bob and Sue had not made the proper legal arrangements regarding these issues, and the decision-making process became a family war. Bob and Sue passed away two days apart and the family war continued. The funerals for both parents were filled with family tension and the grief that accompanies the loss of the patriarch and matriarch of a large family. The family gathered for the reading of both wills on the same day. The estates of Bob and Sue contained just enough to cover their medical expenses and funeral costs with a small amount left to charity. Both of the wills communicated that Bob and Sue were leaving their children and grandchildren the most precious thing on earth: a family. Both wills contained pleas to their children and grandchildren to repair broken relationships. Over the coming months, the family reconciled, put away their differences, and worked to honor Bob and Sue’s wishes. The family experienced a rebirth and became closer than ever before. They came to realize the great gift of family and the opportunity to start anew.

Petition:
On this most glorious night, may families undergoing difficulties experience an Easter renewal and find peace and harmony, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Is your family experiencing tension? Are you struggling to maintain peace? Why not look to this Easter season as a time of rebirth for your family?
Easter Sunday (Resurrection of The Lord)

**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 the Great 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 to continue communication 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 5:12-16

- 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 are called to lift each other up, to share each other’s joys and challenges.
- Parents are in charge of this communal process and sharing in the home.

Second Reading: Book of Revelation 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19

- Just as parents have hopes for their children, God gives us new hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. “I was dead, but now I am alive for ever and ever.” (Revelation 1: 18)
- We bring this understanding to our children. We teach them that although life will have struggles, those struggles will strengthen us to enjoy the glory of God.
- Married couples will also have struggles throughout their marriage, yet the genuineness of their love for one another will outstand the test of time. Such love becomes a choice—it does not just happen. John was told, “Write down what you see.” We see what is, but Jesus sees what will be.
- 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, salvation, and Heaven.

Gospel: John 20: 19-31

- At some point, parents may have a little doubting Thomas tugging at them, saying, “Where is God? Why can’t I see Him?” As tragedy befalls us, we may even ask ourselves, “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.
- Jesus said to His disciples, “Peace be with you.” This peace is for all the faithful, including families and married couples. Our job is to spread peace, each in our own domestic church.

Food For Thought:
If we come together communally and ritually, if we guide and support each other throughout the trials and struggles of life, then Jesus is already present in our midst through this love. That is the gift that Jesus gives us in each other as we work together to bring 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 though the trials of life, and grow towards the goal of getting each other into Heaven, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
At some point, parents may have a little doubting Thomas tugging at them, saying, “Where is God? Why can’t I see Him?” If tragedy befalls us, we may even ask ourselves, “Where is the loving God I believed in?” Such fears may effect children as well as adults; in each case, it is important to recall that not just in the dark moments but especially in the dark moments of struggle, God is present to comfort and heal.
3rd Sunday of Easter

First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 5:27-32, 40b-41
- “We must obey God rather than men.”
- Sometimes the laws in our nation go against the law that God gave us (the natural law).
- The laws in our country say that abortion is legal, anyone may marry, and there is no room for God in schools.
- We must call on the Holy Spirit to obtain the courage to speak against human laws that oppose God’s law. We must speak both in our homes, so that our children hear that God’s law is right and justifiable, and in the workplace, so that other Catholics remember who they are and that God’s law applies to them also.

Second Reading: Book of Revelation 5:11-14
- We must remind parents that it is their job to live the faith and set an example for their children to help them attain the glory of heaven.
- Spouses also have the job of helping each other to attain the glory of heaven.

Gospel: John 21:1-19
- The disciples were nourished by the Lord and then given tasks to carry out after He left them. In accepting the tasks, they showed their love for him.
- So too must we nourish ourselves with our faith each week. As we throw in our nets (travel life’s journey), we must realize that we need God's nourishment (Eucharist) and words (Scripture) to carry on.
- The job for each of us is to nourish others when their nets come back empty. Husbands must nourish their wives, wives must nourish their husbands, parents must nourish their children, and children must nourish their parents.
- This is how we show our love to each other.

Food For Thought:
The Word nourishes parents; parents nourish their children.

It is not enough to simply bring children to church on Sunday. What is called for – an obligation, really – is for the life and lifestyle in each home to reflect God’s Law, most readily taught by Jesus Christ in the Gospels.
**Story:**
A Catholic worked in a school where almost everyone was very liberal and a Democrat. One day at lunch, shortly before an election, a teacher looked at their Catholic coworker and said, “As educators, we must vote as educators first.” The Catholic was stunned to be singled out like this, especially since he was not contributing to the conversation and not agreeing with the rest of the group. The more he thought about it, the more he knew he would confront the speaker, and he did, saying: “Although I am an educator, I consider myself a Catholic voter first, and to me it doesn’t make one bit of difference if education spending gets cut while we sit back and allow babies to be murdered. The two are incomparable and I will always vote as a Catholic first.” At that point, the speaker, who was also Catholic, apologized.

**Petition:**
That all Catholics draw on the Holy Spirit for the strength to follow God’s law, even when it opposes man-made law, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
In this week’s Gospel, Jesus has a fish over the fire already, but invites His Apostles to “…bring some of the fish you caught.” Jesus invites each of us to bring what we have to the practice of our faith, too, and to join our lives with His mission of salvation and mercy.
4th Sunday of Easter

First Reading: Acts 13:14, 43-52
- When Paul and Barnabas urged followers to be faithful to the grace of God, not all accepted.
- Parents are discouraged when children will not accept all lessons on life.
- “All who were destined for eternal life came to believe.” This is a difficult concept. It is especially difficult when your own family doesn’t believe.
- Parents might look around the church at faithful families and wonder where they went wrong.
- This is when we need to call on our faith and hope in prayer. We need to show love to those who struggle.

Second Reading: Revelation 7:9, 14b-17
- This reading reveals the hope and promise of our faith.
- The knowledge that our suffering is not in vain is a gift.
- The promise given is that if we “have survived a time of great distress,” an eternal reward awaits.
- As a gift for our patient suffering, God will give us an everlasting life without tears or pain.

Gospel: John 10: 27-30
- Our goal in this life is to prepare for eternal life with Jesus.
- Marriage teaches us through love and sacrifice. It prepares us for heaven.
- Our job as parents is to teach and prepare our children for everlasting life with our Father in heaven.
- This earthly life is only temporary. However, it teaches and prepares us for the world to follow and determines our destiny in eternity.

Food For Thought:
In the midst of struggle, we need to bring our faith to bear as a compass in our lives. Marriage prepares each member for eternal life through the experience of love and sacrifice. In the witness of their love and lives, spouses guide each other and their children on the path to holiness.

Petition:
That all families work together, helping each family member to follow the path of our Shepherd, let us pray.

Bulletin Announcement:
Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and His sheep know Him, and respond to His voice. Do you know the Voice of Jesus? How do you listen and respond to Jesus in your home, with your family? Do your children know to listen for the Voice of the Good Shepherd?
5th Sunday of Easter

First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 14:21-27
- “It is necessary to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”
- The path is not easy. It is not easy to be a Catholic, more specifically, to be a practicing Catholic.
- Christian genocide has been acknowledged in the Middle East.
- Paul and Barnabas “sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now accomplished.”
- Our job, as disciples of God, is to perform good works. Parents must be models for their children.

Second Reading: Book of Revelation 21:1-5a
- “He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away.” This is the source of our hope.
- “Behold, I make all things new.” Alleluia!
- Families must understand that God is with them. Jesus has promised us this.
- We are not left alone to figure out this world. We have God with us always.
- Even though parents may not always have the answer, God does, and God is good.

Gospel: John 13:31-33a, 34-35
- “Love one another” is the simple answer to any tough question from child to parent.
- This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.
- This is how Jesus will identify us.
- Every decision and every choice will either draw us closer to God or move us away.
- Although it is our choice, the path to Jesus is clear. It is not easy, but it is clear-LOVE.

Food For Thought:
The life of a Catholic in the secular world can be a challenge. Each Catholic family is called to witness the Gospel, in radical ways compared to the “political correctness” of the world around us. Our second reading has God proclaiming for all of His followers: “Behold, I make all things new.” That is God’s plan; Christian families are His instruments of love, and how we live as disciples shows the world all that is God: “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Story:
One day in the staffroom of the elementary school where a woman worked, a fellow teacher was condemning a certain politician, saying very loudly and with great anger, “As educators, we should all vote as educators. We have no choice but to vote as an educator. This is who we are. This is how we live and feed our families.”
The teacher was looking directly at the woman as she said this. The woman was too stunned to respond at that moment, so the next day she told her, “I am a Catholic before I am an educator, and it will always be that way for me. It is how I live, and it is what I feed my family on first.” Believe it or not, this “Catholic” teacher apologized and said she understood with these words, “I actually have people in my family who are like you.” The woman took it as a great compliment.

**Petition:**
That families may remain strong in their faith, help each other through the task, and remember to love each other, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
“This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Jesus tells us in the Gospel this week that the price of discipleship is to love one another. Do we live that with all those in our home, workplace or school? The good news is that if we stumble with that from time to time, Jesus offers His mercy with the invitation to try again, each day. To try again today!
6th Sunday of Easter

- There are necessities in being saved, yet the Spirit desires “not to place any burden upon you beyond these necessities.”
- All are invited to be saved through faith in the power of Christ (not just those following Mosaic Law).
- Every family should stop and regroup and see if they are doing “what is right” in the eyes of the Holy Spirit and the Church.

Second Reading: Book of Revelations 21: 10-14, 22-23
- New Jerusalem, which is the Church, includes the Domestic Church, “for the glory of God gave it light.”

Gospel: John 14: 23-29
- Families need to call on the Holy Spirit together, so as to be reminded of all that Jesus told us.
- Parents model the prayer to the Holy Spirit in difficult times.
- Jesus leaves us “peace;” to find it we must have faith and pray together.
- The Father, one with the Son and the Holy Spirit, is with us now.

Food For Thought:
As Easter People, we live now in the light of the Holy Spirit, whose gifts continue to make it possible for us to live profoundly Christian ideals in the chaos of everyday life. During moments of joy, the Holy Spirit permits us to experience God’s joy in our days. During periods of challenge, the Spirit guides us with the wisdom, knowledge and courage to live as faithful disciples. Thus, in both times of joy and sorrow, the Holy Spirit is with us.

Petition:
That families may realize that they are not alone in difficult times, but led by the Holy Spirit if they would only call on Him, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
In our Gospel, Jesus tells us: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you.” Know that this peace, the peace that can only come from God, is the only peace where we will find our rest. We have only to choose to say “yes” to Jesus in our lives, and to invite Him to be the center of our family life.
7th Sunday of Easter

First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 7: 55-60
- Stephen’s words were a scandal to the court. He proclaimed that Jesus’ prophecy had been fulfilled, and was stoned as a result.
- It is our job to proclaim the truth of Jesus. Although we don’t have to worry about being stoned to death, we do need courage to stand alone, if necessary.

Second Reading: Book of Revelation 22: 12-14, 16-17, 20
- The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” (Revelation 22: 17) This invitation can be extended from parent to child: “Come to Jesus with me.”
- Every day should be the journey of a family to continue drawing closer to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- As we live this journey, we participate in accepting the testimony of Jesus, who said, “Yes, I am coming soon.” (Revelation 22: 20)

Gospel: John 17: 20-26
- Jesus prayed, “…so that they may be one, as we are one....”
- This is the way we, as the body of Christ, come together in the church—in one and as one.
- The whole point is to work together as one. This can modeled in the domestic church, that is, in our homes.
- As families come together and work together, they realize what a family can do together.

Food For Thought:
Every day should be the journey of a family to continue drawing closer to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is our job to proclaim the truth of Jesus. This is the way we, as the Body of Christ, come together in the Church—in one and as one. This was – and remains – Jesus prayer for us: that we may be one, just as Jesus and the Father are one.

Petition:
That, as they pray together, families experience the love of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—working through them as they work on loving each other, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Jesus calls each of us to be one with Him; in Baptism, parents bring their children to God, and consecrate them to being one with God, the Trinity. Parents also make a promise as part of Baptism to be the first and best teachers of the faith for their children. How do you break open the faith and pass on the faith in your home? Is Jesus the center of your life?
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?
Vigil of Pentecost

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.
- 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.
- 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)

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 Sunday

First Reading: Acts 2: 1-11
- The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples gathered in the upper room is told in just 4 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 different, 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 Cor: 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: Is 62: 1-5
- Our God partners with us; we succeed with Him.
- God rejoices in our successes.

Second Reading: 1 Cor 12: 4-11
- All our gifts and talents come from the Holy Spirit.
- Our gifts are given to us to be used to serve the Lord.
- Our family is gift from God. Members of our families may have different gifts and talents but they come from the same Spirit.

Gospel: John 2: 1-12
- Jesus listened to His Mother.
- Jesus enjoyed time with His family and friends.
- Jesus first showed His divinity to His family and friends.

Food For Thought:
Surrounding ourselves with family and friends helps us feel loved. It also challenges us to be the best version of ourselves. Jesus, at the request of His mother, first showed His divinity to His family and friends and they became His first believers, perhaps the first supporters of His mission. Each of us has gifts and talents given to us by the Spirit. Although our gifts are different, we are united by the Spirit, Who gives those gifts to us, and by our common goal of using those gifts to serve the Lord. We can look to our own family and friends as resources and supporters for fulfilling our mission together. Just as we are united by the Spirit, we can also be united by our willingness to say yes to Jesus, both as individuals and as a family, and we can help each other to answer God’s call in our lives.

Story:
A man married the girl of his dreams. She was beautiful, smart and loving. She cared for others by putting other people’s needs before her own. She accepted her husband for who he was—faults and all. She was always supportive of him, his work, and even his hobbies, but the thing he loved most about her was that when he was with her, he wanted to be a better person. While she never asked him to be “better,” the way that she loved him and loved others made him want to love better too. As they shared their lives together they were united by their faith and their love. They became a source of inspiration and strength for each other. They always knew that no matter what life would throw at them they could handle it with each other’s support.

Petition:
That we recognize the gifts of the Spirit in our lives and learn to use those gifts to serve the Lord, we pray to the Lord.
Bulletin Announcement:
Mary encouraged Jesus to use His gifts and to show His family and friends who He really was. Who in your life brings out the best in you? Each of us has gifts and talents, given to us by the Spirit, that we’re called to use to serve the Lord. What are your gifts that you can share for the Lord?
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10
- We should celebrate together in the Lord.
- We should share with those in need so that they may also celebrate in the Lord.
- The law of God is cause for happiness, not weeping.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 (shorter form, 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27)
- We all have an important role within the Body of Christ.
- No one should be looked down upon or viewed as weak.
- As members of the Body of Christ, we are called to care for others in our families, our churches, and our communities.

- Jesus took time to pray.
- Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophesy of Isaiah.

Food For Thought:
We all have an important role in God’s plan. No matter who we are, what our age is, or where we might be on our faith journey, we all have a part to play. This role begins for us in our own families and then continues in our church community. We come together as individuals, friends, couples, and families to celebrate and to become empowered to be the prophets of our time. We are present to each other, praying with each other, and making time for God. We are the Body of Christ.

Petition:
That we will understand how we are called to be the Body of Christ and have the courage to answer that call in our world, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
We all have an important role in God’s plan. No matter who we are, what our age is, or where we might be on our faith journey, we all have a part to play. How do you feel called to be the Body of Christ in the world?
First Reading: Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19

- Our God knows us and has a plan and a desire for us.
- God is with us in our battles and gives us what we need to succeed.
- It can be hard to live our faith, but God strengthens us.

Second Reading: 1Cor 12:31—13:13 or 13:4-13

- God’s greatest gift to us is love.
- Nothing the world can give us could ever replace God’s love in our lives.
- God’s love is the source of the strength we need to persevere.


- Jesus experienced hardship and was not always accepted.
- Jesus did not retaliate against those who were angry.

Food For Thought:
Even Jesus, the Son of God, had tough days in fulfilling God’s plan. We have tough days too. Life is not perfect, and at times it can feel overwhelming. It can be too easy for us to forget that God’s love is all around us. God’s love is the source of the strength we need to persevere. To seek God’s love, in whatever way it comes most profoundly to us, is our greatest resource.

Story:
There was a man who was having a very bad day. As the person in authority at his job, he faced some very serious decisions that would affect many people around him. There seemed to be no good answer. Every possible solution would negatively impact someone. He was overwhelmed and consumed by stress. As he tried to find answers, he kept coming up empty. The harder he tried, the more defeated he became. He felt hopeless and inadequate and wished he could quit. The man was at his lowest moment and was about to give up when he received a message from a friend. The friend said just the right thing at the right time. The man realized that through the message God was sending His love to strengthen him and to let him know that he was not alone. The man began to pray and returned to work with a new sense of confidence.

Petition:
That we will know how to find and feel God’s love when we are hurting and need it most, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement
We all have tough days. When we are hurting, it can be too easy for us to forget that God’s love is all around us. When you need it most, where do you find God’s love in your life?
5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8
- No one is perfect, yet our God still calls us to do His work.
- To know our sins and to want to make changes leads to forgiveness.

Second Reading: 1Corinthians 15:1-11 (shorter form 1Corinthians 15:3-8)
- There is an abundance of “proof” for the resurrection.
- Jesus empowered Paul, once a sinner, to spread the good news.
- To be humble and to recognize our gifts as coming from God can enable us to use them to do great things for Him.
- We should preach the Gospel to others so that they may believe.

- We should recognize our sins and ask for God’s forgiveness.
- When we follow Jesus and trust in Him, great things can happen.
- All that we are given is for the purpose of serving others in the name of God.

Food For Thought:
God knows we are not perfect. We are all sinners and need God’s love and forgiveness in our lives. Being a sinner or feeling weak are not excuses for failing to answer God’s call. To know our sins, to feel remorse, and to seek forgiveness can put us on the path to glory. When we follow Jesus and trust in Him, great things can happen, even in our weakness. We are strengthened by God to do His work, but we must be willing to trust in Him and do our best.

Story:
A teacher was about to head home after a long day. This day was harder than most, and she was feeling particularly down. She thought that she was not reaching her students and was wasting her time. She even wondered if she was in the right profession and if she was really making a difference. As she packed her things, the teacher took a breath. She said a quick prayer that simply asked God to show her His plan for her. As she left the classroom, she immediately encountered a student waiting outside her door. The student was crying. Through her tears the student explained that she needed help. The student felt she could trust the teacher. As they talked, the teacher began to believe that she was making more of a difference than she realized.

Petition:
That we will understand how we are called to use our gifts to make a difference in the world, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement
Even when we feel weak, our God strengthens us to do His work. But we must be willing to give our best for God. Are you able to answer God’s call by saying, “Here I am, send me”? 
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Jeremiah 17: 5-8
- To truly thrive in all aspects of our lives, we must trust in God, not only in ourselves.
- If we trust in the Lord we will always have the ability to overcome distress.
- God is the source of all that we need.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20
- The Resurrection is our hope and proof for life after death.
- The Resurrection is the foundation for our faith.

- When we are faced with struggles, our God is with us, and we are blessed.
- If we allow ourselves to be too comfortable in satisfying our worldly desires, we are at risk of not living for God.
- In the difficulties of our lives, blessings can be found.
- In the face of adversities, the reward of staying strong in our faith is great.

Food For Thought:
All of us face adversities. Whether at work or even in our own families, it can be easy to let life’s difficulties consume us. We can feel isolated, hopeless, and even abandoned by God. But when we struggle we need to remember we can trust in God. When we face adversities in our lives and feel alone, if we can look for the blessings, we will find God there. We are blessed even when we are hurting or struggling and our God is always with us.

Story:
A church youth group volunteered for a day at a local soup kitchen. The day was a bit overwhelming but very fulfilling for the teens. They helped prepare the food, served the guests at their tables, and then helped to clean dishes, etc. As they were cleaning, a gentlemen finishing his meal came over to the kitchen and in a loud voice said: “I just want to thank you all for being here. This was my first real meal in 4 days. You all are a blessing,” and walked away. The teens were very moved that this homeless man, in the mist of all his struggles, was able to see a blessing from God through them.

Petition:
That we may find blessings in our lives, especially when we are hurting the most, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement
All of us face adversities. But when we struggle, can we still find the ways we are blessed? What or who are the blessings in your life that help you face the things that are most difficult?
7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: 1 Samuel 26: 2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23
- Just because there is opportunity for us to do something, we are still called to act as God would want.
- God calls us to do what is right.
- God will provide for us.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15: 45-49
- We are made by God and carry His likeness.

- This Gospel is a framework for what it means to be a Christian, a disciple of Jesus.
- Treat others the way God treats you.
- Your generosity to all those around you is the same that will be returned to you.

Food For Thought:
This Gospel is very challenging. It gives us the guidelines for what it means to be a Christian and the way we are called to treat others. But often times to live up to this expectation can be very difficult, even in our own families. To live every day as the kind of person Jesus challenges us to be, requires hard work and practice. We are not perfect and will make mistakes, but it can start within our own homes. Doing our best to live in the manner Jesus describes would strengthen our families and cause our relationships with each other to grow. Imagine how much easier it would be to see God in each other. To live as Jesus challenges requires us to start living this way with those who are closest to us, in preparation for living out our Christianity in the rest of our worlds.

Petition:
That we may have the strength to live as the disciples Jesus calls us to be, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
This week’s Gospel is very challenging. It gives us the guidelines for what it means to be a Christian and the way we are called to treat others. But often times living up to this expectation can be very difficult. What are the areas of your life that make it the hardest to live as a Christian? What can you do to be more Christ-like in those situations?
8th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Sir 27:5-8
- Very often the inner life is reflected in outward behavior. Spiritual peace is reflected outwardly in peaceful behavior, whereas spiritual chaos is reflected in chaotic behavior.
- Man in his brokenness must employ an act of the will to attain spiritual peace.
- The external chaos often seen in families is usually a sign of some inner chaos in the home.
- Families should strive for inner peace to enable their members to deflect the external chaos of modernity.

Second Reading: 1Cor 15:54-58
- God will reward the faithful in heaven. The daily struggles pale in comparison to the heavenly glory that awaits.
- Family difficulties are very challenging. Keeping faithful and prayerful is the only approach that will bring comfort and eternal rewards.

- Humility and charity are inspirations for external acts.
- The Law and Commandments must be kept in a spirit of faith, hope, and love, not of compliance to rules.
- We must first look at and work on our own weaknesses and failings before we can effectively minister to others.
- The goodness or wickedness of our hearts is revealed in our deeds.
- One of the best places to learn humility and charity is within the family unit. Failings and weaknesses can be overcome or lessened when wrapped in the arms of a loving family.

Food For Thought:
The chaos experienced by the modern American family is revealed to us in many ways. Even families that seem to ‘have it together’ lament about the infiltration of secular values into their lives. All families can challenge themselves to look within and strive to improve from the inside out. One contemporary scholar has written that evidence suggests that it is the breakdown of the family that has caused the breakdown in the Church. A slow and steady return to a simpler life, an embrace of time together with family and friends sharing a meal, or even saying the word ‘no’ to activities that will diminish family time can go a long way to the rebuilding of the family, the culture, and the Church.
**Story:**
A family went on their dream vacation to Disney World and the experienced eight days of fun and excitement. The family returned home tired, grumpy, and in need of some quiet recovery time. On the evening of their return home, the youngest daughter went to swing in the family’s backyard. Her exhausted mother joined her in between loads of laundry and cleaning up after a quick dinner of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and fruit. After a few pushes on the swing, the mother asked the little girl what her favorite part of the vacation was. The little girl answered: “Swinging with you in the backyard. Our vacation was fun and I liked being at Disney, but after a while I just wanted to be quiet with you.” The shocked mother could only think of the money that had just been spent on their vacation and how she and her husband had done everything possible to make the vacation the ‘vacation of a lifetime’ for their children. The mother asked the same question of her other three children the next day. Their answers also shocked her when she realized that the things the children treasured most could have happened at home: snuggling with bedtime stories, looking at a pretty bird on the patio, eating ice cream for supper, laughing so hard together that you almost fall over. Vacations can be lots of fun and travelling to new places and having new experiences can be wonderful, but nothing is better for children than to have experiences, ordinary or extraordinary, with their families.

**Petition:**
That our families learn to say ‘no’ to the secular world and say ‘yes’ to Jesus, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Is your family in chaos? Do you have too many commitments? Are the members of your family running in different directions? Strive to all run in the same direction-- toward Jesus Christ.
9th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: 1Kgs 8:41-43
• These verses are part of King Solomon’s dedication of the temple of Jerusalem.
• King Solomon acknowledged that Gentiles would hear about God and come to worship at the temple of Jerusalem.

Second Reading: Gal 1:1-2, 6-10
• Paul is distressed because the Galatians are believing what they are being told by the Judaizers, i.e. that the Gentiles must be circumcised before baptism.
• Paul was accused of preaching that circumcision was not necessary for the Gentiles only because he wanted to please them.

• The Centurion’s words are prayed prior to the reception of Holy Communion.
• The Centurion is a Gentile and his exemplary faith reveals that Jesus came for all and not just for the chosen people.
• The Centurion knows the boundaries of Jewish culture and does not expect Jesus to enter his house.
• We are the Centurion. Not one of us is worthy of communion with Jesus, yet in His merciful love He offered Himself for us.
• Our families are filled with centurions. Bringing Jesus into our family homes is the most important part of family life.

Food For Thought:
Many of us recall that in years past, Catholic homes had visible signs of the Catholic faith within it. Holy Water fonts, crucifixes in many rooms, religious pictures and statues, prayer tables, and prayer corners were found in most every Catholic home. Many yards contained small Marian grottos or had religious statues placed throughout. Much has changed. It is not unusual for a Catholic home to have no visible sign that the family living in the home is Catholic. This is a shame because we use our senses to help us to understand the earthly world and connect us to the supernatural. Visible signs of the Catholic faith in the family home create an atmosphere that is connected to the divine.
**Story:**
“When any of us - but especially children - encounter culture, it shapes our imaginations and ambitions. In large part, all of us - but especially children - learn our expectations for a good life in part from the images, films, music, and stories in our lives. It is therefore up to parents, the extended family, godparents, adult mentors, and educators to monitor this exposure, and to ensure children’s imaginations are fortified and fed with wholesome food, with material that protects their innocence, gives them an appetite for the adventure of Christian living, and evokes a vocational approach to life. Beauty and contemplation should be part of a child’s ordinary environment so that children can learn to perceive the sacramental dimension to reality. Parents, elders, godparents, relatives, fellow parishioners, catechists, and teachers need to model these attitudes for children. The formation of young people necessarily includes “book knowledge.” Spiritual literacy means knowing the facts of the faith. But it is even more vital to teach children how to pray, and to give children role models, adult examples for them to witness and aspire toward.” *(Love is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive, A preparatory catechesis for the World Meeting of Families, OSV: Huntington, IN, 2014, p.83).*

**Petition:**
That our families always humbly allow Jesus to enter into their homes, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
We are made of body and soul. Our senses inform our bodies about the physical world around us. What better way to make our homes display our Catholic identity than to have religious items in our family homes? Consider having some religious items on display in your home.
10th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: 1Kgs 17:17-24
- The widow of Zarepath was taught by Elijah to have faith and trust in God’s word. The raising of her son back to life confirmed her faith in God.
- This is a foreshadowing of Christ’s Resurrection and our resurrection.

Second Reading: Gal 1:11-19
- Paul received the Gospel directly from Jesus.
- Paul was a zealous and learned Jew as well as a fervent persecutor of Christians prior to his conversion.
- Paul went to Arabia after his conversion and then returned to Damascus. Some scholars speculate that Paul may have gone to Mt. Sinai.
- Paul did not need to immediately consult with Peter or the apostles because Jesus presented the Gospel to him.
- Paul later consulted the first bishop of Jerusalem, Peter, and also James.

Gospel: Luke 7:11-17
- This narrative directly quotes the first reading from 1Kgs 17:17-24 and is a foreshadowing of Christ’s resurrection and our resurrection, too.
- The widow faced great hardship with the death of her son because he was her source of care and income.
- Under Mosaic Law, touching the dead would render a Jew unclean for a week. Jesus turned the situation on its head by touching the dead man and then telling him to rise.
- Parents face many difficulties with their children. Prayer and faith help parents in the most difficult times.
- Children belong to God, not their parents. Giving praise and glory to God on behalf of their children, offering prayers of thanksgiving, and crying out to God in times of trouble for their children are all ways that parents affirm that the children belong to God.

Food For Thought:
Parenthood is challenging. Every generation faces both unique and common difficulties in raising children. In modern times, with the influence of the electronic world, parents seem to have less and less control and influence over their children. Parents should turn to God in good times and bad. It is God that is ultimately in control.
**Story:**
Bartolo Longo was born in 1841 in southern Italy to devout, wealthy Catholic parents who prayed the rosary together every day. Bartolo’s mother died when he was ten years old and Bartolo drifted from the Church. As a young man he studied law at the University of Naples and became involved in a New Age pagan organization. He eventually became a satanic priest and participated in séances, fortune-telling, and orgies. He publicly rebuked Christianity and convinced many Catholics to become members of the occult. Bartolo suffered from poor health, depression, paranoia, and diabolical visions. He eventually experienced a mental breakdown. His reversion back to the Church was prompted by his hearing the voice of his deceased father asking him to return to God. Bartolo took his deceased father’s advice and eventually became a Third Order Dominican. He later married Countess Mariana di Fusco, on Pope Leo XIII’s recommendation. Bartolo’s zealous promotion of the rosary led him to evangelize young people away from the occult. His involvement with the restoration of a painting and a ramshackle church turned shrine was the beginning of the restoration and Christianization of the city of Pompeii. The influence of Bartolo’s father, even after death, was pivotal in bringing Bartolo back to the Church and rebuilding the city of Pompeii.

**Petition:**
That all parents remain faithful and turn to God in good times and in bad, let us pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Parents—are you having difficult times with your children? You are not alone. God is with you. Turn to Him.
First Reading: 2 Sam 12:7-10
- King David’s sins began with his failure to keep custody of his eyes and led all the way to being responsible for Uriah’s death in battle.
- David’s sin, like Adam’s, brought consequences for his progeny.
- Even though David fully repented, he still had to suffer the consequences.
- The prophet Nathan, like the Church today, acted as a moral conscience for those in authority.
- The Church acts as a guide for families in the moral life. The wisdom of the Church in the realm of family life is unparalleled because the guidance is through the Holy Spirit.

Second Reading: Gal 2:16, 19-21
- Paul said he had died to the old order of things, the slavery to sin and the Old Covenant, and had risen to a new life in Christ.
- If the Mosaic Law had been sufficient, there would have been no need for Jesus and His death.

Gospel: Luke 7:36-8:3 or 7:36-50
- The woman’s reputation was known by the Pharisees. Jesus broke all custom by allowing her to touch Him.
- The woman treated Jesus lavishly.
- Jesus supplied the woman with an outpouring of forgiveness, comparable to the outpouring of her tears and lavish anointing of His feet.
- Like this woman, we are called to empty ourselves at the feet of Jesus. He, in turn, serves to love and forgive completely.
- The Church serves as the moral compass for families. It is with the guidance of the moral teachings of the Church that families learn to live as Jesus taught. It is through the Church that sins and wrongdoings are forgiven.

Food For Thought:
No family is perfect. The Church provides the moral guidance necessary for a happy and holy family life. Jesus served as a model of forgiveness. Forgiveness from sins is found in His bride, the Church. Family members not only need to reconcile with each other when sins are committed against one another, they also need to seek reconciliation with Jesus through the Sacraments.
**Story:**
Pope Paul VI published the groundbreaking encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (Human Life) in 1968. This encyclical maintained the Church teaching on the rejection of contraception and was met with widespread dissent from the time of promulgation and is still rejected by the vast majority of Catholics today. Although written to clarify Church teaching, *Humanae Vitae* is considered a prophetic document. The four main consequences of a failure to reject contraception prophesied in the document have all come to fruition. The four consequences—an increase in marital infidelity and moral decline, a loss of respect for women, abuse of power in public authorities in regards to families (forced sterilization, abortion, contraception), and the adoption of the belief that people have dominion over their own bodies (euthanasia, test tube babies, IVF)—are commonplace in modern culture. An epic failure to follow the Church’s moral teaching has devastated our world.

**Petition:**
May our families seek moral guidance in the Church and seek reconciliation through the sacraments, let us pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Is your family going through a difficult time? Are you in need of healing? Look no further than the sacrament of reconciliation. Reconciliation with your family must first start with reconciliation with God.
12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Zech 12:10-11, 13:1
- The passion and death of Jesus will atone for all sin, making salvation available for all.
- The mourning for Christ will be intense.
- “Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo” alludes to the battle at Megiddo (Armageddon) whereby the righteous King Josiah was killed by Pharaoh Neco. There was massive mourning for the loss of King Josiah.

Second Reading: Gal 3:26-29
- Baptism cleanses us of the effects of original sin.
- Gentiles and Jews are all included in the New Covenant.

- The true identity of Jesus remained a mystery to the crowds.
- Peter recognized the identity of Jesus.
- Jesus did not want His identity known because it might have caused misunderstanding.
- Many people do not really recognize Jesus as God. Poor catechesis and a watering down of the gospel message have led to the belief that Jesus is merely a friend or a nice man.
- Many family problems are caused by family members revering other gods: sports, electronic devices, pornography, drugs, and alcohol.

Food For Thought:
It is easy for families to get caught up in the day-to-day activities of modern life. Sports, school activities, celebrations, etc., can pull the family’s focus away from family time and away from God. Parents that are constantly transporting children from activity to activity easily get caught up in life outside of the home and outside of their marriages. Children that are constantly shuffled can easily develop bad behavior caused by a lack of sleep, poor nutrition, and a lack of free time. Once God is removed from the center of the life of the family, the family looks to the world to fill the gap. Nothing fills this gap except God.

Story:
“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” This famous quote made by St. Augustine, in his Confessions, came after he spent much of his life pursuing many other gods. St. Augustine dabbled in lustful excess, false religion, and sought relief from his restlessness in the theater, music, and partying with friends. Nothing fulfilled him until his heart was converted to Christ.

Petition:
That our families strive to focus on God as the source for all happiness and fulfillment, let us pray to the Lord.
Bulletin Announcement:
Are you too busy? Do you feel like your family life is out of control and you need some help getting on the right track? Get rid of the other “gods” in your life and turn to the one, true God
13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: 1Kgs 19:16b, 19-21
- Elisha’s full and immediate willingness to follow Elijah and leave his life behind is an example of radical discipleship.

Second Reading: Gal 5:1, 13-18
- In the early Church, the former Jews were allowed to keep their ceremonial customs. With the spread of Christianity, this ended. The Council of Florence (1442) officially declared that Christians cannot observe the ceremonies of the Old Covenant as necessary for salvation without sinning gravely.
- Christian freedom does not give us license to do anything we want, but gives us freedom to mature in grace and become saints.
- The New Covenant gave the grace to live out “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”
- There is an ongoing struggle between the Spirit and the flesh.

- Jesus is heading to Jerusalem for His Passion.
- Jesus sends out messengers ahead of Him, just as God sent Jeremiah and Ezekiel to Jerusalem to preach against corruption.
- James and John, the sons of thunder, reveal their zeal, but are rebuked by Jesus.
- Christian discipleship requires radical detachment.
- In modern times, radical discipleship begins in the home. With the family under attack from “the world,” a return to family values and to a God centered home is seen as radical.

Food For Thought:
Both discipleship and family life require detachment from the world. A true disciple of Christ considers his family with the utmost of care. The correct order of responsibilities is God, spouse, children, and work. For the married disciple, the fruits of radical self-giving to Jesus will be a radical self-giving to one’s spouse and children.
**Story:**
The Old Testament Book of Ruth tells the story of a Jewish woman named Naomi, her husband, and their two sons who left famine stricken Bethlehem for pagan Moab. Naomi’s husband died and her sons both married pagan Moabite women, Ruth and Oprah. After about 10 years in Moab, Naomi’s sons both died, and she decided to return to Bethlehem to be with her people. Naomi urged her two daughters-in-law to stay in their home country and remarry. Oprah stayed in Moab, but Ruth refused to leave the side of Naomi. “For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die I will die, and there will I be buried.” (Ruth 1:16-17) Ruth traveled back to Bethlehem with Naomi and worked for a man named Boaz. Boaz learned of Ruth’s radical self-giving to her mother-in-law and protected Ruth, the foreigner, from being abused by any Jewish men. Boaz married Ruth as a result of a family monetary transaction. Ruth is noted as being a pagan woman who exhibited radical self-giving and faithfulness. She is in the bloodline of both King David and Jesus.

**Petition:**
That our families may be examples of radical discipleship, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Families, are you ready for radical discipleship? Are you prepared to give your all to Jesus? Your home should be a place where radical discipleship is apparent.
14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 66:10-14c
- God brings His people home to Jerusalem from exile.
- He sends His prosperity and His peace upon them like a river.
- God’s people will find comfort in their relationship with the Lord, as a child is comforted and nursed by its mother.

Second Reading: Galatians 6:14-18
- Paul glories in the cross.
- Peace and mercy come to all who are a new creation in Christ.

- Jesus sends 72 disciples out in pairs to announce “the Kingdom of God is at hand.”
- They take the message and God’s peace to every village and home.
- Where peace is not received, it comes back to the giver.

Food For Thought:
Like the disciples, we are also sent—even to our very own homes and residences. We are challenged to be instruments of the Lord’s peace in our families, to provide safety, peace, and comfort. Everyone in the household is responsible for doing his or her part to share God’s peace.

Story:
The very first Marian Shrine in the United States is in St. Augustine, Florida. It is called Our Lady of La Leche and is a statue of Mary nursing her son, the infant Jesus. It is a beautiful reminder of the peace and serenity that God gives us when we trust in Him.

Petition:
That our homes and towns will be places of peace and prosperity where God’s love and mercy are shared and received by all, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
How can you take responsibility this week to share God’s peace in your conversations and relationships with your loved ones?
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Deuteronomy 30:10-14
- Moses exhorts the people to keep God’s commandments.
- We sometimes complicate God’s law, or make excuses as to why we can’t follow it.
- God writes His law on our hearts.
- We have to make the decision “to carry it out.”

Second Reading: Colossians 1:15-20
- Christ is the image of the invisible God.
- All things were created through Him and in Him.
- God does what we ultimately cannot do – reconcile all things, make all things one.

- A scholar of the law asks: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”
- Here’s how to inherit eternal life, according to Jesus: love God with all your heart, being, strength, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.
- Jesus connects love of God with love of neighbor.
- Jesus then goes one step further and expands the definition of neighbor to include those whom it is hardest to love, our enemies.

Food For Thought:
We learn to love God, others and ourselves in the context of relationship – in marriage and family life. Our households must be schools of love, where we learn to love each other and God. Love of God isn’t “pie in the sky.” It’s a practical, daily endeavor. Unfortunately, sometimes we treat the members of our own families like strangers and even enemies. Sometimes it is hardest to love the ones we are closest to, those we live with and see every day; they bear the brunt of our frustration and anger. Jesus tells us we love God when we care for each other; when we put the needs of others ahead of our own; when we stop rushing through the day, slaves to our own agenda, slaves to our phones, and actually sit still long enough to listen to our spouse, our kids, our brothers and sisters.

Story:
In a very illuminating book called Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age, Penguin Press, 2015), sociologist and psychologist Sherry Turkle discusses the damaging effects technology is having not only on conversation but also on relationships. Studies show that a loss of empathy is one of the casualties of over-texting, excessive emailing and gorging on computer gaming.

“Without conversation, studies show that we are less empathetic, less connected, less creative and fulfilled. We are diminished, in retreat. But to generations that grew up using their phones to text and message, these studies may be describing losses they don’t feel. They didn’t grow up with a lot of face-to-face talk.”
By not conversing face to face, we lose the ability to empathize. Do we want to live in a world where people cannot care about what another person is feeling?

**Petition:**
That our homes will be schools of love where we learn to love God with our whole heart, soul, strength and mind; where we learn to love, respect and accept one another; where we care for each other’s hurts and sorrows, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
This week declare an hour or more as “techno-free.” Talk to each other. Have a Table Talk Time – the members of the household sit at the table and each person gets a full 10 minutes of uninterrupted time to talk. They tell about what is going on in their lives, inside their heads, and down deep in their hearts.
16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Genesis 18:1-10a
- The Lord “visits” Abraham.
- Abraham welcomes his three visitors and, with Sarah, provides hospitality.
- The visitors announce the joyous (and startling) news that Sarah will bear a son.

Second Reading: Colossians 1:24-28
- Paul does not hide the fact that suffering will be part of discipleship; he rejoices in the sufferings and joins them to those of Christ.
- The mystery of God’s love for all people is manifested in Christ Jesus and proclaimed by His Church.
- As a minister of the Word of God, Paul “completes” the Word by bringing it to the Gentiles and opening before them the riches of God’s love.

- Another divine visitation: this time Jesus visits Martha and Mary in their home.
- In making Jesus welcome, Martha is burdened by the many chores of receiving a guest; she is anxious, worried and resentful of being left to do the work.
- Mary sits with Jesus and listens to Him speak and is commended for choosing “the better part.”

Food For Thought:
God visits us on a daily basis. Do we get so busy that we don’t even recognize His presence? Will we get so anxious about how the house looks that we forget to look into the eyes of the visitor? Will we get so angry because no one is helping us with the serving that we can’t enjoy the moment? There is nothing wrong with work, of course. In fact, someone has to go get the curds and milk and knead the dough and make the rolls if family and guests are going to eat. It’s how we go about the chores that seems important: to do them without resentment, without making comparisons about who is doing what, to do them freely, even rejoicing that we are doing our part to help the whole household enjoy one another’s presence – and the presence of God!

Story:
A fellow I know tells the story about how growing up his younger sister always managed to disappear after dinner, even when it was her turn to clear the table and do the dishes. He remembers the explosions of anger he’d have. How unfair it was! He’d be scraping the dishes and wiping down the table (like a slave) and she’d be outside playing with the cat or chasing a butterfly or huddled somewhere reading a book. Years later when he reflected on this, he realized that he wasn’t so much angry with his sister as he was jealous of her. She lived life with an inner joy and peace and contentment that he never seemed to have. Was it possible, he wondered, that God was teaching him something important, through his sister, about how to truly live in His presence?
**Petition:**
That our homes will be places of hospitality where we welcome visitors, neighbors and strangers as we would welcome Jesus, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Let’s practice this week doing our work, our daily chores, without bitterness or resentment or comparison to others. Let’s accept our responsibilities with joy as a participation in the work of Jesus Christ, putting more goodness and peace into our homes and relationships.
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Genesis 18:20-32
- God visits again and isn’t very happy about what’s going on in Sodom and Gomorrah.
- Abraham takes a deep breath and enters into a dialogue with God – perhaps the first of its kind in human history.
- Abraham has left his homeland and followed God – now he seems to want to find out more about who this God is. He asks “Will you do away with the innocent as well as the guilty?”
- God allows the conversation and Abraham’s persistence – which says something about God.

Second Reading: Colossians 2:12-14
- In baptism we are buried with Christ and rise with Him.
- We are forgiven our sins and are given a new life in Christ.

- The friends of Jesus want to learn how to pray.
- Begin, Jesus says, with Abba, Father, “Daddy.” Is this the first time someone has spoken of God in such familiar terms?
- Jesus urges His disciples to be persistent in prayer and to ask, seek and knock.
- God wants to give us every good thing – the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Food For Thought:
Many of us learned how to pray when as small children our parents knelt with us beside the bed and helped us “say” our prayers. They passed on to us the words Jesus gave His disciples. After 2000 years, His words still find an echo in our hearts, homes and churches! Jesus teaches us to trust in God’s providence and to be persistent in prayer. Abraham gives us a good example of dialoguing with God, doing exactly what Jesus says: asking, seeking, and knocking. We must make our homes places of prayer. It would be good for children to see their parents pray together and for the family to pray together at meals and other times. Can there be a room, a corner, which is used only for prayer? Are there images in the house which remind us that this is “holy ground,” a place to openly converse with God?
**Story:**
Maria speaks often of her childhood memories of her Italian grandmother. She loved to watch her cook. “What fascinated me most of all,” Maria says, “wasn’t that my grandmother knew exactly how much salt to put in the tomato sauce, but that her lips never stopped moving while she stirred the sauce or rolled the dough for homemade macaroni. I wondered at first if she was talking to herself. But then I saw she did the same thing as she cleaned or when she sat in a chair to watch television or listen to the radio. It was prayer. She was in constant prayer.” Maria remembers crucifixes over every bed; holy water fonts next to the front and back doors; dried up palm branches stuck behind the big painting of what looked like two people talking to Jesus as they walked through the green woods. There were votive candles and statues of the Blessed Mother, St. Anthony, and other saints on window sills and end tables. It was a holy place. But it wasn’t church. It was very much a home.

**Petition:**
That our homes be places where prayer is taught, nurtured and shared, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
If you’ve never done it, gather the members of the family together one day this week, light a candle and pray an Our Father together. Pray it for peace or for someone you know who is sick or for some other intention. Give it a try. It might become a habit.
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Ecclesiastes: 1:2, 2:21-23
- Qoheleth, the author, seems to be having a bad day—in fact, maybe quite a few of them.
- Everything is “vanity,” he says, which, according to the Introduction found in the New American Bible “has the sense of emptiness, futility, absurdity.”
- Life is filled with toil and work, work and toil. What do we gain from all this toil and work but anxiety, grief and sorrow?
- It’s all vanity.

Second Reading: Colossians: 3:1-5, 9-11
- Now that we are baptized into Christ, we have been raised with Christ and must keep our mind on what is above.
- We need to focus on higher realms which, Hans Urs von Balthasar explains, “are simply Christ. He is our life, the truth of our existence, for we owe to Him everything that we are.” (Hans Urs von Balthasar. Light of the World: Brief Reflections on the Sunday Readings. Ignatius Press, 1992. p. 337).
- For the sake of being in Christ, we must put to death and put behind us “immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry.” (Col. 3:5). These failings “are merely various degenerative forms of yearning.” (von Balthasar, p. 337).

- It’s not our possessions that make us rich.
- Jesus cautions us against greed and accumulating material goods. To emphasize His point, Jesus tells the parable of the foolish man with the big barn.
- It is vanity to think big barns filled with goods will keep us alive. It is false to think that worldly wealth will bring us any kind of lasting joy or peace.
- To be truly rich, we must accumulate what matters to God.

Food For Thought:
All of our relationships—from marriages to families to friendships—will be well served if we can keep our hearts and minds on what matters to God. Too often, destructive desires falsely convince us that happiness will be found elsewhere. The measurement for success isn’t what we own, but who we are.
**Story:**
“Philip Tate was forty-five and he had everything.” So begins *Having Everything*, a novel by John L’Heureux. You get the feeling something is about to happen and that it isn’t going to be good. Indeed, Philip Tate quickly gets pulled off course by a “degenerative form of yearning,” as Hans Urs von Balthasar calls it. He makes a series of poor choices that nearly ruin his nicely wrapped world. The title of this novel comes from something the illustrator Maurice Sendak once said: “There must be more to life than having everything.” In other words, if you’ve got everything, something’s missing.

**Petition:**
That God’s peace will enter into marriages and families that are struggling and divided because of addiction, greed, or infidelity, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
In what ways do we feel unfulfilled? Can we take that to prayer? Can we let God’s Word speak to that emptiness?
19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Wisdom 18:6-9
- “That night” refers to the night of Passover, a foreshadowing of Easter.
- The author of Wisdom speaks of the patriarchs having been given by God “the promise of the future exodus”. (Fuller, p. 494)

Second Reading: Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19 or 11:1-2, 8-12
- We find in Hebrews 11: 1 the classic definition of faith: “the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.”
- The author goes on to speak of those ancient heroes of faith, later referred to as that “great cloud of witnesses.” (Hebrews 12:1).
- In this passage the author focuses on the example of Abraham who trusted, obeyed, and followed God even though he did not know exactly where the Lord was leading.

- In urging us to be vigilant and prepared, Jesus gives us the following two examples.
- In the first example Jesus urges us to “be like servants who await their master’s return from a wedding.”
- In the second example Jesus likens His return to a thief breaking into the house at an unexpected time.
- By these examples Jesus instructs us that the Son of Man will come when we do not expect Him.

Food For Thought:
We keep our homes securely locked up. We’ve got cameras at strategic points. We can even lock the front door remotely via our phone. We don’t want any surprises and yet, ironically, that’s what Scriptures challenges us to be ready for. Here it is summer, a kind of half-way point between Easter and Advent, and we find Easter and Advent themes in our passages from Wisdom and Luke’s Gospel. Ironically, today’s second reading, the middle reading from Hebrews, tells us we need the faith of our ancestors in order to live between “the already” (Christ’s Resurrection) and “the not yet” (His Second Coming). Have faith. Trust in God. While we lock up our homes and watch our children on cameras, it is important to build an atmosphere of trust, not of fear.
**Story:**
Fr. John Kavanaugh tells this story: “Long ago, when I spent a month working at the house of the dying in Calcutta, I sought a sure answer to my future. On the first morning I met Mother Teresa after Mass. She asked, ‘And what can I do for you?’ I voiced the request I had borne thousands of miles, saying, ‘Pray that I have clarity.’ She said no. That was that. When I asked why, she announced that clarity was the last thing I was clinging to and had to let go of. When I commented that she herself always seemed to have the clarity I longed for, she laughed and said ‘I have never had clarity. What I’ve always had is trust. So I will pray that you trust.’” (*The Word Engaged: Meditations of the Sunday Scriptures*. Orbis Press, 1997).

**Petition:**
That an atmosphere of trust will be cultivated and nurtured in our marriages and families, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Is Christ’s Second Coming a promise that shapes the way we live today? What is cultivated more in our home: trust or fear?
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Jeremiah 38: 4-6, 8-10
- There really is no tie to family or marriage in this reading.

Second Reading: Hebrews 12: 1-4
- “... Persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus....”
- It is easy in marriage and family life to get caught up in the struggles, in the “worse, sickness, and poorer” from the marriage vows. In doing so, we are forgetting that it is exactly in these struggles that we have the chance to learn strength, to learn how to make marriages and families strong.
- St. Paul reminds us of two things:
  o Jesus chose the cross because of the joy that was beyond that.
  o We should not grow weary or lose heart.
- This is actually strong encouragement for couples to turn to prayer when they struggle. Through that witness to prayer within their marriage they can break through to the joys found in each other through Jesus Christ.

- Fr. Ron Rolheiser reminds us that the passion, the fire within marriage is a gift of God (reference). Jesus’ lament to His disciples is that He wished the earth was already ablaze with passion!
- The second half of the gospel is dark, describing one against the other within families. This might suggest and/or remind us that family struggles are exaggerated when the faith within families is not shared and nurtured, allowing some to dismiss others for “lack of faith.”
- As such, it is good to be reminded that parents are the first teachers of their children in faith, as highlighted in the rite of baptism.

Food For Thought:
The second half of the gospel is dark, describing one against the other within families. This might suggest and/or remind us that family struggles are exaggerated when the faith within families is not shared and nurtured, allowing some to dismiss others for “lack of faith.” Fr. Ron Rolheiser reminds us that passion, the fire within marriage is a gift of God (reference). Jesus’ lament to His disciples is that He wished the earth was already ablaze with passion!

Petition:
Let us pray that each family remains rooted in faith, living each day their belief in Jesus’ saving presence in their homes, we pray to the Lord.
Bulletin Announcement:
Saint Paul reminds us that Jesus chose the cross because of the joy that was beyond that. We should not grow weary or lose heart. This is a reminder for and strong encouragement for couples to turn to prayer when they struggle, which leads to the joys found in each other through Christ.
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 66: 18-21
• “I will set a sign among them…and they shall proclaim my glory among the nations.”
• Married couples, living lives as authentic witnesses to the gospel, are this sign for their neighbors and for their own families.

Second Reading: Hebrews 12: 5-7, 11-13
• “…For whom the Lord loves, He disciplines….” “At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness….”
• In family life, learning how to live with peacefulness and love within our homes is a reminder that, in that same home, we create the first church, the domestic church.

• “…Lord, who will be saved?” This question can be linked to the first and second readings when we consider that, within the setting of a Catholic family, parents teach how to love, how to pray, how to make our lives occasions to give glory to God.
• Learning to live the gospel does not happen by accident. It takes a discipline—not a discipline of the rod, but a discipline of consistent practices—that helps each member of the family learn how to make good choices and to make community celebrations of our faith a priority.
• These readings celebrate the faithfulness of Christian marriage and family life.

Food For Thought:
Be careful—they are watching! Who? Your children, your neighbors, friends and strangers. These all are watching you, sometimes from a distance, and they are learning how you are an authentic witness to the gospel. Are you giving them the best chance to learn by watching your words and actions each day?

Petition:
Lord, shed your mercy and peace within our family home, that by living as your chosen people, we may remain faithful to the gospel, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Before you were married, you learned about marriage by watching your own parents and grandparents. Now, as a married couple, others are observing you—especially your own children. Never be afraid to show your Christian values in daily life, as this is the constant practice called for in this week’s Gospel of St. Luke.
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29

- “Conduct your affairs with humility … humble yourself the more, the greater you are, and you will find favor with God.”

- Consider how humility is a powerful character trait within a marriage, and how parents’ demonstrating humility are teaching their children that same virtue.

- Without humility, true forgiveness is impossible, whether extended to spouses or other family members. We can’t say “I’m sorry” without humility, or it has a hollow meaning.

Second Reading: Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24a

- There is no direct connection to Marriage and Family Life.

Gospel: Luke 14:1, 7-14

- “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

- Connect the Gospel to the First Reading on the theme of humility.

- There is a powerful lesson in how husbands and wives need to make “humility” an “action verb.” Do you choose a humble approach to the gifts and joys of marriage, or do you tend toward an arrogant outlook, perhaps a sense of entitlement? Entitlement or selfishness can creep into a Marriage, and it is the polar opposite of the Gospel teaching of Jesus, where we are called to lay down our lives, to set aside our personal interest, for another.

Food for Thought:
Forgiveness is impossible without humility. Within couples and families, when we hurt those we love most on this planet, the first step toward healing is to humbly acknowledge our mistakes. No one is perfect, no couple is without the occasional arguments, but love overcomes all pride, and lets true and lasting forgiveness be possible.

Petition:
For each family and married couple, that the sacred moments in their lives are grounded in the foundation of Jesus and humility before Him and each other, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Today’s Gospel calls each person to act with humility, and to reject selfishness as in conflict with Jesus’ teaching. Something for each parent and spouse to consider is this: How do I make “humility” into an action verb in my life, especially within my home and with my family? Do my actions reflect the humility that I hope to teach my children?
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Wisdom 9:13-18b

- Do you ever wonder how to find the straight path, the narrow road that God intends for our salvation? This reading reminds us that “…the earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many concerns.”

- The busy concerns of spouses, for each other, perhaps as parents, with a concern for jobs, houses, cars, education… the list goes on and on, it seems. These earthly concerns are real, and necessary.

- However, we can’t lose sight of the fact that we can deal with all these concerns better when we realize that the counsel we have received guides us, realizing that “…you had been given wisdom and sent the Holy Spirit from on high.”

Second Reading: Philemon 9-10, 12-17

- There is no direct connection to Marriage and Family Life.


- A strange message in this Gospel: you can’t follow Christ without hating your father, mother, spouse and children! We should not take this as a command to hate, for the Gospel is filled with instructions to love even your enemies.

- Instead, take this as a command to trust. (This same word, hate—in Greek, miseo—is used elsewhere in Luke to contrast being hated for God as a blessing.) We should take the command as being to trust in God completely, knowing that He will fulfill all the needs and protection that may be necessary for those in our family that we love.

Food For Thought:
St. Ambrose reminds us that today’s confusing Gospel message is echoed by Jesus when He asks “Who is my mother? Who are my brethren?” In that reminder lies a key: we don’t need to deny our natural families unless they are drawing us away from living our faith to the fullest. In a similar way, does how I live my faith reflect my own discipleship “to the fullest?” If not, am I leaving myself open to being denied by my family for lack of faith? It is interesting to consider this Gospel message while looking in a mirror.

Petition:
For parents and families in our parish, that they offer their lives each day as examples of faithful discipleship, helping to teach each child what it means to be the brothers of Jesus, we pray to the Lord.
**Bulletin Announcement:**
Luke’s Gospel this week asks whether we can love God to the fullest while also loving our parents and our brothers and sisters. The message, in the end, is not about denying family but about embracing Jesus, and recognizing that if our family or friends are getting in the way of our being the best disciples possible, then, we need to re-think those in our lives who take us away from our faith. More importantly, do your family and friends see you as drawing them closer to Jesus, or away from Him? Remember, we can really account for only our own actions, and need to look in a mirror when we hear this Gospel proclaimed.
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Exodus 32: 7-11, 13-14
- God was angry with the Israelites for making the golden calf idol. Moses, in the role of a true prophet, appealed to God for their forgiveness and relief from punishment.
- Each of us through our baptism is anointed priest, prophet and king. So how do we act as a prophet within our homes?
- Consider how we might pray for our spouse, our children and our grandchildren. Perhaps we can link this thought to the second reading, and the mercy and forgiveness of Jesus. When we lift our voices in prayer for our spouse and family, we are acting in our protective role of prophet. We are appealing to a loving and merciful God for the needs of those we hold closest to our hearts.

Second Reading: Timothy 1: 12-17
- Paul speaks to Timothy of his conversion—how he was once a persecutor of the faith and how he was treated mercifully by God.
- Paul is speaking of a conversion of heart. We find that same message in the responsorial psalm. It speaks of being washed from guilt and having a clean heart created in us. The psalm doesn’t end with our conversion. It ends with us opening our mouths and proclaiming and praising God for His mercy and love.
- Parents proclaim God in their homes. Spouses proclaim Jesus Christ to each other. When we invite God to be part of our family relationships we are putting the Gospel to work in our lives and witnessing to all those who observe us. We can’t leave God at the door of the church. We need to carry Him into the world for the other 167 hours of the week.

- Consider using the shorter version and concentrating on the “Lost Sheep.”
- Jesus not only finds the lost sheep, but He carries it back on His shoulders; I often take that image and reflect on parents who carry their small children on their shoulders.
- Perhaps the parents carry the children because they are tired, or so they can see over the crowd. For most parents, even when you have a sore neck after a long day of a child on your shoulders, you cherish those moments! You are teaching your child about love, and in particular love-in-action. When you act with them as the Good Shepherd does for each of us, you demonstrate that selfless love.
Food for Thought:
Saint Cyril, reflecting on the parable of the lost sheep noted that we, members of the flock of Jesus, are not whole without the missing sheep. This Gospel challenges each one of us to be the Good Shepherd and to do our part to bring back to the Kingdom of God those who have wandered away. Do you know someone who is lost from our community, especially among your own family? At a minimum, pray that they can return and in the spirit of evangelization perhaps you might even invite them back. Consider extending an invitation for them to attend Mass with you one weekend.

Petition:
For those young adults who have lost the spark of faith within their marriages and lives, that the prayers of this community stir their heart to respond to the call of the Good Shepherd, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Today’s Gospel story from Luke has Jesus teaching us about the Good Shepherd and the lost sheep. Saint Cyril, reflecting on the parable of the lost sheep noted that we, members of the flock of Jesus, are not whole without the missing sheep. This Gospel challenges each one of us to be the Good Shepherd and to do our part to bring back to the Kingdom of God those who have wandered away. Do you know someone who is lost from our community, especially among your own family? At a minimum, pray that they can return and in the spirit of evangelization perhaps you might even invite them back. Consider extending an invitation for them to attend Mass with you one weekend.
First Reading: Amos 8:4-7

- A theme that can be seen in both the first reading and the Gospel is that of trust.
- When we consider the relationship between a husband and wife, trust is at the center; love without trust is a lie.
- When couples promise themselves to each other, they are promising all their lives—the past, the present and the future. Love is the foundation, rooted in Jesus’ love, which permits couples to trust their most intimate feelings, thoughts, dreams and fears to one other person on the face of planet earth.

Second Reading: Timothy 2:1-8

- “This is my wish, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger or argument.” (Timothy 2: 8)
- Sometimes, it becomes a challenge within families to set aside arguments and differences when entering into prayer. A shift in how we look at differences can be a key to unlocking family harmony, peace and love. That shift is this: do I set aside arguments to pray with someone I love, or do I pray with someone I love in order to overcome differences?
- Where we place the primacy of our focus changes everything. It reminds me of the story where a monk asked his abbot if he could smoke during prayers. “Of course not!” exclaimed the abbot. The monk asked the wrong question, had the wrong focus. He should have asked, “Is it okay to pray while I smoke?”


- “The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest with great ones.” (Luke 16: 10)
- Love is built on trust; the greater the trust, the more vulnerable we allow ourselves to be with another and that allows love to flourish and to shape lives together.
- It is key that the Gospel equates very small matters to great ones. The small ones are the everyday moments that each of us encounter. Those moments become the opportunities for our spouses to really see inside us, to know our hearts, to know how we care for each other, for our community, for those less fortunate. Extraordinary marriages are created when trust is treated as a sacred bond between husbands and wives. If we are trusted with someone’s fears, with their personal prayers to God, we have entered into the true intimacy of love.
Food for Thought:
St. Ambrose, reflecting on today’s Gospel passage, reminds us that “riches are foreign to us, because they are something beyond nature, they not born with us and they do not pass away with us.” Yet for many, we choose to sacrifice what is really important for the sake of what has only passing value. A challenging question might be: Am I sacrificing time and attention within my family or marriage for the sake of a career or earthly success? If the answer is yes, then it is important to consider the risks to an extraordinary marriage that we have brought into our family lives, and to figure out how to reset priorities for the sake of those we love most.

Petition:
That the generous spirit of Jesus is found in every home, so that each husband, wife and child values the Gospel riches ahead of earthly wealth, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Many choose to sacrifice what is really important for the sake of what has only passing value. A challenging question for today: Am I sacrificing time and attention within my family or marriage for the sake of a career or earthly success? If the answer is yes, then it is important to consider the risks to an extraordinary marriage that we have brought into our family lives, and to figure out how to reset priorities for the sake of those we love most.
26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Amos 6:1a, 4-7
- The reading from Amos challenges us to look in a mirror. Whom do you see?
- Are you complacent? Have you started to take moments of your life for granted? It is easy for spouses to begin to take each other for granted, especially where the “division of labor” within the home is concerned.
- All it takes are small, out of the ordinary acts to help energize the love within a family. Love, as Jesus often reminds us, is the foundation of our faith and the very essence of God. Surprise each other with small acts of love – a note left in a lunch or briefcase, unexpected flowers, or a babysitter – and you will find that complacence is replaced by a newly energized relationship with each other.

Second Reading: 1 Timothy 6:11-16
- “… pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness.”
- This verse begins reflecting on characteristics of our relationship with God, and then there is a break. Do “patience and gentleness” reflect our relationship with God? Probably not!
- These words call us to act with righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness in our relationships with one another, especially within our married lives and homes.

- The parable of Lazarus serves as a reminder that life is fleeting. In the midst of this life, we have the chance to live for ourselves or for another.
- This passage reminds me of the instruction from Jesus to “lay down one’s life for one’s friend.” It is not simply what Jesus did during His passion, but what He calls spouses to do for each other and for their children every day.
- Each time we set aside our desires for another, we give witness to the Gospel teaching of Jesus. Connect this with the first reading and the risk that when we focus on ourselves and begin to become complacent with our accomplishments, we forget that we did not achieve them on our own, but by Jesus working through us.

Food For Thought:
The idea of “laying down your life for a friend” doesn’t call for heroic actions. All it takes are small, out of the ordinary acts to help energize the love within a family. Love, as Jesus often reminds us, is the foundation of our faith and the very essence of God. Surprise each other with small acts of love – a note left in a lunch or briefcase, unexpected flowers, or a babysitter – and you will find that complacence is replaced by a newly energized relationship with each other.

Petition:
That the love nurtured in each home find its beginning in the desire of parents and children to serve one another and to place those we love ahead of any selfish desires, we pray to the Lord.
Bulletin Announcement:
Saint Luke’s parable of Lazarus and the rich man reminds us that too often we confuse what has value in this world with what has value on our journey to heaven. For all his regal garments and wealth, the rich man lost what really counts, namely everlasting life. How often do we fail to see the Lazarus figures in our lives, especially right within our own families? Is there someone who is missing your love in this life? Is there someone who may be struggling but ignored? When you consider this parable, do you find yourself more like Lazarus or the rich man?
27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Habakkuk 1: 2-3, 2: 2-4
- When he saw nothing but conflict, Habakkuk turned to God, who assured him that those who trust God will endure because of their faith.

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 1: 6-8, 13-14
- St. Paul encouraged Timothy to nurture God’s gift of the Holy Spirit within. This is good advice for us, too. Notice that the power that comes from God leads to love and self-control. It takes strength to be gentle.

Gospel: Luke 17: 5-10
- The disciples asked Christ to increase their faith in response to Jesus’ call to repeatedly forgive those who hurt them. (Luke 17:4)
- Nowhere is the need to forgive others repeatedly greater than in our family lives.
- Jesus linked faith to forgiveness and to service.

Food For Thought:
The disciples asked Jesus for more faith after he called them to repeatedly forgive those who hurt them. Nowhere is repeated forgiveness needed more than in our family lives. Familiarity makes it easy to take each other for granted. Home is where we let our hair down. It’s usually safer to make thoughtless comments or lose our tempers at home than at work or school, so we often end up hurting the ones we love the most.

What does faith have to do with forgiveness? Jesus said faith as small as a mustard seed could uproot trees. Trees are watered through deep, underground root systems. What underground sources feed our resentments and what can we do about it? Today’s second reading encourages us to nurture the Holy Spirit within us—a spirit that empowers us with both love and self-control. Empowered by love, we can forgive.

Jesus also linked faith to service. Serving our families can either be draining or life-giving. Faith and forgiveness can help.

Story:
Faith, service, and forgiveness go hand in hand.

Sometimes it’s easier to forgive the big things than the little, everyday things:

   Why don’t they ever call to say they’ll be late? Isn’t my time important, too?
   Why does he bury his nose in the paper when I’m trying to have a conversation? Am I invisible?
   Why does she roll her eyes when I talk about writing a novel? Is my dream that ridiculous?

These are the termites that chip away at love and respect. It hurts when we’re on the receiving end, but it might help to remember sometimes our thoughtless actions are hurt others. Forgiveness is a two-way street, and it goes a long way.
Jesus linked faith to service. Sometimes we might feel like servants in our own homes. Our families might benefit when we do the laundry or take out the garbage, and it’s nice to be appreciated, but hopefully there’s more to our motives than a pat on the back.

When we nurture the Holy Spirit within us, we’re given strength to act out of love. We can feel good about ourselves whether or not others notice every time. We might also ask ourselves how often we let our families know we appreciate what they do.

Realizing we’re all in this together can help smooth out the rough spots. When we’re frazzled, turning to God—as Habakkuk did in the midst of conflict—can remind us that the gifts of patience, forgiveness, faith, and self-control can keep us from adding fuel to the fire.

**Petition:**
That God will increase our faith and enable us to serve others, beginning with our own families, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Faith, service, and forgiveness go hand in hand in family life. How can faith in God empower you to forgive and serve your loved ones?
28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: 2 Kings 5: 14-17
- The prophet Elisha cured Naaman, a Syrian army commander, of leprosy.
- Once cured, Naaman returned to give thanks to Elisha and to praise the God of Israel.
- Naaman wanted to give Elisha a gift, but Elisha would not accept it.
- Naaman returned to his country determined to worship only the true God. (He wanted to bring Israeliite soil home because it was believed a god could only be worshipped in his own land.)
- Naaman was not only cured of his leprosy, but underwent spiritual conversion.

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 2: 8-13
- St. Paul affirmed that the gift of salvation and hope of eternal glory are ours through Christ’s death and resurrection, even though suffering and perseverance are involved in witnessing the Good News.

- Jesus healed ten lepers and instructed them to go show themselves to the priests, which was the prescribed rubric for lepers to be determined clean and permitted back into the community.
- Only one leper, a Samaritan, returned to thank Jesus and glorify God.
- Jesus pronounced this foreigner saved, due to his faith in Jesus.

Food For Thought:
In both the first reading and the Gospel, we hear about lepers being healed. When Naaman, a Syrian army commander, returned to thank Elisha, Naaman asked for “two mule loads” of Israel’s soil, to bring back to Syria. Believing a god could be worshipped only in his own land, Naaman intended to worship the God of Israel. In the Gospel, when the Samaritan healed of leprosy returned to thank Jesus, he fell at Jesus’ feet and glorified God.

In both stories, foreigners—from whom not much was expected—expressed gratitude and underwent spiritual growth along with their physical healing.

Saying thank you is important for us, too. Think about times you’ve been surprised by a thank you. How did it make you feel? How about times you’ve gone out of your way for someone who failed to acknowledge it? Over time, that can fray the edges of our relationships. Often, we thank strangers because they don’t owe us anything, but when it comes to our families, we take a lot for granted. Kids expect Mom or Dad to chauffeer them to soccer or the mall. Parents expect the kids to take out the trash or walk the dog. Spouses might expect dinner to be made or the car to get an oil change. We expect a lot of things—sometimes, rightly so. But the effort isn’t any less just because a job is done on a regular basis.

Thanking our nearest and dearest for the little things we take for granted every day can make a big difference, and it costs us nothing.
**Story:**
You’re never too young or too old to practice gratitude. When Jenna’s baby was about a year old, Jenna used a few basic sign language cues to communicate with him. One day, while Jenna changed his diaper, the baby made the “thank-you” sign. There is no limit to what we can find to be grateful for when we look for it.

Linda and Dan were newlyweds at the tender age of 55. Linda’s previous marriage had ended in divorce and annulment. Linda wanted healthier patterns in her second marriage. She began thanking Dan for emptying the dishwasher, making the bed, and the like. It wasn’t long before Dan began thanking Linda for making dinner and folding the laundry. They share appreciation for each other’s willingness to pitch in. Is this a make or break item in their marriage? Maybe not. Does the caring tone strengthen their relationship? You bet.

We can invest in our relationship with God the same way. We come together to celebrate the Eucharist, which comes from a Greek word meaning thanksgiving. We offer our thanksgiving for the gift of God’s healing love and the salvation given to us through Christ. But like Linda and Dan, who practice noticing and appreciating each other in their day to day living, our thanks to God doesn’t have to be limited to Sunday Mass. Every day has potential for us to thank God for His goodness, if we have the eyes to see it.

**Petition:**
That our gratitude for God’s gifts finds expression in our daily lives, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Gratitude enhances our appreciation of God’s goodness in our daily lives. What can you thank God for today?
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Exodus 17: 8-13
- While Moses’ arms were lifted in prayer, the Israelites succeeded in the battle against their enemies; when he lowered his arms, their enemies began winning.
- When Moses’ arms grew tired, his brother Aaron and their companion Hur helped Moses continue to pray by supporting his arms.
- In this way, Moses’ hands remained steady and the Israelites defeated their enemies.

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14 – 4: 2
- Paul encouraged Timothy to remain faithful and to persist in preaching the Good News whether or not circumstances made it easy to do.

- Jesus presented the parable of the widow’s persistence in pleading for justice to demonstrate the importance of persisting in prayer.
- Without the protection or support of a husband, widows were extremely vulnerable in the male-dominated culture of that time.
- All the widow had was persistence, and it was enough to get her justice, even though her judge was corrupt.
- How much more likely is God, who is just as well as merciful, to hear and answer our prayers?
- By asking if the Son of Man would find faith on earth, Jesus linked perseverance and faith. Trusting God means we continue to pray, even when our prayers seem not to be answered on our timetable or to our liking.

Food For Thought:
Today’s readings all talk about persistence. Moses, with support, continued praying past the point of exhaustion during the Israelites’ battle against their enemies. St. Paul directed Timothy to persevere in preaching the Good News even when circumstances were challenging. If a corrupt judge granted justice to a helpless but persistent widow, how much more will a just, merciful God answer our prayers? By asking if He would find faith on earth when He returned, Jesus connected faith with perseverance.

It’s challenging to continue talking to God when our prayers don’t seem to be answered. It’s good for us to be honest with God about what we want, but God’s not a genie who does our bidding because we pray long enough. Laying our requests at God’s feet involves trusting that He has our best interests in heart no matter what His response is. Persevering in prayer is an exercise in faith that can change us.
**Story:**
Loving parents know it’s not in their children’s best interest to give them everything they want. Refusing to give a motorcycle to a five year old doesn’t mean Mom or Dad is heartless—even if the five year old thinks so. Parents might wish their children trusted the love behind their answer.

Can we trust that God has our best interests at heart? Can we continue praying and allow the process to change us, instead of trying to change God’s mind? Mandy, a thirty-something adult, longed to be in a healthy relationship. The string of failed romances in her past had all been with emotionally unavailable men. Mandy continued to pray for a healthy relationship until she realized that emotionally secure men intimidated her. She began to look at her time alone as a chance to work on her own issues and develop as an individual. As Mandy grew, she found the type of men she attracted—and was attracted to—began to change. After several years, she was ready for the healthy relationship she longed for and found the husband God had in mind for her.

Sometimes, we may not get what we ask for because God is inviting us to trust that He has something better in mind. We may find our prayers changing as we persist in our relationship with God. Rather than praying that circumstances or other people change, we begin praying for the qualities that will enable us to cope with circumstances as they are and the guidance to make changes that are ours to make. God might answer those prayers by saying, “I thought you’d never ask.”

**Petition:**
That all believers will trust God enough to persist in honest prayer, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Persistence in prayer develops the faith that trusts God in all circumstances.
30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Sirach 35: 15b-17, 20-22a
- Because God is a just judge, He is not influenced by earthly power. He hears the cries of the poor and helpless.
- Humble prayers are powerful enough to reach God and draw a just and merciful response from Him.

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 16-18
- St. Paul, aware that the time for his death through martyrdom was at hand, entrusted himself completely to God’s justice and mercy.
- Paul trusted God to provide justice for him and for all the faithful.

- There was no humility in the prayer the Pharisee offered. He addressed God in name only, and spent the rest of his prayer cataloging his own achievements. How could his prayers reach heaven when they were anchored in himself?
- In contrast, the tax collector, well aware of falling short, was honest with God and with himself about his shortcomings. He trusted—and focused on—God’s mercy, not himself.
- The tax collector went home justified because, as today’s first reading indicated, his humble prayer went to the Lord. The Pharisee wasn’t looking for justification from God; he was trying to prove he was already justified.
- How often do we try to prove we’re justified to God? How often do we try to prove it to others?

Food For Thought:
The readings today are all about humility. Sirach tells us that God responds to humble prayers. St. Paul trusted God, not his own efforts. In the gospel, the prayers of the repentant tax collector were answered, not the self-righteous prayers of the Pharisee.

How often do we try to prove our own goodness, often by comparing ourselves to others? Pumping up our egos leaves little room for loving God, our neighbors, or embracing our authentic selves.

It’s a paradox, but humility involves self-esteem. Healthy self-esteem isn’t the same as pride or self-justification. True self-esteem gives us the courage to face and accept our weaknesses as well as our strengths. When we have self-worth, we can be honest. Since we don’t have anything to prove, our focus doesn’t have to be on ourselves. The Pharisee, to prove he was justified, focused on his own efforts and his superiority to others. The tax collector acknowledged his sins, but didn’t dwell on them or compare himself to others. He focused on God’s love and mercy.

Story:
Self-righteousness often rears its head under our own roofs.

“How come I’m the only one around here who ever changes the toilet paper roll?”
“Why does he (or she) always interrupt me when I’m talking? I would never do that.”

“I always call when I’m going to be late, not like some people.”

Even legitimate complaints turn into ego-saving battles when both people try to prove they’re right and the other is wrong. Like many couples, Don and Betty squabbled on a regular basis. Neither was quick to apologize. One day, when Betty complained about it to a friend, her friend asked, “Would you rather be right or be happy?” Betty started wondering why proving she was right was so important. What’s the worst that could happen if I just admit it when I’m wrong and say I’m sorry?

When Betty forgot to tell Don her mother was coming over on Sunday, he grumbled about being caught off guard. Betty was tempted to defend herself. Instead, she walked over to Don, who stiffened up and prepared for a counter-attack. Betty gave him a hug and said, “I know. I’m sorry.” Don’s jaw dropped. He didn’t have a word to say. Betty wasn’t devastated by admitting she was at fault in that particular instance. Don didn’t need to act superior. There was no battle, just room for them to go on with their day.

We don’t have to apologize all the time for the sake of peace at any price. But when we’re wrong, instead of covering it up under a mountain of self-justification or alibis, we can simply be honest and admit it. That won’t pump up our egos, but it will pave the way for healthy self-esteem and make room for love.

**Petition:**
That, through mutual respect and love, spouses will help each other grow in self-esteem and true humility, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
We grow closer to God and to others when we trust God’s love and mercy enough to be honest about our faults instead of trying to prove our worthiness.
First Reading: Wisdom 11: 23 - 12: 2
- God loves all that He created.
- God is the “Ruler and Lover of souls,” who mercifully reminds sinners of their sins so they can abandon their evil ways and trust Him instead.

Second Reading: 2 Thessalonians 1: 11 – 2: 2
- St. Paul prayed that God would fulfill the Thessalonians’ longing for goodness so they would bring glory to Christ and be glorified by God’s grace.

- Zacchaeus, a rich tax collector, lacked stature in more ways than one. He was short physically, but also had a low standing in the community in spite of his wealth. Tax collectors in that culture were despised for collaborating with the enemy and had the reputation for being dishonest and greedy.
- In order to see Jesus, Zacchaeus climbed a tree, literally raising himself above the crowd (much as he had tried to lift his status financially by his dubious career.) Jesus, not above fraternizing with outcasts, asked Zacchaeus to come down and extend hospitality.
- When the crowd—who perhaps had suffered from Zacchaeus’ dishonesty—complained, Zacchaeus didn’t deny his past offenses. Instead he acknowledged and accepted responsibility for them, and did what he could to correct them.
- Jesus’ loving acceptance empowered Zacchaeus to make amends. He grew in self-respect, and his relationships with others began to be healed. The higher standing he vainly tried to get with riches came once he encountered Jesus and his neighbors on level ground.
- When we try to build ourselves up at others’ expense, it hurts ourselves and our relationships. God’s love can lead us to honesty and healing.

Food For Thought:
Zacchaeus literally went out on a limb to see Jesus. This short man climbed a tree, physically raising himself above the crowd, much as he had attempted to raise himself socially through wealth obtained by cheating his neighbors. Jesus, who was not above fraternizing with outcasts, asked Zacchaeus to come down and to open his home in hospitality. Zacchaeus, honored by the opportunity, complied.

By coming down from the tree, Zacchaeus gained true stature through his relationship with Christ. When the crowd complained that Jesus favored this sinner, Zacchaeus didn’t deny his past offenses. Instead, he accepted responsibility for them and offered to make amends. Thus he grew in self-respect and his relationships with those around him were on the way to being healed. The higher standing he probably longed for in the community and vainly sought through riches came to him once he encountered Christ and met others on level ground.

Our attempts to build ourselves up at the expense of others damage our self-respect and our relationships. God’s love can lead us to the honest self-acceptance that can heal our relationships.
Story:
When we feel inadequate, sometimes we try to raise ourselves up by looking for praise. Sometimes we try to lift ourselves up by putting other people down—often those nearest and dearest to us. Karen, an intelligent, accomplished woman, suffered from insecurity. Her husband John suffered from insecurities of his own. John cracked a lot of jokes at Karen’s expense. He was often critical of Karen and quick to point out her mistakes. This only caused her to retreat behind a façade of perfection, trying not to make mistakes—or at least not get caught. That, in turn, threatened John, who became more determined to relieve his feelings of inadequacy by belittling Karen. The relationship spiraled downward as each tried, in their own way, to build up their self-esteem at the other’s expense. An undercurrent of fear and tension eroded their relationship.

Although spouses should be able to look to each other for support, that isn’t always the case. When two people are both struggling to feel good about themselves, they have little to feed into the relationship. That’s why inviting the grace of God into a marriage—and other loving relationships with children, friends, and co-workers—is so important. When we experience God’s unconditional love, like Zacchaeus, we grow beyond needing to bolster our egos. By God’s grace we’re free to be honest about and take responsibility for our shortcomings. We’re free to relate to others with acceptance and good will.

Loving faith communities also nurture spiritual growth. St. Paul encouraged the Thessalonians with prayers and words. May we do the same and so build up the Body of Christ.

Petition:
That families accept Christ’s unconditional love and reflect love to each other and to their communities, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
God’s unconditional love nurtures healthy self-esteem and allows us to connect with others instead of building up our egos.
First Reading: 2 Maccabees 7: 1-2, 9-14
- A mother and her seven sons chose to endure torture and death rather than break the laws of their faith, symbolized by eating pork.
- One of these victims testified to his belief in personal resurrection and an afterlife. How do you think their belief in the resurrection affected this family’s actions?
- They didn’t deny their suffering, but they knew that suffering wasn’t the whole story.
- Although most of us here today may not have faced physical death or torture, our faith is tested in our daily lives.

Second Reading: 2 Thessalonians 2: 16 - 3:5
- Paul encouraged the Thessalonians and prayed that God would direct their hearts to God’s love and the endurance of Christ to sustain them through suffering.
- Love strengthens our endurance. Reassurance that God is in charge and that He loves us can empower us to get through challenges.

- Some Sadducees tried to ridicule belief in personal resurrection by making up an outlandish, legalistic example. They asked Jesus about a widow who, in accordance with Jewish law, had consecutively married the brothers of her deceased husband. Whose wife would she be in heaven?
- Jesus’ answer affirmed that there is indeed a resurrection but also showed the Sadducees that the resurrected life transcended their narrow, legalistic understanding.
- Jesus then provided proof of the afterlife using an example from the Torah, which the Sadducees based their faith on. God had told Moses, “I AM the God…of Abraham,” the long deceased Hebrew patriarch. If there were no afterlife, God would have used the past tense, saying, “I WAS the God of Abraham.”
- Today’s readings call us to think beyond our life today. They invite us to consider how our hope in eternal life can influence how we live out our faith in the here and now.

Food For Thought:
We may not face physical torture and death at the hands of non-believers, but our faith can be tested when we struggle with—or watch a loved one struggle with—pain or agonizing circumstances. We might ask why. We might feel far away from God. We might not see the purpose of “hanging in there,” as well-meaning friends and family suggest.

Faith doesn’t guarantee protection from pain. Jesus had perfect faith. That didn’t prevent His suffering, but it did empower Him to go through it and come out the other side. His victory over death gives us a living hope. We might not understand the why of pain. We might even have strong feelings about it but, because we trust God’s love, we have the ability to endure.
St. Paul reassured the Thessalonians that God would continue to give them hope, courage, and grace to “strengthen them in every good deed and word.” The example of endurance we heard in the first reading and Jesus’ witness to the afterlife inspires our confidence and our ability to persevere in following God.

**Story:**
Alice, a cradle Catholic, left the church for many years. Decades later, she found her way back to the Catholic Church and was welcomed with open arms. Meanwhile, she found herself living with a husband strongly anti-Catholic and a defiant teenaged daughter of no particular faith. When Alice discovered her daughter Melissa was sexually active, Alice was torn. She loved her daughter more than her own life. Although fearful of driving her daughter away, Alice was also fearful of her daughter’s choices—which Alice knew were sometimes beyond her control. How could she love her child no matter what and still stand up for living in accordance with God’s will? Alice sought counseling but also prayed for God’s guidance.

One day, Alice mustered the courage to have a frank discussion with her daughter. “I love you,” Alice began. “Nothing you could ever do would make me stop loving you. You know how I feel about your behavior and the risks you’re taking. I can guide you but I can’t be with you at all times and I can’t make your choices for you. I want you to know that if you ever become pregnant and tell me you’ve gotten an abortion, I will love you and care for you, but know this: I could never take you to get an abortion because I believe that would be taking an innocent life.”

Six years later, as a young adult, Melissa did become pregnant. She chose not to marry the child’s father but did choose to have and raise her baby on her own with Alice’s emotional support. That baby became a joy to them both.

**Petition:**
That faith in the resurrection encourages families struggling with the challenges of day to day life, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
When our faith is challenged, the power of the resurrection can lead us to hope in God’s promise of eternal life. What, in day-to-day living, is most challenging to your faith?
33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Malachi 3: 19-20a
• Malachi spoke of a coming “day of the Lord,” a time of justice when evil would be destroyed and the faithful would be healed by God’s saving power.
• Announcing God’s coming reign of justice was a message of hope for the Israelites oppressed by foreign rulers. It would also stir up the consciences of those who were morally lax and taking advantage of others.
• Thinking about the end times puts our choices and interactions in perspective.
• How do we take advantage of those under our own roofs? Do we try the patience or good nature of family members because we can get away with it? Do we use our authority at work or as parents with respect and fairness or do we control by intimidation or micro-managing?
• If the end times—bringing the light of God’s justice—were coming next week, how might we change the way we relate to others? What can we do to make each day the “day of the Lord?”

Second Reading: 2nd Thessalonians 3: 7-12
• Some Thessalonians, who expected Christ’s return and the end of the world to happen any day, adopted the attitude, “Why bother working if the end is coming soon?”
• St. Paul addressed this by reminding the Thessalonians that when he and his companions shared the gospel they worked to earn their keep. Paul said that all should work to avoid freeloading and to prevent the danger of having too much time on their hands and becoming meddlers.
• Fair distribution of labor is important for justice to thrive in the world, but also under our own roofs. Everyone can pitch in around the house. Even little ones can learn to pick up their toys or help set the table.
• Participation promotes more loving relationships. Being overworked creates resentment. Not doing our share erodes self-respect. When we see the challenges in the job, when we expend effort, we are slower to criticize and quicker to appreciate the efforts of others.

• When His disciples were admiring the decorated temple buildings, Jesus told them the buildings would be destroyed. Focusing on things that catch our attention is short-sighted and distracts us from things that have long-lasting importance.
• Jesus warned His disciples about the personal challenges they would face in their own lifetimes, including betrayal by their own families.
• We all face personal challenges. Jesus offers the hope that when facing overwhelming circumstances we’re assured of God’s presence, that God will be with us through it all and that the ultimate reign of justice will have the last word.
• How do we bring the reign of God’s justice into our lives every day?
**Food For Thought:**
The coming reign of God at the end of time is a message of hope. We trust we’ll be brought through any challenges that face us, not by our own resources, but by God’s power. Christ warned His disciples they’d be betrayed by parents, relatives and friends. He promised to give them what they needed.

Sometimes we might feel betrayed by our own family. Maybe we’ve shared an embarrassing moment or a deep-seated fear and were teased or criticized. Maybe we spoke out about abuse and our truth was denied or rejected by those we looked to for support. Maybe we’re the ones criticizing or denying because we’re uncomfortable with a family member’s courage and honesty in exposing fear or shame. We may know it’s wrong to put down someone else, but still respond reflexively. Pausing before reacting—at least for the moment—creates a space for God to get in and guide us to a better way. If we rely on God’s grace instead of ourselves, we might help usher in God’s reign of justice and love under our own roofs.

**Story:**
Donna and her sister Kim were discussing a news item about shoplifting. Donna’s fifteen year old daughter Hannah, within earshot, mumbled, “I shoplifted once. I smuggled a lip gloss out of Walgreens last summer.” “Shame on you!” her aunt barked. Donna looked at her daughter, whose head hung in embarrassment and said, “There’s no shame. Hannah trusted us enough to be honest. There’s no shame in that.” It’s not that Donna didn’t talk to Hannah later about what she’d done, but that the child risked being vulnerable. Whatever consequences needed to happen, Donna didn’t want to destroy the trust between herself and her daughter.

It isn’t always easy to draw the line between justice and mercy. Part of a parent’s job is correcting their children. But that’s not the same thing as humiliating someone when they’ve risked vulnerability. Correcting mistakes and making amends for wrongs done is character-building; shame is not. Jesus invited sinners to change by treating them as if they were worth changing.

The end of the world may or may not happen in our lifetime, but we can do what we can to live God’s justice and mercy every day in big and small ways, starting under our own roofs.

**Petition:**
That through the love and respect lived out in their own lives, families help bring God’s reign of justice to the here and now, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
What can you do to bring “the day of the Lord,” God’s reign of justice, into your little corner of the world this week?
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: 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.

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.
Bulletin Announcement:
Often when this Gospel reading is proclaimed, we hear about the ministries that feed the hungry and cloth the naked. 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.
The Most Holy Trinity

First Reading: Proverbs 8: 22-31
• Wisdom had an important role in creation. Wisdom was there before the earth and all that’s in it were created.
• Wisdom found delight in humankind.
• Wisdom is often portrayed as feminine. In Sirach this portrayal continues. In both John and Colossians, verses speak of Jesus as Wisdom, attributing much of the same qualities found in Proverbs to Him.

Second Reading: Romans 5: 1-5
• We have been justified by faith and so we hope for God’s glory.
• Hope does not disappoint because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

Gospel: John 16: 12-15
• There is understanding yet to come. All of what the disciples need to know has been given by Jesus, but they cannot understand it until the Spirit is sent to them.
• The Spirit will lead them to the Truth—Who is Christ Himself. (I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. JN 14:6)
• Jesus, the Father and the Spirit are as one.

Food For Thought:
One of the primary characteristics of Christians is that we are people of hope. We hope in what we cannot see and in what we cannot explain. Let’s face it. Much of the deposit of our faith is anchored in mystery. The Trinity, the Eucharist, and the incarnation are all realities that countless numbers of individuals throughout history have struggled to explain. Ultimately, we must rely on the promise of Christ, trusting that the Spirit, whom Christ and the Father send, will be the Guide to lead us into the truth. The Spirit will help us understand the mysteries and, through grace, bring us closer to faith. A famous quote attributed to St. Thomas Aquinas states, “To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible.”

Story:
It is said that in the midst of his 30-year struggle to write his treatise on the Holy Trinity, de Trinitate, the great Doctor of the Church, St. Augustine, took a walk by the seashore to clear his mind. He noticed a boy using a sea shell to carry water from the ocean to a small hole in the sand where he dumped it. Augustine, bishop of Hippo at this time, asked the boy what he was doing. “I am emptying the sea into this hole,” the boy replied. Augustine smiled. “I’m afraid that is impossible, my child. This hole couldn’t possibly contain the vast ocean.”

The boy looked deeply into the eyes of Augustine and said, “And it is also impossible for you to understand the vast Trinity with your small mind.” Taken aback, Augustine looked to the horizon to ponder the boy’s words. When he looked back, the boy had vanished.
It is well and good that we ponder the mysteries of faith as well as the mysteries of the universe. It is well and good that we debate, that we explore, that we discover, and even that we doubt at times. But we should never forget that our individual consciousness is not capable of conceiving or containing the fullness of truth. At the end of the day, we let the Spirit lead us to the mystery and fill us with the hope-filled faith which enables us to accept the mystery.

**Petition:**
That the church may be guided into the Truth by the Holy Spirit, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Hope does not disappoint. Are we a people of hope? For what do we hope? Know that our hope placed in the Trinity, The Father, Son and Holy Spirit is always well placed!
The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

First Reading: Genesis 14: 18-20
- Bread and wine were brought out by Melchizedek. These were common elements in Jewish tradition.
- Melchizedek gives Abram a solemn blessing.
- The Israelites followed behind the God of Israel on their journey through the desert.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 11: 22-26
- Paul hands on to the Corinthians the formula that he received for the Eucharist.
- This ritual of eating the bread of life and drinking of the cup of Jesus’ blood is the believers’ way to proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes.
- Jesus’ time on earth, when He ate and drank and lived among us, was when God walked side by side with us.

- The feeding of the 5,000 is possibly the most favorite of Jesus’ miracles.
- They ate and were filled. Would they be hungry again?
- It is symbolic that there were twelve baskets of leftover food.
- God feeds us, and we can say He is within us.

Food For Thought:
Much like the famous Breastplate of St. Patrick, it is good for us to recognize on this wonderful Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ that our God is truly the God of intimacy. God is before us, God is beside us, and God is within us. Today’s feast leads us to celebrate another mysterious way in which God has chosen to share His divine presence with us. In receiving Holy Communion, we consume the very presence of God who co-mingles with us. He transforms us from the inside out. It is nourishment for our souls because the substance of the sustenance is God. This is why it is so important for us not only to pray and be good, but also to attend Mass and to frequently receive this sacrament. Without it, we are starving our souls from this life-giving communion.

Story:
So much of what is good in our lives centers around the table and a meal. We celebrate many occasions with food and drink. The bonds of family are reinforced through eating together. Many of you may have seen at least one episode of Blue Bloods, the popular TV series with Tom Selleck as the NYPD Commissioner and his family. At least once in every episode the multi-generational family is gathered around the dining room table for the Sunday meal. It is there that they pray, argue, laugh, and cry. Lessons are taught and learned among the four generations. It is family life ‘ground zero’ for them and many of us. The wisdom of our God is that He chose to gift us with His body and blood around the table prepared for us, using the simple gifts of bread and wine.
**Petition:**
May those who hunger in this world be satisfied, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
God is before, beside, and within us. God makes Himself known to us in many ways, but most perfectly and most intimately in the gift of His Most Holy Body and Blood. When we come forward to receive the Eucharist, do we recognize the true presence of Christ? What does it mean to you that “God with us” is the reality we share at God’s table?
Presentation of the Lord (February 2nd)

First Reading: Malachi 3:1-4
- “… I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me…”

Second Reading: Hebrews 2:14-18
- Jesus shares with us the embodiment of human flesh and blood.
- He became one like us so that we might become like Him, who is both “… merciful and faithful…”

- The imagery of this passage is remarkable, and includes so many references to faithfulness and faith-filled family life.
- Simeon shows faithfulness to God in his years of keeping vigil for the Messiah, and shows the power of the Holy Spirit in recognizing the infant Jesus as that promised Messiah.
- Mary and Joseph reflect the powerful bond of marriage, in the eagerness to present their infant back to God, or as the Gospel quotes from Isaiah, to “consecrate him to the Lord.”

Food For Thought:
In the readings for this feast, we hear references to the messenger that would precede Jesus; we hear that the Son of God will take on human flesh and become like us as He adopts humanity for a time; and we hear that in doing so, one of the most important missions Jesus has is to teach us how to be merciful. The Gospel is a reminder that faith is rooted in family life. For Mary and Joseph, that meant the purification ritual and sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem. For our families, we make that connection to parents bringing their infant children to the church for baptism.

Just as Jesus, as an infant, could not recite scriptures in Greek and Hebrew, children in each family depend on parents to teach them their faith. The beautiful prayers during the baptismal ritual highlight that parents are the first and the best teachers of their child; as such, and in bringing that child to the sacrament, they make a sacred promise before God to teach them their faith. In doing so, parents participate in the ongoing work of God’s creation, enabling each child to manifest God’s dream for each little one. Sure, there will be challenges and pain, just as Simeon told Mary that a sword would pierce her heart. But each child is a gift from God, entrusted to parents for a short time to teach, to guide, and to introduce them to the love of God. And that very love of God is most clearly manifest in the day-to-day lives of parents and children.

Petition:
That just as Mary and Joseph presented Jesus in the Temple, each household will reflect the faith-filled promise of parents to teach and share their faith and the Gospel of Jesus, we pray to the Lord.
Bulletin Announcement:
God so loved the world that he gave His Only Son, Jesus, to be our model. And God enrolled the help of Mary and Joseph as models of parents, who would need the grace of God to strengthen and nourish them in their ministry as parents of the Messiah. We see that reflected today in the scripture passages for the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus. May each parent draw on the same grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony, which is promised to husbands and wives, so that they can each day be the first and best teachers of our Catholic faith to their children.
Saint Joseph (March 19th)

First Reading: 2 Samuel 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16
- “I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me…. Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever.”
- Saint Joseph serves as a model and highest example of fatherhood.

Second Reading: Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22
- “… the promise was made to Abraham and his descendants that he would inherit the world…”
- “… to those who follow the faith of Abraham, who is the father of all of us, as it is written, I have made you father of many nations…”
- We are those descendants; generation upon generation inherit the world, and pass our world along to our children.

Gospel: Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a
- Joseph is a “… righteous man….”
- “… do not be afraid to take Mary, your wife, into your home….”

Food For Thought:
Marriage is wonderful.

Marriage is also scary; it is permanent, and with marriage a man and a woman say, “We, both of us together, are ready to face whatever life holds in the future.” In your homes, the role of a faithful and faith-filled father is remarkable, scary, demanding, and exquisitely wonderful. On the Feast of St. Joseph, husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary, it makes so much sense to dedicate our prayers for and with fathers and husbands. None are perfect, except in the eyes of their youngest children; by the time your kids are teenagers, they know all too well how many weaknesses fathers embody. Hopefully, as young adults, your kids will once again see those weaknesses as character traits to be cherished.

I am reminded of a Christmas carol, “Joseph’s Song,” in which Joseph is holding the newborn Jesus in his arms while Mary sleeps, and he prays to God, asking, “how can a man be father to the Son of God?” Every father who has held a newborn child in their arms offers a similar prayer: “How can I be a good father to this child? Please God, help me to get it right!!”

To all the fathers in our parish, those here at Mass and those who are at work providing for their families, may the protection and intercession of Saint Joseph assure them of the strength and grace to face every day as helpers to their wives, and models for their children.

Petition:
That the intercession of Saint Joseph on behalf of all fathers may assure them of his strength, wisdom, and faithfulness as they strive to be the best helpers of their wives and children, we pray to the Lord.
**Bulletin Announcement:**
Saint Joseph likely asked God, more than once and in the middle of the night, “Hey, God, how can I be a good father to Jesus?” May the celebration of his feast day remind every family to pray for fathers and grandfathers, that they see in Joseph a model for their lives, and follow in Joseph the example of loving care for their spouses and families.
Annunciation (March 25th)

First Reading: Isaiah 7:10-14, 8:10

- “… the Lord himself will give you this sign: a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.…”
- King Ahaz did not want to challenge God with any signs; he was a king, in fear of losing a battle against two attacking nations, and simply hoped and prayed that God was on Israel’s side.

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:4-10

- Jesus is recorded in this passage as saying, “… I come to do your will, O God …” and again, “… Behold, I come to do your will.…”
- The author of Hebrews then reminds us—you and me—that “… by this will we have been consecrated.…”


- “… Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”

Food For Thought:

Who imagines what will be in store for us 1, 2, 5 or 10 years from now? The fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy to Ahaz took 8 centuries to occur. And yet, it was in that prophecy that God promised a son, and promised to use a family as a sign. It was God who decided that this remarkable sign of His power and faithfulness would be a family! And with His fully divine nature, Jesus repeatedly showed His faithfulness to the will of His Father.

What does this mean for us today? First, it is imperative that we recognize the importance that God places on families, as evidenced by the earthly protection that was to be offered to Jesus by Joseph, and beginning in her womb, by the Blessed Mother. Second, it is important that we each recognize what it means to be “consecrated to God.” After all, each of us is already consecrated to God in baptism. Only when we rely on the grace of God in our daily lives are we able to confidently offer our own fiat to God, or commitment to be the servants of the Lord, and recognize the particular way parents are called upon to say “yes” to God on a daily basis in their homes.

Petition:

That through the intercession of Mary, each parent may say “yes” to God in the chaos of everyday lives, knowing that through her intercession they have the strength and courage to face all that life holds, we pray to the Lord.
**Bulletin Announcement:**
The Feast of the Annunciation reminds us that God does, indeed, enter into our human existence. God is with us, through the grace of our baptism and confirmation, offering His Holy Spirit to guide our actions and choices. Just as Mary said “yes” to God through the Angel Gabriel, may we confidently say “yes” to God at each moment when we might be tempted to be selfish, judgmental, impatient, or otherwise place ourselves before our spouses and children, or children before their parents. Let us light each household with the Blessed Mother’s “yes,” joining our faithfulness to God with hers.
Nativity of St. John the Baptist (June 24th, Vigil)

First Reading: Jeremiah 1: 4-10
• “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you….“ (Jeremiah)

Second Reading: 1 Peter 1: 8-12
• “…You rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy as you attain the goal of your faith….”
• “It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you….”

Gospel: Luke 1: 5-17
• Both Elizabeth and Zechariah were righteous, faithful believers, but they lamented that they were childless.
• When the angel addressed Zechariah, he said to him, “Do not be afraid,” one of the most common phrases in the New Testament. The angel promised that a son would be born to Zechariah and Elizabeth and that they would “rejoice at his birth…."

Nativity of St. John the Baptist (During the Day)

First Reading: Isaiah 49: 1-6
• “…[F]rom my mother’s womb he gave me my name.” (Isaiah)

Second Reading: Acts 13: 22-26
• “My brothers, children of the family of Abraham, and those among you who are God-fearing, to us this word of salvation has been sent.”

• “What, then, will this child be?

Food For Thought:
Parents often struggle with children. They wish there was an instruction manual, some easy to follow map that tells moms and dads exactly what they need to do to raise children well. But in lieu of that “owner’s manual,” let’s consider other resources to assist parents with their kids.

First, our first reading tells us that God knew each child before it was born. In fact, we know from genetics that each of our DNA reflects the traits of both our mother and father. When we couple that fact with the scripture assurance that each child is known to God before they are born, we can easily see that it was part of God’s plan of creation for those parents, that man and woman, to have met. Just as Elizabeth and Zechariah were designed by God as the parents of John the Baptist, each parent can know that every child is a gift particularly sent by God to them.
Second, we know from Scripture that parents are invited by God to rejoice in the birth of their child, even when they wonder, as Saint Luke’s Gospel asks, “… what, then, will this child be?” Certainly there are many unknowns when a child is born. Parents may have moments of fear over the years as their child grows, concerns about what the child will become and whether they are doing their best as parents. But we know this: their child is a particular gift, a unique person, known to God before their birth and given as a gift to those particular parents. With the sure knowledge that God has sent this child to them to be cherished, nurtured, and taught, parents can also count on the assurance of God’s continuous grace in their lives. This grace will empower them to guide the growth in faith that will manifest in each child, a child uniquely made in the image and likeness of God.

**Petition:**
That, through the love of their parents, children throughout the world may find safety, peace, and love as the manifestation of God’s creation, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
The birth of John the Baptist is one of only three births celebrated in the Gospels: John the Baptist, the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Mother, and of course, the birth of Jesus. That makes this feast a pretty important moment of liturgical celebration! Perhaps more than the other two, the Nativity of John the Baptist is a feast that invites us to celebrate families, and, in a particular way, the children who are longed for and born to parents specially selected by God to nurture and care for them. On this feast, let us reflect on the great joy that can be found in family life and love.
SS. Peter and Paul (June 29th, Vigil)

First Reading: Acts 3:1-10
• “...I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give to you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, rise and walk.”
• Parents have the blessed responsibility to share their faith with their children. It’s a far more powerful a gift than any silver or gold. It is, in fact, not an option, but an obligation which parents take on when they choose to have their children baptized.

Second Reading: Galatians 1:11-20
• God calls each of us, before we are born, in our mother’s womb, to a life of grace.
• Relate this connection to the first reading and baptismal gift of parents to teach their children the faith that has been handed on to them.

Gospel: John 21:15-19
• Three times Jesus asks Peter (Simon) whether he loves Jesus. This reflects Jesus’ tender mercy to forgive Peter for the three times he denied Jesus in the court of the High Priest.
• This can be a direct reflection to parents, indicating that the way to love is to nurture your children (“...feed my sheep; feed my lambs...”)

SS. Peter and Paul (During the Day)

First Reading: Acts 12:1-11
• The story of the angel of the Lord entering into Peter’s jail cell and setting him free is a reflection of how God enters into our human lives.

Second Reading: Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18
• (No particular reference to family or marriage)

Gospel: John 21:15-19
• “Who do you say that I am?”
• A powerful question; a frightening question!
• Every single day, husbands and wives have the chance to answer this question. Put more succinctly, every single day, husbands and wives throughout their lives must answer this question, and they answer it by their actions.
• We know that God is Love; Jesus taught that to His disciples, which includes us.

Food For Thought:
On this feast, both the Vigil and the daytime Mass readings give us multiple things to consider. The vigil readings can be easily looked at in the light of the responsibilities of parents to pass on their faith to their children—a sacred obligation assumed when they bring their children forward for baptism.
The Mass during the day has readings that can be applied to the reality that Jesus has entered—and continues to enter—into our human lives. He is present in a special way among couples who have entered into the sacrament of matrimony, conveying His grace every day of their lives. It is for us to put that grace to use, but some miss it (2 Cor 6:1), and the grace goes unused.

The challenge for each married couple is to look for the moments of grace in their lives—often moments involving their spouses or children—and to allow their lives to be set on fire by the grace of God. Then the love shared within that family, between spouses, parents and children, reflects the passion that both Peter and Paul had for the early Church.

**Petition:**
That parents may remain open to the action of God’s grace in their lives, so that their every action reflects the love of God, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
The feast of Saints Peter and Paul is a great chance to consider how grace enters into our lives and how the gift of God’s presence is manifest in each family. Falling as it does at the start of the summer season, this feast can serve as a reminder for families, especially for families with children, to make sure that their break from school does not mean a break from God. The summer break can actually be an opportunity to feel God’s presence in your family in a special way. Think about including a day trip this summer that includes a connection to your lives of faith, lives that mirror God’s grace. If you are going to New York City for the day, include a visit to Saint Patrick’s Cathedral with your children. If you are visiting Philadelphia this summer, consider stopping at one of the many historic churches that date from our Revolutionary days. If you are simply taking a day trip anywhere, perhaps you can adopt the practice of saying a prayer before you pull your car out of the driveway. In each of these actions during this vacation season, you are helping to show your children the importance of God and His grace in your family life.
Transfiguration (August 6th)

First Reading: Daniel 7: 9-10, 13-14
- No particular verses connect to marriage or family.

Second Reading: 2 Peter 1: 16-19
- Peter recounts that he, himself, heard the words of the Father declare, “This is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Gospel: Matthew 17: 1-9 (A); Mark 9: 2-10 (B); Luke 9: 28b-36 (C)
- “This is my beloved [chosen] Son. Listen to Him.”

Food For Thought:
We heard the voice of God the Father at Jesus’ baptism, telling His disciples that Jesus was His beloved Son. What makes the words different in the story of the transfiguration is the phrase which follows: “Listen to Him.” This serves as a profound reminder that Jesus has come as a teacher, to serve as a model of how faith can be lived by those who choose to follow Him. What, we might ask, does this command mean in our families? While Jesus was the one who was “transfigured” in the sight of Peter, James, and John, in another way we might consider that these disciples were also transfigured, in that their understanding of Jesus was changed by the experience. Each of us are called to be transfigured in our own lives, to allow the knowledge of Jesus to shape how we relate to God, and, in a more practical sense, to shape how we relate to each other. Considered in this way, it becomes a natural connection to illuminate family life. Parents, through living as Jesus taught, shape and influence their children’s knowledge in regard to growing in faith. Spouses, too, influence and transfigure each other in how they individually respond to God in their own lives.

Petition:
That within each family, the love shared becomes the grace and power which transforms how each member acts toward each other and toward the world, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Jesus’ transfiguration was a remarkable event, found in each of the three Synoptic Gospels. While that experience certainly helped to cement the faith of Peter, James, and John, the growth in faith for these three became their own “transfiguration.” After going through that experience, they would not see Jesus in the same way again. We, too, are called to experience the transfiguring power of Jesus. To this end, parents are encouraged to ask each other and to ask their children, “How does the Eucharist transfigure you?” “How does it affect your relationship with God?” If you don’t have a good answer to these questions, then perhaps a conversation around the dinner table is in order, where each person has the chance to explore the power of the Eucharist within your family.
Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15th, Vigil)

First Reading: 1 Chronicles 15:3-4, 15-16; 16:1-2
- King David brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem to a holy place to be its dwelling until the Temple was built.
- God’s presence in the community of believers is physical, even dating back to the days of our Jewish ancestors.
- Mary is the new ark of the covenant, being the vessel in which Jesus, the fulfillment of God’s promise, came to earth.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:54b-57
- God invites us to clothe our mortal selves with immortality.
- The immortality that God offers us removes the sting of death.
- The only thing that makes death “sting” is sin.

- A woman, upon hearing Jesus speak, recognized the blessing that Mary must feel for being the mother of Jesus. What mother wouldn’t be proud of such a son?
- Jesus, not disrespecting His mother in any way, acknowledged that any person who responds to God’s invitation to love is as blessed as His mother.

Food For Thought:
The Church’s teaching on the Assumption is a little tricky to understand sometimes. The bottom line, though, is that Mary, having never been touched by sin (so that she could be the perfect vessel—the ark—for Christ), does not feel the “sting” of her own death. Of course, she felt the sting of Jesus’ death, and death in general, but she herself was untouched by it. The Church teaches that “when the course of her earthly life was finished” (CCC 966) she was taken up to heaven, body and soul. She is blessed because she chose to live in perfect unity with God. Jesus reminds us that any one of us could make the same choice as Mary if we “hear the word of God and observe it.”
**Story:**
A little girl was playing by a pond in her local park and saw some squirmly bugs just beneath the surface of the water. She asked her father what they were and he told her, “Dragonflies.” “Dragonflies? That’s impossible!” said the little girl. “They have wings and don’t live in the water.” Her father replied, “They begin their lives in the water, but when they are ready, their bodies change, they grow wings, and they are no longer able to return to their old home in the water.” The little girl pondered this. Her father made use of this teachable moment and asked, “Do you remember when Grandma passed away? We were so sad that we couldn’t see her the way we always had when she was here.” The little girl nodded. “Well,” her father continued, “it’s like the dragonflies. They spend the right amount of time in the water so that they can leave that home and move to their next home—the air. Their little wormy bodies become beautiful jewel-colored flying bodies. God makes a promise that’s sort of like that to us. Our bodies, even though they die, become new again when we’re in heaven and they are made perfect.”

**Petition:**
That, with Mary’s perfect example of living in union with God, we too will choose to bear Christ to the world with our lives, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Because of Mary’s choice to never enter into sin, she did not experience the same death process that each of us does. Her body was taken up with her soul when her time on earth was finished. Jesus reminds us that we can be blessed like Mary by hearing God’s word and applying it to our lives. How does Mary’s example challenge and encourage you in your life? What does the image of Mary as “ark of the covenant” mean to you?
Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Day)

First Reading: Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10a,b
- The images in this reading depict a mother with child being attacked by a dragon and protected by God.
- The mother is the Church and the child is the Christian Community in persecution.
- The Church is a family protected by God, our Father and Jesus, our Brother.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:20-27
- Death came into human experience through the sin of Adam and has been a condition handed down since then.
- Jesus, although sinless, let Himself be subjected to death so that He could conquer it once and for all.

- This reading tells a very lovely story about four cousins meeting in impossible circumstances: Mary and Elizabeth, who both became pregnant when it was impossible, and the infants Jesus and John, who interacted in utero.
- It is a tender moment—and one that is full of grace. Each of these individuals has a part to play in the destiny of the others and each fulfills God’s promise in their own way.
- God is frequently revealed in our family relationships and God’s promise is lived out in them.

Food For Thought:
The Church’s teaching on the Assumption is a little tricky to understand sometimes. The second reading tells us that “last enemy to be destroyed is death.” After Jesus conquered death, His mother, sinless as she was, was preserved from it. Mary—the ark—was the perfect vessel for Christ. God invited Mary to participate in the salvation of humanity. Her response to God’s invitation helped pave the way for Jesus to conquer death. Mary is the mother of Christ, the mother of the Church, and the mother of all of us. Her assumption to heaven, body and soul, “when the course of her earthly life was finished” (CCC 966) is the fruit of God’s promise.
**Story:**
A little girl was playing by a pond in her local park and saw some squirming bugs just beneath the water’s surface. She asked her father what they were and he told her, “Dragonflies.” “Dragonflies? That’s impossible!” said the little girl. “They have wings and don’t live in the water.” Her father replied, “They begin their lives in the water, but when they are ready, their bodies change, they grow wings, and they are no longer able to return to their old home in the water.” The little girl pondered this. Her father made use of this teachable moment and asked, “Do you remember when Grandma passed away? We were so sad that we couldn’t see her the way we always had when she was here.” The little girl nodded. “Well,” continued the father, “it’s like the dragonflies. They spend the right amount of time in the water so that they can leave that home and move to their next home—the air. Their little wormy bodies become beautiful jewel-colored flying bodies. God makes a promise that’s sort of like that to us. Our bodies, even though they die, become new again when we’re in heaven and they are made perfect.”

**Petition:**
That, with Mary’s perfect example of living in union with God, we too will choose to bear Christ to the world with our lives, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Because of Mary’s choice to never enter into sin, she did not experience the same death process that each of us does. Her body was taken up with her soul when her time on earth was finished. How does Mary’s example challenge and encourage you in your life? What does the encounter between Mary and Elizabeth and between Jesus and John say about how God’s promise is lived out in our family relationships?
Exultation of the Cross (September 14th)

First Reading: Numbers 21:4b-9
- Typical to humanity, the people of God were annoyed by His care for them in the desert—they were given food to sustain them in that harsh environment, but got bored with it.
- Upon hearing their ungrateful complaints, God sent venomous snakes to bite them.
- They were sorry because they didn’t want to get bit and die, so they apologized and asked Moses to help them.
- God said to make a pole with a snake on it. Everyone who looked at it was saved.
- Essentially, God made the people look at/acknowledge the consequences of their sins in order for them to be healed of them.
- This event prefigures the Crucifixion.

Second Reading: The Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians 2:6-11
- Jesus, who had every right and authority to punish the human race any way that He wanted, chose to humble Himself and take our punishment on Himself.
- Jesus’ obedience shines a light on our disobedience and serves as an example of what we ought to be.
- Through His obedience and love for the Father and for humanity, Jesus is exalted forever. (He should be anyway because he’s God).
- Through His death on the cross, Jesus allowed Himself to be lifted up, so that we could acknowledge our sinfulness and receive God’s mercy.

Gospel: John 3:13-17
- The serpent lifted up in the desert gave the people physical life; Jesus raised up gives us eternal life.
- Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was God’s gift to us because of God’s great love for us.
- As a loving Father, it isn’t God’s desire that any one of us should be condemned, but that we would acknowledge our sins and be saved through Jesus’ loving act.

Food For Thought:
God, who is a great author, brings the story of salvation history full circle in today’s readings. The serpent lifted up in the desert prefigures the crucifixion. Both of these events hold us accountable for our sin, require us to look at what we’ve done, and then, in God’s mercy, remove the consequences of our sin. Not wanting us to lose our lives—physical or spiritual—God is willing to sacrifice His own Son for our salvation. The cross, which should have been a symbol of failure, humiliation, and shame, became a sign of victory, honor, and dignity.
**Story:**
Mitchell was a fairly spoiled child who grew up to be an even more spoiled adult. He was used to having things his way, and insisted upon it in every aspect of his life. He was demanding in his relationships, unbending in his conflicts, self-centered in his friendships, and obnoxious in his workplace. Much of this stemmed from a self-hatred that he had fostered over the years, which manifested eventually as an alcohol addiction. Even when he got his own way, Mitch never felt like he had anything. He was never satisfied because he had a spiritual hole in him that couldn’t be filled by anything but the love of God. Life was miserable in his house and his son started getting into trouble at school. He picked a fight with the biggest kid and was beat up pretty badly. When he was required to say why he picked the fight, he said it was to get his dad’s attention. It wasn’t until Mitch saw the pain that he had caused his family that he realized he needed to face what he had done, what was lacking in him, and accept that he needed help to regain his life. He had placed his cross on his family instead of dealing with it himself, but now he understood that he was going to have to take up his cross and let Jesus help him carry it.

**Petition:**
That all of us will look to the cross for our example, for our healing, and for salvation, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
For the people living in the Roman Empire, the cross was a sign of shame, warning, torture, political occupation, and cruelty. God turned that evil on its head and made the cross a sign of hope, victory, self-giving love, resurrection, and personal sacrifice. It has become the symbol behind which all Christians rally—it is the symbol of our mission. Recognizing that we are sinful, but invited to redemption, we embrace the cross as Jesus did in service of our God and one another. What significance does Jesus’ cross have for you in your life? How are you inspired by Jesus’ love for you and his willingness to suffer on your behalf? What crosses do you bear every day?
All Saints Day

First Reading: Revelation 7:2-4; 9-14
- God’s family in heaven is a multitude so great it cannot be counted.
- God’s family is made up of every nation, race, people, and tongue.
- God’s family is holy and bears witness to the truth.
- God’s family is saved by Jesus’ sacrifice.

Second Reading: First Letter of Saint John 3:1-3
- God’s love is what makes us God’s children.
- As God’s children, we will become like God when we see Him as He is.
- If we place our hope in God, we become more like God.

Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12a
- Whenever Jesus sees people who need to be taught, healed, and loved, He takes the time to fill their need.
- Jesus taught the Beatitudes to give hope to those who were in spiritual need.
- The Beatitudes give us a roadmap for how we are to become more like God and to eventually see God as He is.

Food For Thought:
The readings on the Solemnity of All Saints take time to give us a vision of heaven, to teach us how to hope and what to hope for. They give us a roadmap for becoming what God’s eternal plan for us holds. They teach us our primary vocation: to be saints. They speak of us as a family, as children of God, who have been given the mission of peace, justice, and mercy while we are on earth so that we can live in perfect peace, justice, and mercy in eternal life. The Beatitudes remind us of what, as the family of God, we should be focused on: our spiritual needs. Whatever we are lacking here, we will have our fill of in heaven.
George and Lois began the celebration of their 50th wedding anniversary by renewing their vows at a Sunday Mass in their local parish. They received a blessing from the presider after repeating the vows that they had made to each other all those years ago. Tears rolled down the cheeks of every sentient member of the congregation and spontaneous applause erupted when they kissed. The joy that they shared, and that their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren shared, was matched by their parish family. When Mass was over, the couple remained in the gathering space as delighted parishioners congratulated them on their achievement. One beaming, middle-aged woman asked them, “What’s your secret? How did you stay together with such joy for all those years?” George replied, “Lois is a saint.” Lois chuckled and said, “He made me one.” The couple went on to express that their marriage wasn’t all flowers and candy. They had terrible times: times of unemployment and overemployment; they had lost a child tragically; they’d had their share of challenge. The key, they said, was the recognition that the sacrament of marriage was designed to make saints of us. They rooted their marriage in prayer and looked to Jesus’ example on how to deal with all of their hardships—including the hardship of living with difficult people every day. Over time, they had become more deeply dependent on one another for many things, but most of all for assistance in living their vows every day. They learned patience, forgiveness, persistence, how to live with grief—how to do everything together with Jesus at their center. They each give the other credit for being a saint, and each of them helped the other to become so.

Petition:
That families will create an environment where the hope of heaven and healthy spiritual attitudes are fostered, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Our primary calling, the vocation to which all God’s children are called, is to be saints. It’s God’s hope for every one of His children—regardless of nation, race, people, or tongue—that they should be in heaven forever with God. The Beatitudes tell us which human attributes we should work on to make ourselves more like God and more fitting for heaven. Which beatitude do you find most helpful? Is there one that you could apply more intentionally to your life?
All Souls Day

First Reading: Isaiah 25:6-9
- God will destroy death, the veil that keeps us apart from our beloved dead.
- God will bring comfort to all who mourn and wipe away our tears.
- Through the destruction of death, people will recognize God, in whom they had hope.

Second Reading: The Letter of Paul to the Romans 8:14-23
- The Holy Spirit makes us adopted children of God, who we are invited to call “Daddy.”
- We are heirs—people of inheritance—and our inheritance is everything.
- The children of God live in “glorious freedom.”
- Creation responds to the action of God, “groaning in labor pains,” as it—and we—wait for the redemption that is coming.

Gospel: John 14:1-6
- Jesus’ Father’s house is our Father’s house and there is room for everyone.
- Desiring that every one of His children should be with Him in His house, God sent us a brother, His own Son, to personally take us there.
- We receive that personal attention from our brother and from our Father to bring us to a place that was prepared specifically for us.

Food For Thought:
As the funeral liturgy says, our relationship with the dead is “changed, not ended.” It is as children of God that we are united with one another across the boundaries of space and time. We wait in hopeful expectation for the fulfillment of what was begun in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The family of God, with the Father—our Daddy—at its head and our brother, Jesus, at our side, trusts that the sting of death is not permanent because of God’s promise to “lift the veil” that separates us and to wipe away every tear. We believe that we will live in freedom from sin and death when Jesus comes again.
**Story:**
Anyone who knew Lois would say that she’s a saint. She was compassionate, wise, and generally reserved, but also loved to have fun. She was truly joyful. When she passed away after a long, eventful life, people turned up in droves to honor her at her wake. Everyone had stories to share about ways that she had helped them, offered advice, or just cheered them up with her sunny smile. They were sad that they wouldn’t see that smile around the parish or around town anymore, but there were rejoicing in the belief that she was already enjoying the time she was so looking forward to with Jesus, who she always referred to as “the love of her life.” In the weeks and months after her passing, parishioners would continue to talk about her as if she was still among them. They would see the statue of St. Theresa that she donated to the parish, or the prayer cards that she habitually left at the feet of the Blessed Mother, and smile. Every now and then one of her famous phrases would slip out of someone’s mouth and again there’d be smiles all around. For those who knew her, there were always little reminders of Lois’ presence in their hearts, which always reminded them of her inspirational love for Jesus.

**Petition:**
That as we remember our deceased loved ones in prayer today, we are comforted by God’s promise of the resurrection, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
On the Feast of All Souls we remember those who have gone before us and pray that they will be in God’s House in perfect peace and joy. We are reminded that our relationship with them is “changed, not ended” and that, one day, we will be restored to the fullness of relationship with our loved ones, and more importantly, with our God, who invites us to call Him Abba—Daddy. God loves each of us intimately and prepares a special place for us in heaven. What hopes do you have in the resurrection? What prayers do you have for your deceased loved ones? How is your relationship changed, not ended?
Thanksgiving

First Reading: Sirach 50:22-24
- God “fosters” our growth from the moment of our conception.
- Every good thing we have is from God.
- God wants us to be joyful, peaceful, and delivered from sin.

Second Reading: The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 1:3-9
- We are always referred to as “brothers and sisters” in the letters, reminding us that we are a family in Christ.
- We are reminded that we should always be thankful for the grace given to our family because of how God enriches us.
- We need to be mindful of the spiritual gifts.
- God calls all of us into fellowship with Jesus.

- Jesus went near a leper colony—lepers were required to live outside the healthy community and would become a sort of make-shift family, united in their sickness and maybe in their feelings of rejection.
- When Jesus healed the lepers at their request, He told them to go show themselves to the priests in order that it could be understood that their sins and their sickness were healed so that they could be welcomed back into their families.
- Only one of the lepers who were healed came back to say thank you—and it wasn’t one of the members of God’s chosen family.

Food For Thought:
We have much to be thankful for. We have a God who has been keeping an eye on our development since our conception, who works for joy and peace in our lives, who gives us families (spiritual and biological) in which to grow, and healing to live in gratitude every day. We need fellowship with Christ, but we need fellowship with one another, too. God, who is a family of three Persons, gives us communities in which to experience His love and healing. Even the lepers who were cast out from their born communities were given a temporary family for survival and comfort until they could rejoin their original families. Regardless of our situations, we are always in God’s care and have people who will assist us in moving toward the “day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That is something to be truly grateful for.
**Story:**
When Sherri was in graduate school, there came some holidays that she was unable to get home due to her work schedule. She lived in graduate housing for ministry students, most of whom were not local, and some of whom were international. This meant that there were always people who couldn’t get home for short holidays. One Easter break, Sherri’s duties at the church at which she was employed required her presence. Along with her, there was a Christian Brother from Ireland, a Sister of St. Joseph from upstate NY, and classmates from China, South Korea, Texas, and Minnesota. Since they were all left together, they decided to have Easter dinner together. Sherri was a cook, so she asked everyone what one dish they needed to have to make it a proper Easter. They all put in their orders, so Sherri cooked up a delicious but eclectic Easter dinner. The foods, while probably not how Mom would have made them, made dinner special, but the company—the little makeshift family that they were that day—made it home. Each person shared stories and traditions of their family celebration of Easter and of their cultures. Everybody was a little homesick, but very grateful for the opportunity to pray, eat, and enjoy each other’s company on that day.

**Petition:**
That we will always live in a spirit of gratitude for our families—biological, spiritual, and makeshift—who help us to move closer to our Lord each day, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Thanksgiving is a time when we stop the normal routine of life and make a point of expressing our gratitude to God for all that we have. We gather together the people that we love and who love us—our families and friends—and share the good things that we have together. What does Thanksgiving mean to you? For what can you be thankful for this year? The word “Eucharist” means “thanksgiving.” How is the Mass like a Thanksgiving meal that you would share with your family?
The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (December 8th)

First Reading: Genesis 3:9-15, 20
- When sin was introduced into the world, our relationship with the Father and with one another was injured.
- In the presence of sin, it’s human nature to blame, isolate, and create conflict.
- God, as a good Parent, shows us the clear consequences of our actions, helping us to prepare for what is coming next.

Second Reading: The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12
- God chose us for Himself, before the foundation of the world, to be holy.
- We are adopted through Jesus’ becoming human to recreate us and to remove the sin that God never wanted for us, but that we brought into the world.
- We exist to participate in the love of God and it is our natural response to give God praise and glory.

- As Mary is preparing to start her new married life, God presents her with an invitation to save humanity, changing the very nature of what her life with Joseph would have been and what her betrothed was expecting.
- The Father approaches her with care, honor, and joy, giving her the opportunity to freely choose her future.
- God also shares the good news about Elizabeth’s pregnancy, bonding these two cousins in their impossible situations as they each respond to God’s invitation to participate in salvation history in a most extraordinary way.
- Mary’s “yes,” when faced with a difficult situation, was in direct opposition to Eve’s “no.” While Eve’s decision brought death and destruction, Mary’s brought an end to death and a new life of wholeness.

Food For Thought:
Our celebration of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is the acknowledgment that God preserved one human woman from the stain of sin so that she could be properly disposed to give birth to and raise God in human form. Mary stands in direct opposition to our sinful nature, being preserved from sin through God’s grace, but also refusing sin through her life choices. While Eve is the mother of our brokenness, Mary is the mother of our wholeness. Both of these mothers helped to shape the history of God’s family and our humanity is enriched in knowing both.
Sharon thinks that reality TV shows like Jerry Springer are ridiculous. She believed that they were most likely made up, not real situations—that is, until she heard her family history. Sharon comes from a very fine family, good people who are dedicated to living Christian values and passing them on to the next generation. But the family the two generations before hers was full of immoral, illegal, and incomprehensible behavior. They were addicts, mobsters, thieves, adulterers—you name it. She couldn’t believe that the family she knew now could have been shaped in such circumstances. Luckily, members of the generation between hers and the scary one were still alive, making it possible for her to ask how they came out so “normal” under the circumstances of their upbringing. She came to understand that it’s not our circumstances that define us, but the choices we make within them: to either continue the harmful patterns or to change them into life-giving ones. We don’t become good in a vacuum devoid of sin. We become good when we turn to God to teach us mercy, to teach us the right way to live, and to make us whole. The wisdom of the generations before Sharon’s that led to her good upbringing came from a desire for something better and the belief that nothing was impossible for God.

Petition:
That, with the Immaculate Conception as our model of peace, love, and charity, we will make our lives a “yes” to God’s grace, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is often misunderstood to be when Jesus was conceived, but it is in fact when Mary was conceived in the natural way by her parents Joachim and Anne. This celebration is a reminder of God’s grace in our broken world—how true goodness and purity can exist even in the midst of ugliness and sin. We are reminded that we always have a choice to say “yes” to God as Mary did and to welcome God’s saving action—even when it seems impossible. What does this feast day tell you about how God’s Spirit works in our lives? What contrast do you see between Eve and Mary? How is their difference significant? How are you shaped by the presence of both of them in salvation history?
Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12th)

First Reading: Zechariah 2:14-17
- God will come to dwell with His people.
- God will claim the Holy Land and Jerusalem again—forgiving the people of their sin and reinstating proper worship.
- God is on the move.

- Gabriel came and spoke to the mother of Jesus, telling her what would happen to her by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus would be Mary’s Son and the Son of God.
- He is a descendant of King David.
- Elizabeth, Mary’s cousin, was also miraculously pregnant.
- Nothing is impossible for God.

Food For Thought:
The readings on this Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe are all about hope, promise, and birth. They are the story of God’s family and how God became one of us to save us from our sin. God accomplishes all things, even what seems impossible to us. The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is Mary in her pregnancy. She is preparing to give birth to the Savior and she is preparing Juan Diego for bringing new life into the Church. Juan used to walk 16 miles to go to Mass; the building of this new Church would bring Jesus to dwell more closely with the people of his town in the Eucharist. Juan Diego had a lot of work to convince his Bishop that the message he was given was true. Juan was persistent, and received the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who gave him a sign that remains with us to this day.
**Story:**
Juan Diego was a convert to Catholicism who took his baptismal call seriously. He would regularly walk 16 miles to the nearest church so he could participate in Mass. One day, on his way to church, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to him and told him to go to the Bishop and let him know that Mary wanted him to build a chapel for her in Juan’s town. This was a daunting task, but Juan accepted it. The Bishop said no. Mary told Juan to go back and tell the Bishop that he would come back with proof that it was Mary’s request. He did. The next day, when he was supposed to go see the Bishop, Juan’s uncle got sick and he stayed home to take care of him. He was embarrassed at not following through with Mary’s request, and tried to avoid seeing her. That didn’t work. Mary appeared to him again. He explained what happened, and she told him to go pick flowers on the mountain, which would be a sign for the Bishop. He did, and it worked. Approaching the Bishop, telling him that you had an apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and that she wanted the Bishop to build a church closer to your house would be scary for anyone. But Juan trusted that what Mary said would be true and what seemed like an impossible task came to be accomplished. His faith was rewarded with healing for his uncle, a church in his neighborhood, and a tilma with the image of his vision of Mary on it.

**Petition:**
That, like Juan Diego, we might trust in the impossible promises of God—even risking ridicule for the sake of the truth, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Sometimes working for God can be tricky. For Elizabeth and Mary, it came with obstacles that required much trust. The same was true for Juan Diego. The Blessed Mother didn’t ask anything of Juan that she didn’t have to go through herself—to put his complete trust in God and put himself into a situation in which he wasn’t completely comfortable. But, as God always does, God provided what was needed in order for the mission to be completed through the intercession of Mary. How do the stories of Elizabeth, Mary, and Juan Diego inspire you? What impossible things have you seen God do in your life? How does Mary’s care for the Church touch your life?
Contributors

Jean Dimech-Juchniewicz:
  Advent, Christmas, and Holy Family

Gerard D. Ford:
  Palm Sunday, Holy Week Triduum, and Easter Sunday

Rev. Jim Grogan:
  Holy Mother of God, Epiphany, Baptism of the Lord, Presentation, Ash Wednesday, St. Joseph, Annunciation, Nativity of St. John the Baptist, Ss. Peter and Paul, Christ the King and 20th – 26th Sundays in Ordinary Time

Barbara Hosbach:
  27th – 33rd Sundays in Ordinary Time

Jill Kerekes:
  8th – 13th Sundays in Ordinary Time

Msgr. Richard LaVerghetta:
  14th – 19th Sundays in Ordinary Time

Jen Perry:
  Lent, Transfiguration, Assumption, Exultation of the Cross, All Saints, All Souls, Immaculate Conception, Thanksgiving, and Our Lady of Guadalupe

Regina Purcell:
  Easter Season

Rev. Scott Shaffer:
  Ascension, Pentecost, Holy Trinity, and Corpus Christi

Daniel Waddington:
  2nd – 7th Sundays in Ordinary Time