HOMILY NOTES
for
MARRIAGE & FAMILY LIFE

Cycle B

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Table of Contents – Cycle B

1st Sunday of Advent ................................................................. 1
2nd Sunday of Advent ................................................................. 3
3rd Sunday of Advent ................................................................. 4
4th Sunday of Advent ................................................................. 6
The Nativity of the Lord – Vigil Mass ............................................. 8
The Nativity of the Lord – Mass at Midnight ................................. 10
The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph ................................. 12
January 1st, Mary, the Mother of God ......................................... 14
January 6th, The Epiphany of the Lord ....................................... 16
The Baptism of the Lord ............................................................ 18
Ash Wednesday ........................................................................... 20
1st Sunday of Lent ...................................................................... 22
2nd Sunday of Lent .................................................................... 24
3rd Sunday of Lent .................................................................... 26
4th Sunday of Lent .................................................................... 28
5th Sunday of Lent .................................................................... 30
Palm Sunday ................................................................................ 32
Holy Thursday ............................................................................ 34
Good Friday ................................................................................ 36
Easter Vigil .................................................................................. 38
Easter Sunday (Resurrection of The Lord) ................................... 42
2nd Sunday of Easter ................................................................... 44
3rd Sunday of Easter ................................................................... 46
4th Sunday of Easter ................................................................... 48
5th Sunday of Easter ................................................................... 50
6th Sunday of Easter ................................................................... 52
Ascension of the Lord .................................................................. 54
7th Sunday of Easter ................................................................... 56
Pentecost Sunday ......................................................................... 57
2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time ....................................................... 59
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time ........................................................ 61
4th Sunday in Ordinary Time ......................................................... 63
5th Sunday in Ordinary Time ......................................................... 65
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time ........................................................ 67
7th Sunday in Ordinary Time ........................................................ 69
8th Sunday in Ordinary Time ........................................................ 70
9th Sunday in Ordinary Time ........................................................ 72
10th Sunday in Ordinary Time ....................................................... 74
11th Sunday in Ordinary Time ....................................................... 76
12th Sunday in Ordinary Time ....................................................... 78
13th Sunday in Ordinary Time ....................................................... 80
14th Sunday in Ordinary Time ....................................................... 82
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time ....................................................... 84
16th Sunday in Ordinary Time ....................................................... 86
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................. 88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................. 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................. 92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................. 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................. 96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................. 98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................. 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................. 102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................. 104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................. 106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................. 108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................. 110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................. 112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30th Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................. 114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31st Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................. 116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................. 118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time</td>
<td>.................................................................................................................. 121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King ........................................ 123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Most Holy Trinity .................................................................................. 124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ ..................................................... 126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation of the Lord (February 2nd) .................................................... 128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saint Joseph (March 19th) ........................................................................... 130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Annunciation (March 25th) ........................................................................ 132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nativity of St. John the Baptist (June 24th) ........................................ 134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SS. Peter and Paul (June 29th) .................................................................. 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Transfiguration (August 6th) ............................................................... 138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15th) ............ 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exultation of the Cross (September 14th) ................................................. 142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Saints Day ............................................................................................. 144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Souls Day .............................................................................................. 146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thanksgiving ............................................................................................... 148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (December 8th) ........ 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feast of Our Lady Guadalupe (December 12th) ....................................... 152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contributors ............................................................................................. 154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**1st Sunday of Advent**

**First Reading: Isaiah 63: 16b-17, 19b**

- We aren’t capable of accomplishing anything good on our own—everything good comes from God.

- Wallowing in the depths of guilt can be terrifying and paralyzing as a parent. Anyone who thinks they are essentially a good person has serious doubts as soon as they have kids.

- Children are precious gifts handcrafted by God in heaven and, as parents, we often believe we are not worthy of them. We want only the best for them because we love them so much it hurts, yet we constantly fall short of giving them the very best of ourselves in our parenting.

- We need to acknowledge our guilt before God for all our shortcomings and offenses, and place ourselves in the Potter’s hands every day. He can continually mold and remold us into the people He created us to be, teaching us through experiences of everyday life.

**Second Reading: 1Corinthians 1: 3-9**

- As a parish family and as a domestic church we are “enriched in every way” and “not lacking in any spiritual gift.” Though we are keenly aware of how much we lack, God’s grace is sufficient. God is faithful and will keep us firm to the end.

- Our only hope is in Christ. Again, any good we accomplish, any winning moments we have in our family relationships, come through God’s grace. We have to rely on Him.

**Gospel: Mark 13: 33-37**

- No one knows when their time will come to meet the Lord face to face. Perhaps some have had the experience of a close call—a dangerous accident, a scary medical test result, or a similar experience that caused us to face the reality of our own mortality or that of a loved one.

- Usually that experience changes a person, at least for a while, and invites them to live more reflectively and intentionally, with a greater sense of gratitude and clearer priorities.

- Like the man traveling abroad, this experience causes us to be more watchful and ready, more aware of God working in our daily lives.

- We need to be spiritually vigilant, keeping our spiritual house in order at all times and doing the best we can. That way we are prepared for God’s grace to break into our lives and draw us into His Presence. We need to be ready for Christ coming in the present, at the end of our lives, or at the world’s end when He will come again.
Food For Thought:
Isaiah, bemoaning the depths of human sinfulness, begs God to “rend the heavens and come down.” In other words, “Come fix this mess we’ve made.” Yet Paul assures the Corinthians that they lack nothing because of Christ’s grace and fellowship. However, the Gospel seems to put it all on us to be watchful and alert. This changing dynamic of apparent helplessness and taking responsibility is also part of human parenting, so it shouldn’t surprise us that God also teaches us in this way. Parents often try to fix things and shield children from the consequences of bad decisions, but that isn’t in their best interest. Instead, parents should encourage independence, foster personal growth, and assure their children that their gifts and God’s grace are sufficient means for happiness. Are we, like God our Father, there to help our children when they truly cannot help themselves? Of course we are. Yet we also expect them to do their part.

Story:
Jen’s eight-year-old daughter’s room is a constant mess. Half of the problem is that she has way too many toys and can’t possibly put them all away because she doesn’t have enough space. The other half of the problem is that she hoards things she doesn’t need and refuses to part with things that have outlived their usefulness. One summer Jen told her daughter Emily that she needed to clean her room because they were having house guests, and one of them would be sharing her room. It was two days before their arrival. Emily had tried her best to clean her room on her own, but it looked worse. It seemed hopeless. Mother and child were both overwhelmed. Emily had made such a mess of things that no eight year old could fix the chaos on her own. She needed help cleaning up the mess that she lived in every day. Cleaning out her room was an all-day, family affair. They all got down on our hands and knees, crawled into every dark corner, dug under every piece of furniture, and sorted through every drawer and closet. Even Emily’s brothers felt bad for her and helped. Together they filled seven huge garbage bags with broken toys, odds and ends, missing socks, unidentifiable bits of rubbish, and actual garbage that had been choking her room. It was difficult, unpleasant, and exhausting work, but they felt so much better afterwards. It’s a reminder of the spiritual housekeeping we should all do on a regular basis and how, if we don’t keep on top of things, the individual sins and spiritual difficulties will just start to pile up into habits and patterns that can overwhelm us. We always have recourse to the aid of the sacraments. Through Christ’s grace, our struggles can lead us toward the virtues He makes possible for us.

Petition:
That Christ’s grace will keep us firm in virtue and mindful of Him in all of our ways, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Has life ever given you any “wake up calls?” In what ways, be they mundane or dramatic, has God reminded you of your priorities and sought to redirect you to follow Him? What are some ways you will be watchful for His presence in your life this week?
2nd Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

- Comfort and tenderness are the fruits of forgiveness. A good way to live out this season of repentance is to extend forgiveness to those who have hurt us, especially within our families. Where there is forgiveness, there is warmth and love.

- Where are the mountains and valleys, the rough spots in our hearts and in our homes? Where can God make a straight path of forgiveness in our life to reveal his glory?

Second Reading: 2 Peter 3:8-14

- Because God desires our repentance, He is patient with us. God exists outside of time, so God isn’t in a rush.

- However, when God does return, we should all look busy!

- That day will come like a thief, and when it does a new age of peace and righteousness will be ushered in.

Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

- John the Baptist’s call to repentance should remind us of our own need to turn away from sin in our lives. As we read about him baptizing sinners in the Jordan, we should remember our own Baptism and how the light of Christ came to dwell within us on that day.

- Acknowledging our sins is the first step in clearing a path for Christ to enter more fully into our lives. Advent is a wonderful time to begin fresh and make a good confession.

Food For Thought:
Advent is a season of repentance. It’s a very good time to go to confession. Whether we’ve been holding onto bitterness because of how another person has sinned against us, or whether we’ve been unable to forgive ourselves for various sins, confession is a healing balm for our soul’s deepest hurts. It also gives us grace to strengthen our will to avoid sin in the future and choose what is good and right.

Petition:
For the grace to recognize our sinfulness and turn to God for healing and mercy in the sacrament of Penance, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
John the Baptist calls us to turn away from sin to prepare a way for the Lord. How can we make our hearts and homes ready for the coming of Christ this Advent season?
3rd Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11

- This is the section from the book of the prophet Isaiah that Jesus read in the synagogue in Nazareth at the beginning of His Galilean ministry to reveal His identity as the Messiah.
- The new life of the restored Israel is expressed in marital imagery. Marriage depicts the relationship between God and His people.
- True joy comes only from God.

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

- Midway through the penitential season of Advent, St. Paul reminds us to rejoice. We light the rose-colored candle to mark this halfway point in our journey.
- Growing in holiness is not our mission alone, but the mission of God within us. He sets us apart for His sacred purposes, thus making us holy and blameless.
- Holiness is not the same as spiritual perfection, nor is it the same as never sinning. Of course we should strive for the perfection of virtue and to always avoid sin, but holiness comes in the desiring and the striving. It is God’s work in us.
- “The one who calls you is faithful, and He will also accomplish it.” God will do what He says, and it doesn’t all depend on us. We do not have to accomplish anything on our own.

Gospel: John 1:6-8, 19-28

- All Christians are called to be John the Baptist and to testify to the light of Christ in the world.
- “[T]here is one among you whom you do not recognize….” Christ is among us, and often we overlook Him. We do not recognize His face in the faces of our spouse, our children, our parents, or our friends. Yet He is here among us. During Advent we remember how Christ came into human history two thousand years ago in the mystery of the Incarnation. We look forward to His Second Coming at the end of time. We also acknowledge Christ’s presence among us in the here and now.
**Food For Thought:**
The joy of the Third Sunday of Advent is that the long-awaited Messiah is here! The world waited for His coming two thousand years ago on that first Christmas. The world still waits for His Second Coming at the end of time when all creation will be made new. The Good News is that Jesus is present among us now. Like the Pharisees, we don’t always recognize Him. In the liturgy we encounter Jesus in several ways. When we gather together in His name, He is there. We encounter Christ in one another, our families, and our friends in the midst of the assembly. Christ comes to us in the proclamation of His Word as we listen to the readings from Sacred Scripture. He ministers to us through the service of His priest who leads our worship and offers prayers to Him on our behalf. And finally and most especially, Jesus is truly present – Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity – in the Blessed Sacrament we receive.

**Petition:**
That we will recognize the presence of Christ in the midst of our faith community, especially in our brothers and sisters who are most in need, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
“Pray without ceasing.” This is the challenge of the Christian spiritual life within the vocation of marriage. Spouses are not called to religious life or to be cloistered in a monastery to pray the Divine Office. How can vigilant prayerfulness and a loving mindfulness of the presence of God become a part of your marriage and family life?
4th Sunday of Advent

First Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16

- God cannot be contained. He does not need to dwell in a grand temple. It’s tempting to try to fit the reality of who God is into our neat little image of Him. However, we must always remember that God cannot be contained.

- Israel and the line of King David will endure forever.

Second Reading: Romans 16:25-27

- Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies of old.

- What had been kept secret is now made manifest.


- God broke into a very specific time and place in human history to announce a miracle and the fulfillment of a prophecy through the words of an angel.

- Mary doesn’t act surprised that an angel appeared to her. Instead she wonders about what he said. She doesn’t reject Gabriel’s announcement, but merely asks, “How?” She wants to understand how God is going to accomplish His will through her, not if. She wants to know what is required of her so that she can consent to God’s will.

- God uses a virgin, a woman who—according to Catholic tradition—made a vow of perpetual virginity to God at a very young age. This tradition also tells us that Mary’s parents, Anna and Joachim, suffered 20 years of infertility before an angel appeared to them to announce that they would conceive Mary.

Food For Thought:
The Lord of all creation, who pitched His tent among the Israelites and later dwelled with His people in the holy temple in Jerusalem, deigned to become incarnate for our salvation within the womb of a young unmarried Jewish woman in Palestine over 2000 years ago. Almost as “proof” that God can bring about the impossible, the angel Gabriel tells Mary that Elizabeth – though she had suffered infertility for years – was now also pregnant. God specifically used two women who believed they would never have children to accomplish His divine will by doing what was thought to be impossible. John the Baptist ended the era of the prophets of old, and Christ ushered in the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God that the prophets foretold in the coming of the Messiah. Salvation history was brought about through the institution of the family. It is within the Holy Family that God became a human, and it is still within the context of family life that God continues to make his presence known.
**Story:**
Accepting God’s will with the response, “May it be done to me according to your word,” wasn’t easy for Mary, and it’s not always easy for us. One in six women experiences infertility at some point in their marriage. The Advent and Christmas seasons can be especially difficult for couples struggling with the loss of a child through infertility or miscarriage, particularly the readings about Mary and Elizabeth.

One woman’s testimony, found in Jean Dimech-Juchniewicz’s book, *Facing Infertility: A Catholic Approach*, eloquently sums up this sentiment in the following quotation:

> “Meanwhile, Christmas was coming. Christmas was difficult because I’d thought I would be getting ready to deliver my first child. In the secular world, Christmas is all about children. Parents buy pajamas that say ‘Baby’s First Christmas.’ On Christmas morning they record their children’s reactions to the presents under the tree. For those struggling to conceive, Christmas often feels very sad. In the midst of everyone else’s festivities, couples may privately mourn the passing of the holiday without a child. For Catholics, Christmas is all about a child – the Christ child. I fought back tears at Mass as I listened to the miraculous story of Jesus’ conception and birth. All the manger scenes and Christmas cards made me ask: When would my child rest in his cradle? Where was my miracle? Where was my baby? Why not me, Lord?” (4-5)

**Petition:**
For women like Elizabeth, who pray for the miraculous gift of a child, that God would give them courage, hope, and healing as they struggle to welcome new life into their families, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Mary heard the message of the angel and accepted God’s will, even though it seemed impossible and she didn’t quite know all the details. How often in life do we not know exactly how things are going to turn out? Yet God always wills for us to choose the good, even if it seems impossible.
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 who’s 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 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 were banished from 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? It was 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, and thieves. 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: Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3

- Having faith in God was credited to Abram as an act of righteousness.
- The founding father and mother of the Israelites, Abraham and Sarah, were infertile. God used an infertile couple to build a covenant with his Chosen People. It is through them that Christ traces his ancestry.
- “[A]t the set time that God has stated” challenges us to wait on God’s time, not ours.
- Building a family is difficult for many couples. One in six couples will experience infertility at some point during their marriage. This reading can be a source of both pain and hope for them.

Second Reading: Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19

- By faith Abraham obeyed, even though he didn’t understand.
- Abraham and Sarah became parents, even though they were past childbearing years, because they trusted in the Lord.
- Abraham was willing to offer his son to God out of obedience and trust.


- As was prescribed in Jewish law, Mary and Joseph presented and consecrated Jesus to God and offered sacrifice in the Temple. This was to recognize and give thanks to God for sparing the firstborn sons of the Israelites during the final plague when the Angel of Death struck down the firstborn of the Egyptians to set the Israelites free from slavery.
- Simeon was present in the Temple and prophesied that Jesus would bring salvation, and that he was “destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel.”
- Anna also prophesied about Jesus and his role in the redemption of Israel.
- Joseph and Mary were amazed about what was said about Jesus.
- The Holy Family returned home to Nazareth and Jesus grew in wisdom and God’s favor.
Food For Thought:
The common theme among all three readings seems to be the importance of trusting and obeying God in our family life, even when we don’t understand. Abraham and Sarah trusted and obeyed God, even though they could not understand how God’s promises could be accomplished given their infertility. St. Paul recalls Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac, the child of God’s Promise, out of obedience to God even though he didn’t understand God’s plan. And Mary and Joseph obeyed God at every turn, from the Annunciation through all of Joseph’s dreams about keeping Mary and Jesus safe through Herod’s persecution. And the Gospel always says that they pondered what God said and wondered at what He did. They were amazed at Simeon’s and Anna’s prophecies, yet they continued about their life as husband and wife, raising Jesus in God’s favor in the midst of their family life in Nazareth.

Story:
Children don’t always understand why they have to obey their parents. Perhaps some children unquestioningly, immediately, and cheerfully obey their parents’ every wish without fail. But many parents here have probably asked one of their children to do something, and instead of obeying, the child’s response is “Why?” With a look of confusion, maybe even defiance, they dig in their heels and say, “Why?”

Sometimes, if a parent feels particularly patient or indulgent, they may try to explain so the child understands and to convince the child to comply. But many times this leads to a parent ultimately saying something that amounts to, “Because I said so, that’s why. I’m the parent. I’m in charge. Listen to me.” Sometimes the reason is too complicated for a child to understand or about a topic that’s not appropriate to discuss at that moment and the child just needs to trust their parents and obey. Parents, after all, know and want what is best for their children. Parents understand the bigger picture, and children often do not.

The same is true for our relationship with God. God sees all of eternity in an instant. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He sees things that we cannot foresee. He is all-knowing and all-loving. No one loves us more than God our Father, and no one desires our good more than He does. Even when we don’t understand His will for us, we need to give Him the same trust and obedience that we would want from our children. Instead of asking God, “Why?” sometimes we just need to say “Yes.”

Petition:
For couples like Abraham and Sarah who struggle with infertility. May God hear and answer their prayers with the gift of a child, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Our covenant relationship with God through Baptism makes God our Father and makes us His children. He asks for our trust and obedience, even when we don’t comprehend His will. God sees the bigger picture and knows what is best for us, even when we struggle to understand.
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 standards for correctness that are, at times, 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 55: 1-11

- Isaiah’s passage has multiple verses that apply to marriage and family, such as “I will renew with you the everlasting covenant…” and “…Let us turn to the Lord for mercy, to our God who is generous in forgiving.”
- “Covenant” speaks to marriage, as does “generous forgiving.”
- Isaiah speaks throughout the passage to the faithfulness of God, which mirrors God’s promise to us in our own Baptism. It is through Baptism that membership in the Church and the Communion of Saints begins. It is through the faithful sharing of the Gospel around kitchen tables, backyards, and bedsides that we are nurtured in faith as the “beloved” of God.

Second Reading: 1 John 5: 1-9

- John speaks of love, the love we have for the Father, which cannot be separated from the love of Jesus Christ.
- It is through the foundation of love of God that we shape our familial love, both the love between spouses and the love of parents for their children.
- Perhaps link this reading to the strong messages of being in a covenant with God through Baptism found in both the first reading and the Gospel.

Gospel: Mark 1: 7-11

- Mark emphasizes that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit.
- We—including those of us who are parents and spouses—need to emphasize with our lives that, yes, we are baptized by the Holy Spirit!
- That, of course, begs a question: “So what?” If your Baptism doesn’t make a difference in your daily life, you are missing a chance to witness the Gospel to your spouse and family. Baptism is the entry into the sacramental life of the Church, but it comes with the obligation to be an active participant in living the Word of God in the secular world.

Food For Thought:
You have been baptized with the Holy Spirit, perhaps many years ago. Does it make a difference today, or has that sacred fact become nothing more than an anecdote, an old milestone? The Baptismal Rite offers a candle with the admonition to keep the flame of faith burning brightly in your heart. What do you do to keep that flame of faith alive in your daily life?

Petition:
That each husband and wife, each father and mother, and each child feels the warmth of God’s grace as the flame of faith glows within their hearts, we pray to the Lord.
Bulletin Announcement:
Mark’s Gospel today speaks of Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit. Isaiah reminds us of God’s covenant to be faithful to his disciples. Embracing the fire of faith within the homes of every family is an important foundation for growing ever closer to God. Jesus’ incarnation continues in each family and in each home where we declare that we are disciples of the One God. May we each declare, as was written in the Old Testament Book of Joshua, “as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!” (Joshua 24:15)
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.
1st Sunday of Lent

First Reading: Genesis 9: 8-15

- God saved a family from the flood so that, together, they could rebuild the world.
- God made a covenant with Noah’s family.
- God provided for Noah’s family when they came out of the ark.
- Families (like Noah’s) can be a source of holiness or, like the other people, a source of evil.

Second Reading: 1 Peter 3: 18-22

- Jesus, our brother, died for our sins so that we could go to heaven.
- God loves His children so much that Jesus even went to our ancestors who were already dead so He could preach the Gospel to them.
- Jesus made that sacrifice for good people and bad people.
- Jesus’ death and resurrection, linked with our Baptism, brings God’s family into heaven.

Gospel: Mark 1: 12-15

- Even when Jesus was in the desert, His Father sent angels to help Him. God, our Father, never leaves us alone, either.
- We hear about Jesus’ cousin who worked to prepare the people for Jesus to come.
- When Jesus started preaching, He began with the message that John shared before Him.
- The reason that Jesus came to share the good news with His human family is so that they could be with Him forever in heaven.
- Like God, our parents are here to correct us when we do wrong so that we can learn to make good choices and live happy lives.

Food For Thought:

Today’s readings offer two examples of families who live as God calls us to—Noah and his family, and Jesus and John. Both families show us how to respond to God’s invitation to relationship by listening to what God told them to do, and bravely following through with the plan. Neither family had it easy—but God never left them alone. God always brought them the help they needed and made great things happen through their faithfulness. We also see that the love of the Father cannot be stopped by death—not our own, and not Jesus’. Jesus even went to the dead to bring them to heaven with Him.
**Story:**
By the time Bob’s melanoma was diagnosed, he was in stage 4. He was not going to recover from it, but the doctors were able to keep him alive for another year and a half through various treatments. It was a dark time for his family as they trudged through the rocky waters of treatment, travel, weakness, confusion, putting things in order, and grief; but not a time without feeling God’s embrace. Their time became precious, their conversations became healing, their prayers became fervent, and their gatherings became often. It was ugly, but it was graced. They were strengthened by their hope in the resurrection and their knowledge that Jesus went through it all so that believers could come out of tragedy truly alive and bound together in faith. They believed in God’s faithfulness to His promises and became a stronger family as a result.

**Petition:**
That all families will know that even when things are hard, they always have God’s help with them, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Through our Baptism, God promised us that we would always have God’s help. Today we see families who, in very difficult circumstances, found that God is always faithful to His promises. How have you experienced God’s faithfulness to your family? How has God done great things through your family’s faithfulness to God?
2nd Sunday of Lent

First Reading: Genesis 22: 1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18

- Abraham and Sarah, after receiving God’s promise of a big family, lived a long time with infertility.
- When, after a mishap with Hagar, they finally had a child—the child they understood would carry on the covenant—they believed that they would lose him.
- In Abraham’s time, it was normal for fathers to sacrifice their first born son to their god. As usual, God was working within the already established human system to change it. God did not want people to kill their children for Him.
- This event showed the mutual fidelity between God and Abraham. It also showed God’s protection of Abraham’s family.
- An angel (messenger) came to intercede for Isaac and to prevent Abraham from killing his son.

Second Reading: Romans 8: 31b-34

- God is in our corner—nothing can stand against God.
- We are God’s chosen ones—God’s family. We have God’s protection.
- Jesus, our brother, intercedes for us.
- God, who does not require the sacrifice of our children to Him, sacrificed His own son for us.

Gospel: Mark 9: 2-10

- Peter, James, and John were brought to witness the transfiguration, but not to understand it.
- Peter realized that it was a good thing that they were there, but didn’t get the significance.
- God echoed the words God spoke at Jesus’ Baptism for the apostles to hear.
- They were not allowed to talk about the transfiguration until they could understand what it meant.
Food For Thought:
For Abraham and Sarah, marriage was really hard. Years of infertility became a painful burden. Since they couldn’t have children, they wondered how God would fulfill the promise that they would be parents to a great nation. When Isaac finally was born, their joy was complete—and then they believed that they were going to have to lose him. God interceded and saved their son. It was a precursor to how God would intercede for us through Jesus later on. For some families, the loss of children is a reality. God willingly gave up His only child to the most horrific death, sharing in the suffering of His human family. God does not delight in our pain, but feels with us, dwells with us, and offers us healing. The transfiguration was a bright spot for the apostles so that, when everything else went wrong, that little glimmer of hope could be there for them. God continues to intercede for us in our suffering. The resurrection is the promise that we will be made whole and live forever with God and our loved ones.

Story:
Two brothers were three years apart. Sometimes they’d get along great and other times they lived to get one another in trouble. When they fought, and the one that their mom perceived as being the instigator got in trouble, the other would always be an advocate for him. Their parents often called them “Abraham” because of how they tried to get the sentence reduced: they bargained, they rationalized, and they made excuses for the other. “Suppose there were fifty righteous people in the city; would you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people within it?” (Gen 18: 24) If God couldn’t resist Abraham’s intercession, you know these parents couldn’t! They gave in every time. There’s something about seeing a child seeking mercy for the one who was just annoying him that makes you cave in.

Lucky for us, we have Jesus in our corner—not that we need to be protected from God the Father. We have the perfect sacrifice Jesus made for us that relieves us of the consequences of our sins. The mercy that those brothers seek for each other can be something like a transfiguration moment for their parents—a moment when those parents see what they hope their sons’ future relationship will be. Those parents have good reason to hope that, when they’re gone, those brothers will cling to one another, be good friends, and always have one another’s back.

Petition:
That families will build strong and lasting bonds, leaning on each other and on their faith for strength during difficult times, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Family life isn’t easy. Sometimes it’s filled with loss or the fright of a potential loss. We need to keep our family in our corner the way that Jesus is in our corner—as advocates for one another, interceding and praying for one another. How does your family intercede for you? How do you intercede for your family? What was your family’s scariest moment and how did you get through it?
3rd Sunday of Lent

First Reading: Exodus 20: 1-17

- The Ten Commandments consist of 3 on how to live with God and 7 on how to live with people.
- The first one that deals with humans, “Honor your Father and Mother,” is a very important commandment for families.
- The Commandments are all about how to live happily as God’s family.
- God, our Father, teaches us how to make good, life-giving decisions, and our families do so also.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1: 22-25

- If we do not have faith, the reality of Jesus and His life with us looks like foolishness.
- The “weakness” of God is stronger than human strength.

Gospel: John 2: 13-25

- Jesus is protective of His Father’s house because He saw the abuses happening there.
- There is such a thing as “righteous anger,” and it should lead to correction of bad behavior.
- Correcting wrongs is an act of love; allowing someone to persist in evil is not loving.
- As a “sign” that He had the authority to correct the Jews, Jesus offered Himself in perfect love, died on the Cross for our sins, and rose again on the third day—His proof that He is God.

Food For Thought:
Like any good parent, God gives us a set of instructions for us to live by. God’s commandments are not self-gratifying laws, but laws that seek to protect us from lives of hurt and disappointment. Studies show that children feel more confident and secure when they are given clear boundaries. Parents imitate God’s love by giving instruction, boundaries and correction to their children. To allow someone to persist in doing wrong gives that person no hope of change or improvement. When parents don’t correct their children, they are not being friends to them. Instead, they are telling their children that they don’t care enough for the ultimate goal of improving their lives to risk being uncomfortable or unhappy with them for a little while. Parents need to be willing to lay it all on the line for their children—to risk some hurt, to feel some pain—for their children’s future. God’s weakness is stronger than human strength, and we participate in that “weakness” when we make sacrifices for our children.
**Story:**
A few years ago, there was a grammar school with a playground that abutted some woods. The teachers observed that, although there was some playground equipment close to the edge of the woods, the children rarely went there to play. They kept close to the building and really didn’t venture beyond the blacktop. After a time, a fence was installed. At recess on the first day after the fence appeared, kids were everywhere—using every piece of equipment, sitting in groups against the fence chatting, running, playing and exploring every corner of the schoolyard. The woods had created a sense of unknown—anyone or anything could be in there—and the kids felt unsafe. As soon as they had a clear boundary, i.e. as soon as they knew where they could and should go, and that no one would come out of nowhere, they were comfortable exploring the space that was designated for them. We all need boundaries. We all need to know where we belong and how to take care of ourselves. It’s self-preservation and it’s self-care. It’s up to parents to set the tone and the foundation for their children so that they can be safe and grow into independent and responsible adults.

**Petition:**
That parents will take to heart their roles of instructing, providing boundaries for, and correcting their children as God does with us, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement**
These days, everyone wants to be his/her kid’s “friend.” There seems to be a confusion that correction is somehow unloving or judgmental. God shows us that correction is a form of love and that not all anger is bad. How does my family provide structure, foundation, and safety for one another? How does the way we correct those we love help them to become responsible, caring adults?
4th Sunday of Lent

First Reading: 2 Chronicles 36: 14-16, 19-23

- The people of Israel were unfaithful to God by worshipping other gods in the temple.
- God tried to correct them gently by sending the prophets to speak for Him. It didn’t work.
- The nation was sacked, and many of the important people were exiled to Babylon.
- Jeremiah said that their corruption was so bad that the land needed 70 years to purge itself from their evil.
- King Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon and let the Israelites go home because that’s what God wanted him to do. God worked through Cyrus (a pagan) to get his people home.

Second Reading: Ephesians 2: 4-10

- God is rich in mercy and loves all His children—even when they’re bad.
- Our Father wants us to live with Him forever in heaven. He sent Jesus to lead us there.
- We are created in God’s image to do God’s work.
- We don’t have to worry about whether we are capable of accomplishing the good things that God wants us to do. With grace, God accomplishes His good works through us.

Gospel: John 3: 14-21

- God loves the world so much that He sent His Son to save us.
- God does not want to condemn us, just to correct us so that we can be in right relationship.
- Jesus is the light of the world, but people preferred darkness because they wanted to keep doing what was wrong.
- People who love God don’t mind being in the light because they have nothing to hide.

Food For Thought:
The people of Israel were cheating on God by making sacrifices to false gods in God’s temple. They broke their relationship with God and weren’t ready to have it repaired for 70 years, even after their country was destroyed. God worked through a pagan king to get His people back on track so that they could rebuild their temple and nation. God sent His Son to teach and guide us so we could be fit for heaven. God loves us like a parent loves their child, but more perfectly. He is willing to give everything for us to know His love and wants us to return the love that is offered. When we choose God, we choose to live properly and to live in the light. There is no need for God’s children to hide. We are invited to live boldly for God.
**Story:**
When John was about seven years old, his dad found a butterfly that was wounded. He put it on his workbench in the garage and showed it to John, but told him not to touch it. John was sure that if he was very careful, it would be all right to touch it, and he picked it up. He accidentally broke the wing and knew it would not be able to fly and that it would die. He was so afraid of disappointing his Dad and getting in trouble that he hid in the garage. John was exceedingly small, so he was able to fit into a garbage can (it didn’t have any garbage in it), and that was where he stayed for what seemed like a long time. After a time, his dad was looking for him, and since he couldn’t find him, he began to get agitated. John heard him circle around, calling—the anxiety in his voice growing with each passing minute. His dad wasn’t mean. He was always very gentle, but still John was too scared to come out. John heard his father tell his mom that he was going to call the police, so before it went too far, John came out. The dad was so relieved to see John alive that he hugged him and began to cry. He wasn’t very mad at John—there had been no reason for John to hide. John never wanted to make his dad anxious again, regardless of what he had done. He also never wanted to do anything that would make him hide from his dad ever again.

**Petition:**
That our families may be children of the light, helping one another to see clearly and live in the love of Christ, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
We don’t need saving when we’re good—God came to save us when we were still doing evil. Jesus wants us to be comfortable in our actions and in our choices, so that we should not be embarrassed or ashamed of anything. If we are doing what’s right, we never have to be. Do you ever feel like hiding from the light of God? Do you ever feel like you are lacking the ability to do what God asks of you? What gives you courage to live in the light?
5th Sunday of Lent

First Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

- God wants to make a new covenant with His children to give them their own land and a new relationship with Him.
- They will know God without needing to be taught because God will place the Law on their hearts. It will be natural to them.
- God will forgive all sins and forget them.

Second Reading: Hebrews 5:7-9

- Jesus cried out to His Father to save Him from death.
- Jesus was obedient to His Father.
- Jesus became the source of salvation through His obedience to the Father.

Gospel: John 12:20-33

- In order for the resurrection to happen, we must first die.
- Jesus wants His actions to glorify the Father. The Father uses them to glorify Jesus.
- The goal of Jesus’ death was to draw us to Himself.

Food For Thought:
God wants our relationship with Him to be, not second nature, but first nature. He writes His law on our hearts. When God is natural to us, making difficult sacrifices doesn’t necessarily become easy, but it does become possible. Jesus is God’s nature, and it was hard for Him to do what He knew He needed to do. Prayer, obedience, and love for God and God’s people made Jesus brave enough to face the cross. His desire to draw people to Himself and to the Father brought glory to God and redemption to us all. Death is a sad, hard part of life. When we are brought up in our families to appreciate the gift of life, the meaning in sacrifice, and the dignity of death, we are being brought up with God written on our hearts. We are equipped to deal with and honor the death that brings us to resurrection and eternal life.
**Story:**

John and Frances were two of the most faithful Catholics anyone has ever known. As a couple, they clung to each other, quite literally, because they were at an age when getting around wasn’t so easy anymore—either physically or spiritually. They were inseparable. You couldn’t call their house without speaking to both of them at once. They would answer on speaker together. John and Frances had good reason to cling to each other, not just because the Scriptures tell husband and wife to do this, but because in their sixty years of marriage these two had been through everything you could imagine. They had miscarriages, stillbirths, older children passing away, and one daughter murdered. She was missing for more than ninety days before her body was located. Some marriages wouldn’t have survived even the first tragedy, but this one was unbreakable. Theirs was founded on faith, obedience to God, and a serious belief in the resurrection. They were grief-stricken, they were broken-hearted, they were bereft—but they would not allow themselves to become desolate. Their relationship with God as individuals was first nature, and so that relationship was first in their marriage too. They experienced the agony that Jesus experienced. They experienced the agony that Mary experienced. They also experienced the healing that Jesus, Mary, and the apostles experienced in the resurrection. This came to them through much prayer, much sticking together, and much support from family and friends. The result was a deep and satisfying marital relationship that flowed out to their living children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and community and that truly brought glory to God.

**Petition:**

That families will be a place where children can first have God lovingly written on their hearts so that they can grow to know God’s comfort in times of loss, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**

God is hard-wired into humanity. We are made in God’s image and likeness, and God is natural to us. Think of little children and how receptive and excited they are about God. The foundation we give them in these tender years prepares them for everything they will face in their lives, especially loss. How does knowing God’s love help you to get through hard times? How does your relationship with God help you to make hard decisions or to deal with loss?
Palm Sunday

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-7

- This reading 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 of Isaiah 45:23.

Gospel: Mark 14:1-15; 47

- The woman with the alabaster jar of nard represents the faithful: we should pour our love and gifts on Jesus, who will accept them and remember us always.
- The Last Supper took place on the same night that the Passover Lamb was sacrificed.
- The Eucharist is instituted at the Last Supper.
- Peter, James, and John fell asleep during their “watch” in the Garden of Gethsemane. We need to pray and be watchful to withstand the attacks of Satan on our families.
- The mocking of Jesus by the soldiers is not unlike our modern culture which mocks the traditional family and the teachings of the Church in regards to chastity, contraception, and abortion.
- Christ died for all of mankind and all of mankind is redeemed by His death.
**Food For Thought:**
The chaos that is experienced on Palm Sunday and throughout the Passion of Our Lord will give rise to His glorious resurrection on Easter Sunday. When we cry out “crucify Him” we should feel uncomfortable and experience inner turmoil. On a smaller scale, chaos in our families caused by a myriad of modern day difficulties can pull us away from Our Lord. The Good News is that by His death and resurrection we can restore ourselves to union with Him and with our families.

**Story:**
On the morning of October 14, 1987, an 18 month old Jessica McClure fell into the 8-inch wide opening of an abandoned well in the backyard of her aunt’s home in Midland, Texas. Baby Jessica fell a full 22 feet before becoming wedged in the well pipe. The world watched in fear and anticipation while rescue workers dug a shaft parallel to the abandoned well and then dug a horizontal shaft through rock to rescue this tiny girl. On the evening of October 16, two and a half days after Jessica fell into the abandoned well, the world witnessed her miraculous rescue. In that moment, the world, and most especially our country, united in the hope of her survival from this ordeal.

**Petition:**
For our families, on this Palm Sunday, that we seek comfort in Our Lord during our family difficulties, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
How did you feel when you declared “crucify Him” today? Did you feel uncomfortable? Consider that this is the feeling we should experience whenever we fall into sin.
Holy Thursday

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

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

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

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

**First Reading: Genesis 1:1-2:2 or 26-31a**

- All powerful God created all things material and spiritual out of nothing in an ordered and intentional way.

- This 1st creation account is not meant to be read in a literal manner. It is written in a poetic literary style 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 freely chooses to follow Him.

**Second Reading: Genesis 22:1-18 or 2:1-2, 9a 10-13, 15-18**

- This event, the “binding” of Isaac, in Hebrew the “Aqeda,” 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 temple of Jerusalem.

- Abraham answered: “The Lord will provide a lamb for the sacrifice.”

- 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 of 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**

• Israel defiled their own land and were scattered.

• Israel profaned the name of God in the scattered nations.

• God promises to restore Israel and return them 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 after periods of chaos—with God’s help in communion with Him.

**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.

**Gospel: Mark 16:1-7**

- “Christ’s Resurrection is an object of faith in that it is a transcendent intervention of God himself in creation and history” (CCC 648).
- The fact that women were the first to discover the resurrection of Jesus is the highest affirmation of women in the New Testament.
- The summons to go get Peter indicates that Peter’s betrayal has been forgiven. Families can use Peter’s betrayal of Jesus and Christ’s forgiveness of him as a model of the forgiveness that family members should show to each other.
- Peter is singled out as the leader of the apostles.
- The resurrection of Christ points to the resurrection of our bodies on the Last Day.

**Food For Thought:**
The multitude of readings from the Old Testament in this celebration leads 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 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 and came to realize the great gift of family and the opportunity to start anew.
**Petition:**
On this most glorious night, that families experiencing 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 calls us “brothers and sisters.”
- As Christians we must focus on the things of heaven.
- Now we must put our old life to death and live a new life in the risen Christ.

Gospel: John 20:1-9

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

Food For Thought:

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

In 1994, the Rwanda genocide took almost one million lives after the Aids/HIV epidemic had already wiped out a large portion of the population. In 1995, an orphan, who had lost his family in the genocide and to the Aids epidemic, had almost given up hope when he received shoes for Christmas. It was a gift that would transform more than his feet. Alex Nsengimana recently graduated from a college in New York with a degree in Pastoral Ministry. He has not only survived the devastation, he has thrived. Alex was able to return to Rwanda and go to the prison where his family member’s killer was held. He ministered to the man and forgave him. Alex returned to his old orphanage with new shoes for everyone. He also plans on opening a church in his village for reconciliation and healing.

Saint Pope John Paul II was said to have forgiven his would be assassin, Ali Agca, on his way to the hospital after being shot. The two later met in prison where the Holy Father declared the necessity for reconciliation 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. This is a 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 1 4:32-35

- A family should be like that first community of believers.
- No one claimed any possessions or gifts, but shared, so no one was needy.
- This means material gifts as well as gifts of self, such as talents.
- If everyone in a family shared like this, how rich a home would be.
- How God would truly favor them.

Second Reading: 1 John 5:1-6

- The term *begotten* means more than sired or fathered. It means “to cause; produce as an effect.”
- Jesus is the product of love, the effect of the love that God has towards us.
- Follow this love in His word. His commandments should be posted, like the Jewish *tzitzit*, as a reminder.
- The home is where these commandments are learned, by example and by daily reminders.
- Obeying the commandments may be difficult, but it is for our own good. It protects us from ourselves and each other.

Gospel: John 20:19-31

- Even as God gives us His commands, He also gives us the way back to Him through earthly forgiveness.
- God wants peace for us.
- Families also need to practice forgiveness.
- Husbands and wives should strive for peace, so children can feel, and be part of, that peace.
- How many times do we ask for signs? We want to see the mark of the nails or put our hand into His side.
**Food For Thought:**
In the book of Numbers, the Israelites are commanded to put tzitzit (fringes) on their garments in order to remind them of God’s laws. (Numbers 15: 37-40) If Catholics were to have such a physical reminder of God’s Laws, would we be more likely to follow them? As those involved in elementary school education can attest, it is plainly evident that everyone has different learning styles. Interpersonal learners learn by social interaction and by doing. Intrapersonal learners set goals for themselves. Musical learners need to hear to learn. Naturalistic learners need to understand patterns and reasoning. Visual learners, however, need to see in order to learn. Seeing a prayer shawl or a poster in the kitchen with the Ten Commandments might be just the thing for that visual learner at home.

**Petition:**
That all families follow God’s commandments, practice forgiveness, and foster peace in the home, our domestic church, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
The Israelites had the constant reminder of the laws of God in their clothing, the prayer shawls, the tassels worn on their garments, and more. A question to ponder for Catholics might be: what reminders do we have in our daily lives of God’s faithfulness to us, and our obligation to remain faithful to Him?
3rd Sunday of Easter


- The quote “...and asked that a murderer be released to you” means the murderer represents sin.
- When we deny Jesus in our everyday lives, we let sin into our lives.
- We make a decision whether or not to follow Jesus every second of our lives.
- A child can visualize two prisoners: the sinless Jesus and the sinful murderer.

Second Reading: 1 John 2:1-5a

- To know God, try to keep His commandments. As wives/husbands/children, we can’t just say we are Catholic, but must live His every commandment deliberately.
- When we fail to keep the commandments and we sin, we know that Jesus died for our sins and the sins of the whole world. We are all God’s children.
- We have an “Advocate” in Jesus Christ to help us when we sin. He paid the price for us.


- “Then He opened their mind to understand scriptures.” Couples and families must allow Jesus to open their minds each time they are presented with Scripture/truth.
- A family can prepare for Mass, either at home or in the car, by talking about the readings. Then, when the words are heard, they are not discarded, but become part of the hearer.
- When Jesus’ followers first saw Him after His resurrection, they had trouble recognizing Him and recognizing the truth. We should ask Jesus to prepare us for the truth.

Food For Thought:
The Gospel tells us that Jesus opened the minds of His disciples to understand the Word of God. Jesus does that for us, too, but we need to condition ourselves to put that understanding to good use. That is more difficult in our noise-filled, connected world; difficult, yes, but still something that each family is called to do. How and what can parents do to create an environment for their children to hear and respond to the message of the Gospels?

Petition:
That families prepare for the truth in Jesus Christ by asking Him to open their minds to understand the Scriptures, we pray to the Lord.
**Bulletin Announcement:**
That in our world filled with confusion and chaos, family homes become sanctuaries where those gathered can be transformed by the Gospel message. For parents, this is the promise made at the Baptism of each child; for spouses, this is putting the sacramental grace of Marriage to use in helping each other to grow in holiness.
4th Sunday of Easter

First Reading: Acts 4: 5-12

- “The stone the builders rejected…” That stone could be a rejected student in your child’s class.
- That stone could be a rejected co-worker; it could be one’s parent or one’s child who is rejected.
- Even in our own families we reject those who don’t stay with the mainstream.
- Before rejecting others, consider the path or life that God has given them.
- Often the lonely ones, who stand their own ground, are following heaven’s guidelines.

Second Reading: 1 John 3: 16-21

- “The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him.”
- Being Catholic is often a lonely place; our practices are different from societal norms.
- Our habits may seem square and nerdy, or may even come off to others as self-righteous.
- What is the faith behind our practice? Is our motive doing God’s will or is it pride in looking down judgmentally on others?
- If we are following our Shepherd, then we are on the right path, even if we are misunderstood and judged by others.

Gospel: John 10: 11-18

- “I know mine and mine know me.” As a parent knows a child, even from far away.
- A parent will do anything for that child, and the child feels loved and safe.
- That love is only a shadow of the love the Father has for us.

Food For Thought:
A parent’s love for their child is unconditional, even when that grown child is really turning his back on the parent. When the child is following destructive pathways and stubborn ways, a parent can still see the little boy or girl within them. Parents see the searching child and love the child in that young man or woman. It is in this way that God still loves us, even when we mess up. He looks on us with love and forgiveness, like a merciful parent.
**Story:**
Jane could always tell her son on the sideline of a football field, just by the way he stood—hands on hips, yet still completely engaged in the game. Jane could not see his face or his number and there were fifty others who, at first glance, seemed identical. But the stance alone told Jane it was her son. That’s how we can picture God knowing us—by our stance.

**Petition:**
That parents teach children by word and example the truth, that faith has a cost and can be a lonely place, and that it is okay to be different before God, let us pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Jesus tells us that as the Good Shepherd, He knows us. But do we know Him? Do we recognize the call of Jesus amidst the noise of our world? Give yourself and your family the gift of solitude, so that from time-to-time you get more comfortable with the quiet in which God speaks to us.
5th Sunday of Easter

First Reading: Acts 9:26-31

- Parents should model Saul as he “spoke out boldly in the name of the Lord.”
- It is not enough to say it within the confines of a home. It must be said loudly outside the home.
- Just as with Saul, there will be debates, but children must learn not to back down.
- Our faith must be fought for and spoken about in every move we make.
- It must be on the parents’ tongues as an example to their children.

Second Reading: 1 John 3:18-24

- “Love one another just as He commanded us.” Parents should model this.
- Loving means forgiving.
- When we model love and forgiveness, we are living Jesus’ commandment.
- If children see how a sibling is forgiven, they will feel safe and loved, never “forever wrong,” as some teenagers feel.
- Words are not enough. The constant action of love is what is demanded here.

Gospel: John 15:1-8

- “He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit….” Again, we must act.
- Just as Jesus is our vine, and we must remain in Him, so too must children remain on their parents’ vine, following them as the parents follow Jesus. We are all connected.
- Children, obey your parents.
- Parents and children must remain in Jesus, and His words must remain in them.

Story:
Although a couple struggled with forgiving their oldest son and sometimes even loving him, as he constantly broke family rules and disrespected God, home, and family, they did forgive and love him.

Their younger daughter said to them, “I feel like the brother in the Prodigal Son story. I’m annoyed because you always forgive him. I follow all the rules, and I don’t receive anything special for doing this. Even so, it is a comfort to see that you will still love us in difficult situations.”

It made her feel safe. It also made her wonder if she could love that way. It is difficult.
**Petition:**
That families may bear the fruit of a rich faith and be strong enough and intelligent enough to defend their faith, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
The story of the vine and the branches in our readings remind us of our connection to God; we are also connected to God through our families, as mothers and fathers, as children and parents. In what ways does your family life resemble the connectedness and communion with God spoken of in our readings? In what areas do you need to continue to grow and work to reflect this loving and dependent relationship to Jesus?
6th Sunday of Easter

First Reading: Acts 10: 25-26, 34-35, 44-48

- “Get up,” Peter said, “I myself am also a human being.”
- Children sometimes look only to their parents for answers to the difficulties life throws their way, but parents are only human. They do not have all the answers.
- Parents should model trust in Jesus and ask courage from the Holy Spirit when life hurts.
- To put trust in humans is missing the mark of our true nature as children of God.

Second Reading: 1 John 4: 7-10

- Children learn to love first by the love that is shown to them in their home (domestic church).
- If parents can’t show this love, then children will not understand the love of God.
- God sent His only son and we must give up a part of ourselves to be a parent.
- There is sacrifice in love.
- To love is a choice and this choice is involved in every action/interaction.

Gospel: John 15: 9-17

- Permissiveness in today’s families has become a problem. Would they even understand “Commandment”?
- If rules are not kept in family households, how will children learn to follow Jesus?
- Love is keeping the Commandments which leads to joy.
- “Remain in My love,” Jesus says. He wants us to succeed.

Story:
True story: A little girl in Faith Formation class was struggling with answering a question when her friend sitting next to her said, “Just say ‘LOVE,’ the answer is always ‘LOVE.’” We must have done something right in that class.

Petition:
That families have the courage and strength to follow the Commandment to love one another, we pray to the Lord.
**Bulletin Announcement:**
Within each of our family homes, we learn what it means to love one another. Jesus loved each of us first, but our first human experience of love is probably from our parents. How is Jesus’ commandment to love mirrored in each home?
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?
7th Sunday of Easter

First Reading: Acts 1:15-17, 20a, 20c-26
- The apostles sought another “witness to the resurrection.”
- We must be the witnesses to the resurrection; we must be the one they sought.
- Every day, in our homes, we must bear witness to the truth.

Second Reading: 1 John 4:11-16
- To keep God close, we must love one another.
- This will be our joy, to love one another as God has loved us.
- This love begins in the family.
- Just as God loved us, so parents love their children. In this way, those children will know how to love their children and neighbors as well.

Gospel: John 17:11b-19
- “They do not belong to the world.” Even though Jesus is talking about the disciples, this also refers to us.
- None of us should “belong to this world,” but work hard to keep our eyes lifted to God.
- We should also ask God’s help to keep ourselves and our families safe “from the evil one.”
- It is difficult today to keep from belonging to the world when, with our iPhones, we have the world at our fingertips, literally. It’s a great temptation for children and parents alike.

Petition:
That families pray together for the courage to bear witness, to keep God close, and to keep from falling into the hands of the evil ones of this world, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
The Gospel has Jesus telling us that we do not belong to the world, but to God, as his beloved disciples. Have you thought recently about what it means to be a beloved disciple who belongs to a loving God? Are there parts of your family life that seem out of balance with this vision of Jesus for you?
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 andshown 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: 1 Samuel 3:3b-10, 19

- The Lord calls each of us to be His servant even if we are young.
- Samuel was obedient to Eli and to the Lord.
- Samuel was willing to be the Lord’s servant and to answer the Lord’s call.
- We are never too young to know and serve God.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20

- We are called not just to be a Christian in the way we treat others, but also in the way we treat ourselves.
- We are called to take care of our own body.
- When we choose to hurt our body with sinful acts, we damage the gift of our body that God gave us.
- God is in us and a part of us. Our body should be treated as a temple.

Gospel: John 1:35-42

- Once the disciples understood who Jesus was, they wanted to be close to Jesus as members of a family want to be close to each other.
- The disciples literally got up and followed Jesus in order to be close to Him. We should have that same desire.
- The disciples did not wait to be called. They did whatever it took to get close to Jesus.
- Andrew wanted to share Jesus with his brother.

Food For Thought:
When Samuel was called by the Lord, he answered immediately. The disciples didn’t wait to be invited; they did whatever it took to know who Jesus was and how to be close to Him. Do we want to be close to Jesus? Are we willing to answer His call, seek Him, follow Him, and sacrifice so that we can be close to Him? Andrew wanted to share Jesus with his brother. Do we share Jesus in our families?
**Story:**
Two young siblings, a boy and a girl, were playing together on the floor in the family room. The boy was the older sibling and whether he realized it or not, he was clearly playing the role of the leader. His little sister mimicked everything he did. From the way they sat on the floor to the sound effects provided for the toys, the younger child did her best to imitate her older brother. When the game was over and the older child hopped up to move on to another adventure, the little sister followed, hot on the heels of her older brother. It didn’t matter if she was invited or what the next activity would be. She wanted to be close to her big brother, and she was going to make it her business to be a part of whatever he did.

**Petition:**
That we will have the courage to seek Jesus in our world and to do whatever it takes to stay close to Him, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
We read in today’s Gospel that the disciples wanted to be close to Jesus. They followed Him to spend time with Him, to get to know Him, and to understand Him. What do you do in your life to know Jesus and to be close to Him?
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Jonah 3:1-5, 10

- When we respond to God’s call to do His work, we can do great things for Him.
- God is merciful.
- If we repent, we will be forgiven.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

- We cannot focus only on our own needs.
- We must pay attention to the needs in the world around us and respond.

Gospel: Mark 1:14-20

- Jesus calls us to spread the good news.
- Following Jesus may require us to make sacrifices.
- We cannot focus only on “our nets” if we are to answer our call.

Food For Thought

Our world and even our families can be very demanding. Work, running the children to various activities and our many responsibilities can make it hard to focus on anything else. Even spending time with those we love can be very difficult. To be in a family requires sacrifice and commitment. Parents put aside their own desires and time with each other for the betterment of their children. It is done not begrudgingly, but out of love. To live our faith and to answer the call of Jesus in our life may also require us to make loving sacrifice. It can be a very difficult challenge to “lay down” things in our world in order to make room for what is most important.

Story:

There was a young couple that loved to travel. Early in their marriage they worked, rented a modest apartment, and did not have children. Although no one would consider them rich, they had very reasonable month to month expenses which afforded them some luxuries. Their jobs kept them busy, but despite their schedules they always made time for each other. They had many date nights, weekend get-a-ways, and a vacation at least once a year. It wasn’t until they had children that the realities of the world began to set in. Money became tighter, date nights were fewer and further apart, and vacations became a distant memory. Instead of putting everything into travel and time with each other, they put everything they had into raising their children. For them, raising a family was now most important. They realized how truly blessed they were. They also recognized the need to sacrifice old priorities and desires in order to be the kind of parents they felt called to be.
Petition:
That we will recognize the areas in our life where we are called to sacrifice in order to answer the call of Jesus, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
In today’s Gospel we hear Jesus call His apostles to be “fishers of men.” In order to “follow,” they needed to “lay down their nets” and make a sacrifice. In our own lives, following Jesus may require us to make a sacrifice or to set aside some of our desires so that we can answer His call. Is there something in your life that you might need to “lay down” in order to better follow Jesus?
4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Deuteronomy 18: 15-20

- God will always come to us in ways we can understand.
- God will empower us with His message.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 7: 32-35

- Keep God as the focus of your life.
- Our world can be filled with distractions and, if we let them, they can take us away from God.
- We are not called to focus on things of the world, but rather to be focused on what God calls us to be!

Gospel: Mark 1: 21-28

- Jesus has power over all things.
- Nothing is impossible with Jesus.

Food For Thought:
Today we face more distractions than ever: Smart Phones, TV, internet, social media, and video games, just to name a few. In addition, so many families face adversities such as illness or addiction. We must remember to look to Jesus for the hope and strength we need to persevere or overcome what we face. Jesus has the power to overcome all things and He can and will help us to carry our crosses, but we must have faith and believe.

Story:
Together a family faced the loss of a child. Each family member seemed to deal with it differently. One avoided the hurt by masking it with humor; another withdrew into alcohol, while yet another bottled up the anger while trying to hide the pain. The only person that seemed to be able to manage the loss was the one person who, some would say, should hurt the most: the mother. The greatest difference between the mother and many of the other family members was that she coped with prayer and a belief it was the angels of the Lord that would hold her up through this tragedy. She focused on her faith and the belief that her child was now with God, as the source of strength that carried her through.

Petition:
That we may keep our faith as the focus in our lives so that it may be a source of strength when we need it most, we pray to the Lord.
**Bulletin Announcement:**
Our world is filled with distractions and sometimes pain. Today’s Gospel reminds us of the power of Jesus, and that His teachings can be a source of strength for us. What worldly things weigh you down that you can turn over to Jesus? What can you do to keep your focus more on Him?
5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Job 7: 1-4, 6-7

- It can be so easy to lose hope.
- If we dwell on the negatives, we will be negative.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 9: 16-19, 22-23

- We should be willing not only to preach the Gospel, but to share it with all, including our families, not for our own glory but for the glory of God.
- We are called to give of ourselves to others.
- We are called to be present to others and to share our faith with others in a way they will understand, so that they can understand the Good News through us.

Gospel: Mark 1: 29-39

- Jesus took time “away” to pray.
- When people encountered Jesus, He impacted them profoundly.
- Jesus did not stay in one place; He moved to spread His message.
- Jesus went where he was needed to fulfill His “purpose.”
- Jesus has the power to change lives.

Food For Thought:

It can be easy to become comfortable in a particular routine or place in life. We can fall into the habit of doing things a certain way, and being okay with it just as it is. Jesus shows us that we need to be willing to challenge ourselves and stretch who we know ourselves to be, so that we can grow.

The same can be said about our faith. We should not be happy in a simple routine that puts our faith in a category as part of our life. Rather we should take time to pray, look to stretch our faith, and explore ways for it to grow in every aspect of our life. If Jesus stayed in the same town for the entirety of His ministry, would the world know Him? Would we know Him? If we are not looking for ways to grow our faith and make it stronger, how can we be truly ready and able to answer the call to share it?
Story:
There was a young family who came to Mass every week. They would always attend the same Mass, sit in the same pews, and shake the same hands of the same people at the sign of peace. They were part of a church “clique” of wonderful church friends who would all sit together during Mass and stand and talk after together after Mass, usually till the ushers began to turn out the lights. One Sunday, this family was even later than usual and had to park on the other side of the church. As the family rushed across the parking lot they ran into church through the closest door they could find and took the first available pew instead of sitting in their normal section. After Mass, before they could even make their way over to their usual group of friends, two children who went to school with the children of the family came running over to say hello. The parents also met, began to talk and begin a new relationship. As the families walked to the car, the kids were thrilled that THEY now had “friends in church” too. The simple act of sitting in a new seat stretched what it meant to be a part of a church family and opened the door for new relationships.

Petition:
That God empowers us to go beyond what is comfortable and look for new ways to deepen our faith, let us pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
It can be easy to become comfortable in a particular routine or place in our life and the same can be said about our faith. We always need to look for ways to grow and share our faith rather than let it become part of a routine. What is something you can do to help your faith grow?
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Leviticus 13: 1-2; 45-46

- We are called to do the right thing, even if it is unpleasant.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1

- Do all things with the intent of honoring God, no matter how small or simple the task.
- Be an example of living for God to others.
- Be respectful to all.
- We are called to be “responsible” in our Christianity, in both things we do and refrain from doing.

Gospel: Mark 1: 40-45

- The man may have been acting irresponsibly when he shared the miracle with others, based on Jesus’ request to tell no one.
- Even though the man was ordered to keep his healing a secret, perhaps he simply could not contain himself.
- The man shared his joy for what Jesus gave him with many people.

Food For Thought:
I wonder if the man who was healed in the Gospel really meant to disobey Jesus, or if he was simply so overjoyed about being healed that he could not contain himself? Maybe he felt so compelled to share the gift that Jesus gave him that he had to tell others. Perhaps there is something we can learn from the man. If we took the time every day to recognize the gifts Jesus has given us, how could we not be overjoyed as well? While the first and second readings remind us of our need to be responsible and respectful of others, both in our life and in our Christianity, perhaps the Gospel reminds us that it should be hard for us to control our Joy about the love of Jesus in our lives!

Story:
A young girl went shopping with her mother for a Father’s Day gift for her dad. When she came home from the shopping trip the mother reminded her not to tell her father about the gift, as it was going to be a surprise. The little girl agreed and ran into the house. As soon as she saw her dad she ran up to him, smiling from ear to ear, and jumped up into his arms for a hug. With her arms wrapped around his neck she began to whisper in his ear. Unable to stop herself, she told him what the Father’s Day gift would be, but quickly followed it by “but it’s a secret!” Even though she knew not to tell her dad about the gift, her excitement was too much for her to keep it in.
Petition:
That we may recognize the gifts God has given us and to share the joy of our Lord with others, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
There are many things in our lives we get excited about, but is our faith one of them? What can you do to share your faith with great joy?
7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 43: 18-19, 21-22, 24b-25

- God does not dwell on our past; neither should we.
- If God is willing to forgive us, are we able to forgive ourselves?
- If a member of our family or a friend asks for forgiveness, our God challenges us not to hold a grudge.

Second Reading: 2nd Corinthians 1: 18-22

- God promises to be faithful to us.
- God has sent us the Holy Spirit as part of His promise to be with us.

Gospel: Mark 2: 1-12

- Our faith should be a driving force in our life.
- We should never give up trying to be close to Jesus.
- Jesus has authority over all things.
- Our faith in Jesus can help us overcome all obstacles.

Food For Thought:
Jesus shows us that he has authority over all things. He loves us, forgives our sins, helps us overcome our obstacles, and gives us the gift of His Spirit to be with us always. No matter what mistakes we have made, or how bad our situation may seem, we know our God has the power to help us overcome. Whether we face conflicts at work, difficulties in a relationship, stress from the pressures of life, or even serious illness, we can draw strength from our faith and the knowledge that our God is with us, and we should never give up.

Petition:
That our faith may always be a source of strength in our life, especially when we face our most difficult challenges, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
God has sent us the Holy Spirit as a part of His promise to be with us. No matter what we face, we know our God has the power to help us overcome, but we must have faith. Can you let your faith be a source of strength when you face adversity?
First Reading: Hosea 2:16b 1 7b, 21-22

- God wanted the chosen people to call Him a name that means “husband” or “lord.”
- In the Old Covenant, God showered the faithful with blessings based upon their fidelity to Him. In the New Covenant, we become adopted sons and daughters of God through Baptism.
- The book of Hosea is calling out the infidelity of the Chosen. This particular passage is describing the celebration upon the return to fidelity.
- The wedding imagery in the Old Testament comes to fullness in the New Covenant.

Second Reading: 2Corinthians 3:1b-6

- In St. Paul’s time, letters from authorities were carried as proof to authenticate the identity of the bearer of the letter.
- St. Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to live in such a way that a letter of authentication regarding their Christianity is not necessary.
- Christian families in the world serve as witnesses to the Gospel.

Gospel: Mark 2:18-22

- Christ uses the image of the bridegroom to communicate His total gift of self.
- Christ was not condemning the practice of fasting, but wanted to highlight the joy of His presence.
- Husbands and wives are called to give themselves completely to each other—just as Christ gave Himself to the Church. Children are the fruits of the spousal total gift of self.
- Anything that acts as a barrier in the way of this total gift of self (contraception, infidelity, etc.) prevents the realization of the fruits of the sacrament of Matrimony.
- This wedding imagery alludes to the ‘marriage supper of the Lamb.’

**Food For Thought:**
The image of Christ as the bridegroom of the church serves as a beautiful foundation for the sacrament of Matrimony. The total self-giving of husbands and wives to each other is a parallel to the self-giving of Christ to the Church. The witness of married life within the Church and the witness to its fruitfulness with the bearing and raising of children is powerful in the modern world. There is nothing more extraordinary in today’s world than an ordinary man married to an ordinary woman and their ordinary children.
**Story:**
A young 1st century Jewish woman named Mary was betrothed to a carpenter. She became pregnant in a most unusual way and, instead of her husband Joseph rejecting her, he stayed with her and raised her son as his own. They lived a chaste marriage and lived devout, holy lives. We know little about the years between the birth of their son and His adult years and we also do not know when Joseph died. We do know that the Son of God was raised by a mother and a father on this earth as part of God’s Plan. God could have chosen any way He wanted to bring His Son into the world, and God chose to bring His son into the world via a human family made up of a married mother and father.

**Petition:**
That the witness of Christian married couples serves to open hearts and minds to the sacrament of Matrimony we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Mothers and fathers, there is nothing more valuable to a child than a mother and a father. If you want your children to have it all, love each other with total self-giving love.
9th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Deuteronomy 5:12-15

- The third commandment recalls creation and is a memorial of Israel’s liberation from bondage in Egypt.
- The Sabbath is for the Lord, set apart for praise of God. It is a sign of God’s covenant with this chosen people.
- The Sabbath is a day of rest from work, a day to spend with family.
- The Lord’s Day in the New Covenant is the 8th day, the fulfillment of the Sabbath.

Second Reading: 2Corinthians 4:6-11

- Light overcoming darkness is a sign of salvation.
- Paul experienced darkness when he was blinded on the road to Damascus.
- Earthen vessels carried sin offerings in the Old Covenant. In the New Covenant we carry the “death of Jesus” in our bodies.
- Although we are broken and subjects of The Fall, we are also recipients of grace.
- Families are made of earthen vessels which, although subject to The Fall, can be filled with grace, life, and holiness.

Gospel: Mark 2:23-3:6 or 2:23-28

- Referring to Abiathar alludes to an “outgoing” regime. Abiathar was the last high priest of his line, banished from Jerusalem for opposing Solomon.
- Christ explains the fullness of the meaning of the third commandment—that honoring God also includes serving the needs of the person.
- Works of mercy always supersede the Sabbath rest.
- The modern family is not only skipping Sunday worship, but is also skipping Sunday rest and family time.
- God designed the Sabbath to benefit His people, not burden them. Sunday worship, rest, and family time benefit families and society as a whole.
Food For Thought:
Sunday Mass attendance is a fulfillment of the Sabbath and a precept of the Church. It is considered a mortal sin to miss Mass except in the cases of illness, caretaking of the infirm without available respite, or lack of access. The Eucharist, when received by those properly disposed, provides the supernatural nourishment needed to live out our everyday lives in our homes, places of work and learning, and most importantly, in our families.

Story:
Pope Francis discussed family Mass attendance in his August 12, 2015 weekly audience. Pope Francis said: “Family life, seen with the eyes of faith, shows itself to be worth more than the effort it requires. It is a masterpiece of simplicity and is beautiful precisely because it is not artificial, not fake.” Pope Francis continued, stating that Sunday Mass is the most important celebration for a family because it brings “the grace of Jesus Christ, His presence, His love, His sacrifice, His making us a community, His being with us.”

Petition:
That our families be nourished and sustained by our communion with Christ in the Eucharist, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Remember the Lord’s Day and make it Holy. The most important day of the week for a family is the day that we worship The Lord in communion with Him. Is Sunday Mass “fitting into” your family’s schedule— or is Sunday Mass THE priority?
10th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Genesis 3:9-15

- Adam and Eve both tried to “point fingers” rather than take responsibility for their actions.
- Loving them, God invited them to confess their guilt and show repentance.
- Genesis 3:15 is the Protoevangelium, “the first Gospel.”
- Man and woman are wounded with concupiscence. Concupiscence explains the tension and discord that comes along with marriage.
- Concupiscence also explains much of the stress and strain in families.

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

- 2 Corinthians 4:13 contains a quote from Psalm 116:10, a hymn of thanksgiving to God in which David remembered his faith in God during troubled times and recalled that he was rescued. Paul and the others shared this faith and expected to thank God in return.
- As our bodies decline, our soul can be enriched by the Holy Spirit.
- Our temporary, earthly bodies stand in contrast to our resurrected bodies.

Gospel: Mark 3:20-35

- By claiming that Jesus’ power came from Satan, the scribes revealed their own relationship with the Evil One.
- Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is particularly bad because it blinds people to their own need for forgiveness.
- Jesus opened his spiritual family to include his disciples—not to exclude his Mother and relatives.
- Our spiritual family is made up of families. The backbone of the Church and society is the family.
- The breakdown of the family is a major contributor to the breakdown of the Church.

Food For Thought:
Concupiscence is the cause of much discord in marriages and families. Our fallen nature leads to selfishness and strife in our families and explains why our families must be nourished by the Eucharist. Living lives consistent with the mind and heart of the Church, in the context of an immediate family and a spiritual family, helps combat concupiscence and helps people lead grace-filled lives. In times of discord, repentance and the sacrament of reconciliation serve to rebuild and strengthen bonds that have been weakened.
**Story:**
In the late 16th century, a twenty year old French woman married a baron and was granted the title of baroness. She arrived at her new home to discover that she had married into a dire situation of deep debt. This new “Baronne de Chantal,” rather than grow angry with her new husband, entered this situation with her deep faith. She rolled up her sleeves and took over the supervision of the financial responsibilities of the deeply indebted estate. She gained the love of her employees and she and her husband were described as “sharing one heart and one soul.” The baroness personally served all of the poor that came to the estate. When questioned about repeatedly giving to those that were obviously trying to take advantage of her generosity, she responded, “What if God turned me away when I came back to him again and again with the same request?”

When her husband was shot and killed in a hunting accident, before he died, he forgave the man who shot him. The baroness forgave him too. The road to forgiveness of the man responsible for her husband’s death was particularly difficult for the baroness, but she persevered in faith and love. Eventually, she forgave him so completely that she became the godmother to his child. The baroness developed a close friendship with St. Francis de Sales and, in time, founded the Visitation order for women. St. Frances de Chantal, pray for us!

**Petition:**
That family members continuously seek reconciliation with each other through prayerful dialogue and peaceful companionship and that they seek union with God through the sacraments of the Church, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Is there discord in your family? Is there constant fighting and tension? Consider seeking reconciliation with your family by first seeking reconciliation with God. If you use your hand to point a finger at another, this same hand has three fingers which point back at you.
First Reading: Ezekiel 17:22-24

- This passage is part of a metaphor relating to the phases of the Babylonian Exile.
- God promises to take “a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar,” a remnant of the faithful chosen people, back to Jerusalem and have them flourish in their own land.
- Faithful Catholic families, seemingly modern day “remnants,” provide a great witness to the world.

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

- Perfection will not come on earth, but will come only in the kingdom of heaven.
- Christ is always with us. The certainty of faith comforts us and gives us strength during the trials of earthly life.
- At the moment of death, our spiritual souls are separated from our bodies. We live in hope for our souls of the beatific vision.
- We will be judged for our time on earth.
- Our marriages and our family life should be directed toward eternal reward rather than directed toward earthly pleasures and accolades.

Gospel: Mark 4:26-34

- From St. Gregory the Great: Seeds of good intention are sown first. These seeds bring forth the blade of repentance and finally the mature ear of charitable works.
- The harvest is a metaphor for the Day of Judgment.
- The parable of the mustard seed depicts how a small band of disciples grew into the worldwide Church.
- The faith and love of one fruitful married couple can manifest itself into an enormous family tree.
- The mustard seed of faith blossoms in a family where it is cultivated.
Food For Thought:
Rather than worry about the evangelization of the whole world and feel overwhelmed by the decline of the faith, should we not simply do the best we can in our own spheres of influence? Perhaps we, as individuals, cannot change the hearts and minds of the multitudes that have strayed from the Church, but we all have contact with people every day with whom we can share the Gospel. There is rejoicing in heaven when one simple soul has a conversion of heart. If every one of us would start each day committed to loving and serving the Lord and loving and serving our neighbor—starting in our own homes and communities—what a world it would be! Just like the flourishing of the little mustard seed, nourishing and spreading the faith little by little—one soul at a time—will lead to the building up of the kingdom of God.

Story:
The studies of distinguished sociologist Rodney Stark, outlined in his book *The Rise of Christianity*, reveal that what appears to be the meteoric rise of Christianity in the first centuries of the Church was really the result of one-on-one evangelization over time. Stark concludes that evangelization in the first centuries of the Church occurred in families, in the Jewish Diaspora, in culturally oppressed women, and through the Christian witness observed in the care of the sick during the massive plagues of the time. Our modern world contains many similar conditions that were present in the first centuries of the Church. The family structure still exists, although troubled in many instances. In a sense, a Catholic Diaspora exists in that the Church operates a massive system of parishes, schools, and outreach: all points of potential evangelization. Women in the secular culture are still falling victim to the oppression of abortion and physical abuse. There are many different forms of suffering in the world that can parallel the plagues of the first centuries of the Church. The one-on-one evangelization efforts of the first centuries of the Church have the potential to bear the same level of fruit in modern day.

Petition:
That the Catholic faith be nourished in our families, such that the faith will grow and spread, just like the growth and spread of the tiniest mustard seed, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Are you upset about modern culture? Are you overwhelmed with all of the problems in society? Consider that, although we may not all be in positions of vast influence, we all are in positions of some influence. Rather than fret about what is happening far away, why not focus your energies on building up the Body of Christ in your family and local community.
12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Job 38:1, 8-11

- God has perfect knowledge and keeps all of creation in harmonious existence.
- Harmony in the family requires grace from God.

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:14-17

- Christ’s love propels us in our earthly existence.
- Christ died so that we could live.
- We should consider others in terms of their eternal existence, rather than their earthly existence.
- Baptism rescues us from the bondage of sin and we become a new creation in Jesus.

Gospel: Mark 4:35-41

- The divinity of Jesus manifests itself in His power over nature.
- From St. Augustine: The chaotic sea represents the drama of Christian life. We need to learn to trust in Jesus every day. He alone can battle the evil forces and temptations of the flesh and bring us to the safe, calm waters of salvation.
- The answer to the turmoil of modern life is Jesus and His bride, the Church.
- Jesus is in control of all.

Food For Thought:
In our own human weakness, it is easy for good people to try to take control over everything in life. It is in the realm of the family that we sometimes learn that—even though we did all that we knew to do—in certain situations, the results of our efforts were not what was expected. Children, despite our best efforts, sometimes stray in problematic directions. Spouses sometimes fail each other. Illnesses develop despite efforts toward good health. Job distress occurs even with top performers. The list of life’s disappointments can be very long. The family can provide direction to help loved ones turn toward the Lord in good times and in bad. The family is also the place where coping skills and attitudes are developed and nurtured.
Story:
St. Pope John Paul II, Karol Wojtyla, lived a tragic young life. His mother died when he was just nine years old and his only sibling, his brother Edmund, died when the young Karol was twelve. When he was twenty-one, he lost the last member of his immediate family, his father. Karol was forced to leave his university studies at the age of nineteen, when the Nazi occupation closed his university. Karol found work in a quarry and then in a chemical factory to avoid being deported to Germany. He began his seminarian studies in a secret seminary run by the archbishop of Krakow in 1942. St. Pope John Paul II endured many difficulties in his young life, from the loss of all his immediate family members to the myriad difficulties of living in Nazi-occupied Poland. His strong, enduring faith was the source of strength and direction that led him to become one of the most beloved popes of modern times.

Petition:
That families turn toward the Lord, who can calm the turbulent seas of family life, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Is your family experiencing turbulent seas? Are you having difficulty finding peace within your home? Turn to the Prince of Peace to calm the turbulent waters.
13th Sunday in Ordinary Time


- Our first parents were not originally subject to death. Because of original sin, everyone is now subject to death.
- The Evil One was not completely victorious. Upon bodily death, the immortal soul separates from the body, but can join Jesus in eternity.
- Envy is described as the reason that the demons rejected God. It is an offense against the tenth commandment.
- Families are made up of people that are subject to original sin.

Second Reading: 2Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15

- The Corinthians were so blessed materially that they had the opportunity to express thanksgiving to God and also to help those in need.
- Christ, who was infinitely perfect, became a man and a servant to redeem man. He did not lose His glory in the incarnation, but disguised it.
- Paul is urging the prosperous Corinthians to share their wealth with the less fortunate.

Gospel: Mark 5:21-43 or 5:21-24, 35-43

- Jesus works miracles to bear witness to His divinity and to strengthen the faith of His followers.
- Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman provide examples of faith to us.
- The resurrection of the daughter of Jairus is a sign of the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of our own bodies.
- God answers our prayers if we request in faith and trust, and if it is what is best for us. He may not answer our prayers in the way that we think is best for us, but in the way that provides the greatest blessing.
- Jesus often responds to the pleas of parents whose children are suffering or in danger.
- This should provide an example to parents to turn to Jesus when they have difficulties with their children.
**Food For Thought:**
The world would be perfect if it were not filled with people that are subject to the Fall and concupiscence! Families can be hubs of grace or hubs of strife, with most families existing somewhere in between the two. The example in the Gospel is quite clear: Jairus called on Jesus to heal his daughter. Today’s parents need to call on Jesus to heal their children both physically and spiritually.

**Story:**
St. Monica is said to have prayed constantly for the spiritual welfare of her son, St. Augustine. His life of unchastity and his dabbling in Manichaeism wore heavily on her heart. His eventual conversion and Baptism were sources of tremendous peace before her death. St. Monica is a model for all parents distraught about their children.

**Petition:**
That parents always call on Jesus to heal their children, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Are you a parent that has a child in need of physical or spiritual healing? Be like Jairus and call upon Jesus to heal your child.
14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Ezekiel 2:2-5

- God speaks and sends His Spirit into His prophet Ezekiel.
- Ezekiel gets the dubious news that he is being sent to the Israelites, who haven’t been in the best of moods lately. They are “stubborn of heart” and have “rebelled” against God.
- Although not part of the reading, later in this chapter God encourages Ezekiel not to be afraid. God then gives His scroll, His Word, to Ezekiel and feeds the prophet with it.

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

- This is Paul’s famous and mysterious “thorn in the flesh” passage.
- A “thorn in the flesh” keeps Paul humble and relying only on the grace of God. “My grace is sufficient for you,” says the Lord.
- The power of Christ dwells within Paul and enables him to be content with any manner of hardship and suffering “for the sake of Christ.”
- “When I am weak, I am strong,” Paul writes.

Gospel: Mark 6:1-6

- Jesus returns home to Nazareth and does not receive a ticker-tape parade.
- He teaches there in the synagogue where the townsfolk, although amazed and astonished, are moved only to wonder where he picked up all this wisdom. Isn’t he the carpenter’s son?
- Like many of the prophets of Israel, Jesus’ own people reject him.
- Jesus seems dismayed and even annoyed by their lack of faith—this is going to be harder than perhaps he first thought!

Food For Thought:
Loving someone involves accepting them for who they are but also challenging them to be the best they can be. Being accepted for who we are is easy and feels good. Being challenged? Not so easy, but perhaps one of the prophetic responsibilities that comes with our Baptism is to help our spouses and children hear and respond to God’s Word. It doesn’t mean preaching to them, but it certainly means telling the truth and giving honest feedback, as we help each other make decisions, both big and small, in harmony with the Gospel. Like Jesus, we must speak the truth with courage and compassion, always remembering to “do to others as we would have them do to us.” Should we get rejected by the people we love most, as Jesus was, we must rely on God’s grace to sustain and strengthen us.
**Story:**
“You can’t handle the truth.” There’s a lot of truth to that line from the movie “A Few Good Men” with Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson. Sometimes we can’t handle the truth because it is spoken by someone we know and love … someone we live with. We get defensive. We attack. Sometimes we literally kill the messenger, as in the case of Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was shot and killed as he stood at the altar. Just moments before, in his homily, he had addressed the army and government of El Salvador saying, “In the name of God, in the name of this suffering people whose cries rise to heaven more loudly each day, I implore you, I beg you, I order you in the name of God: stop the repression.”

**Petition:**
That spouses and family members will have the courage to speak the truth to one another with compassion and love, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Let’s make it a “prophet-able” week: In Baptism we are anointed “priest, prophet and king.” Let’s practice this week being prophets, speaking to our spouses and families truthfully, always with compassion, with the goal of helping each other live in harmony with the Gospel and church teaching.
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Amos 7:12-15

- Amos is run out of town by Amaziah, a priest of Beth-El, who is trying to protect the king.
- Amos would rather deal with herds of animals or take care of sycamore trees than do the work of a prophet.
- But God sends him to Israel to speak as His prophet.

Second Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14 (or 1:3-10)

- Paul wastes no time in telling the Ephesians that he is amazed—which, in this case, could mean anything from dumbfounded and disappointed to downright angry—that, in such a short time, they have moved away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Gospel: Mark 6:7-13

- Jesus sends out the Twelve with a few instructions.
- Take a walking stick…and sandals…and no more.
- They are to stay where they are welcomed and to leave where they are not.
- The Twelve go, preaching repentance, driving out demons, and anointing the sick.

Food For Thought:
Have you flown on a plane recently? On one airline, appropriately named Spirit, you can fly cheap if you bring with you only a toothbrush and 3.4 ounces of toothpaste! Like flying, in relationships, the more baggage—emotional and otherwise—we bring along, the more it costs us. All of the stuff we accumulate, the material goods we think are so important, can easily distract us from what is most important and dilute the attention we need to give to one another. As many spiritual writers have said, if we are not careful, our possessions can easily possess us.

Story:
In the 1964 movie Becket, adapted from the play by Jean Anouilh, Thomas Becket, who is quite attached to the royal trappings that come with being the King’s best friend and Chancellor of England, has just been named the new Archbishop of Canterbury. One of the first things he does as Archbishop is to call in the poor off the streets and give away everything he owns to them. Then, passing by a large crucifix, Becket stops and prays, “Forgive me, Lord. Are You sure You’re not laughing at me? It all seems far too easy.” Maybe God is laughing, or, certainly enjoying it, because in giving everything away, Becket has finally found himself.

Petition:
That, in our families and relationships, we will help each other to live simply, to not be dominated by the pursuit of material possessions, and to put first in our hearts and minds the kingdom of God, we pray to the Lord.
**Bulletin Announcement:**
Where will you go this week? What extra “baggage” will you take with you? How might that dilute the joy and the peace of the Gospel you are called to carry and share with all you meet—including those you love?
First Reading: Jeremiah 23: 1-6

- Bad shepherds scatter the flock.
- Like a good shepherd, God will gather the scattered sheep and bring them home where they will flourish.
- Such a shepherd will come from the House of David, and the people will find security and salvation in “the Lord our justice.”

Second Reading: Ephesians 2:13-18

- Through the blood of Christ, all have been reconciled to God.
- Jew and Gentile are made one in Christ.
- All have access to God the Father.

Gospel: Mark 6:30-34

- Jesus sees the crowd and is moved with pity.
- They are like sheep without a shepherd.
- He teaches them.

Food For Thought:

Jesus Christ is the Great Gatherer (for more on this, take a look at Bishop Robert Barron’s book, The Priority of Christ, chapter 4). This is Jesus’ ultimate mission and purpose: to gather the lost, to bring back those who have strayed, to reconnect us to God and to one another. From the very beginning of the Scriptures, this has been the plan of salvation. In our role as husband or wife, father or mother, son or daughter, brother or sister, how do we strengthen the unity of the family? How do the words we speak, the attitudes we bring, the decisions we make strengthen or disrupt the bond of unity? Jesus is THE good shepherd, but as his disciples, in the context of our marriages, families and friendships, we are empowered to shepherd one another.

Story:

Mary and Joe are getting married. It is time to do “the list.” Who will be invited? Who will not? They get a lot of advice from family and friends. Mary’s Aunt Irma reminds her of how the whole Jersey side of the family was snubbed when Cousin Betsy in Baltimore was married last year and none of them were invited to the nuptials. Aunt Irma strongly urges Mary to keep Baltimore off the list. “How will that help things?” Mary asks her. Aunt Irma is stumped by the question. “Help? What do you mean help?”
**Petition:**
For our families, that we may work to mend broken relationships, heal family rifts, let go of grudges and grievances in order to restore and strengthen our bonds of love, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Let Jesus teach you this week how to “gather” rather than “scatter.” Practice compassion for those who are lost, overlooked, pushed aside … even in our own households.
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: 2 Kings 4:42-44

- Elisha takes the first fruits offered by a foreigner.
- How can 20 barley loaves feed 100 people?
- Elisha tells him to do what the Lord has said.
- They eat and there is food left over.

Second Reading: Ephesians 4:1-6

- Paul calls us to live a life worthy of the name “Christian.”
- A Christian is humble, gentle, and patient: “bearing with one another through love.”
- As we have one God and Father, one Lord and Savior, so must we live as one family.

Gospel: John 6:1-15

- All four Gospels tell of the multiplication of loaves and the feeding of the multitude.
- In John, a crowd has followed Jesus across the sea.
- Jesus knew the sign He would perform, but He asks Philip where they can buy bread to feed the crowd. Philip is negative: we will never have enough money to feed this mob.
- Andrew, a bit more optimistic, but perhaps only half serious, points out a lad with five loaves of bread and two fish.
- In a foreshadowing of the Last Supper, Jesus blesses the bread and shares it along with the fish; twelve baskets are filled with what is left over. Now fed, the people call Jesus a prophet.

Food For Thought:

There is a hunger deep inside of all of us. This deepest of hungers, of course, is to be loved, to be known, to belong. When we come to the Eucharist, this hunger is reached, touched and satisfied. So, we can sing: “You satisfy the hungry heart with gift of finest wheat.”

Popes and bishops have often reminded us that the most basic unit of Church is the family. Nourished on Sunday at the table of the Word and Eucharist, family members must be bread for one another on Monday and throughout the week. Blessed by God, we must allow the Lord to break open our hearts so that we might fully give ourselves to those whose hearts are hurting.
**Story:**
A little girl notices one of her classmates never seems to smile. “Mommy,” she says one day after school, “she doesn’t look happy. Her clothes don’t look washed. Her hair isn’t combed.” As you might suspect, the girl whose hair isn’t combed is often left out of games on the playground. The mother says to her daughter “What can you do?” “Maybe I can be her friend,” the little girl offers. This is how it begins – compassion – noticing, paying attention, asking ourselves “What can we do?”

**Petition:**
That, as disciples of the Lord Jesus, we will pay attention to the hurts and hungers of the people with whom we live and work and of the strangers we meet this week, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin:**
This week practice Presence. It is our Catholic teaching that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist. Having partaken of this heavenly food, we must be bread for one another by being really present to each other – starting in our families.
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15

- We hear a lot of grumbling against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.
- The people complain that it would be better to be slaves than to be free and hungry.
- The Lord gives them bread from heaven – manna.

Second Reading: Ephesians 4:17, 20-24

- Paul reminds the Ephesians, and us, to put on our new selves.
- We are to renew our minds.
- We are to live in righteousness and holiness of truth.

Gospel: John 6:24-35

- The well fed crowd goes looking for Jesus.
- Jesus invites them to work for food that will last forever and to believe that He is the one sent by God.
- The people want more signs.
- Jesus is the Bread of Life.

Food For Thought:
When children leave home, a spouse retires, or, even more difficult, a loved one dies, we find ourselves in transition. Transitions, whether for an individual, a married couple, or a whole family, can be difficult and scary times – like going out into the wilderness where there are no landmarks, where nothing is familiar. The temptation is not to continue the journey, but to turn back; not to grow and mature, but to hide in what looks like security and comfort, but is actually regression, withdrawal, co-dependency, even enslavement (as in the case of the Israelites). However, in the wilderness, in the transitions of our lives, we also have the unique opportunity to learn to trust in what is permanent and to find our center and our sustenance – Jesus Christ – true food – bread from heaven.

Story:
About to begin a new pastorate, a priest told his spiritual director that it had been his experience in past moves that the first few weeks of a new parish assignment were the most challenging and rewarding time in his life. “How so?” the director asked him. “Most challenging – because I am all alone. I know no one, not the staff, not any of the parishioners. I am in that regard, on my own. Most rewarding – for the same reason. I have no one but Christ.”
**Petition:**
For all individuals, couples and families who find themselves in transition, that the Eucharist, our Bread from Heaven, will sustain them and strengthen them as their food for the new journey they chart, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin:**
How have you recently experienced a life transition? How do you deal with change? How do the members of your household help each other during transition? Where is God in your life when you find yourself in the wilderness? How does the Eucharist sustain you?
19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: 1 Kings 19:4-8

- Elijah, fleeing for his life, goes into the wilderness.
- Things have gotten so bad for him that he prays for death.
- An emphatic angel of the Lord gives him a poke and tells him to eat.
- Elijah is strengthened by the gift of this food and walks forty days and forty nights to Mt. Horeb.

Second Reading: Ephesians 4:30-5:2

- Paul continues his ethical exhortation.
- The apostle is insistent as he instructs the faithful to imitate God!
- “Christians are to forgive one another because Christ has forgiven them, and they are to walk in love because Christ loves them with a love that expresses itself in sacrificial terms.” (Preaching the Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today, Reginald Fuller, p. 335)

Gospel: John 6:41-51

- There’s a lot of murmuring going on; people think they’ve got Jesus pegged: he’s the son of Joseph and Mary.
- What’s all this talk about being the bread that came down from heaven?
- Jesus refers to the manna the Israelites ate in the desert, which we heard about two Sundays ago, and He tells the people He is the living bread and whoever eats this bread will live forever.
- Jesus says, “The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”
- Stayed tuned—next Sunday we get the reaction of the people!

Food For Thought:

We must be careful not to become like the neighbors of Jesus who could only see him in one dimension, as the man down the street, a good guy, a great teacher, but nothing more. Jesus is the Bread of Life. Whoever eats this bread will have eternal life. Like Elijah, sometimes things get so bad we feel like giving up. It is the Eucharist, our daily bread, that gives us the strength to get up and move on and to do even more than that—to love and forgive one another as we never thought possible, to love as Christ loves us, to imitate God. The Eucharist holds us, forms us, and shapes us into the Body of Christ. Parents must tell their children what the Eucharist means and how it changes their lives on a daily basis.
**Story:**
When he was instructing a couple for marriage, Dietrich Bonhoeffer the great Lutheran priest and martyr, would caution them with words to this effect: “Right now you are in love and you believe that your love can sustain your marriage. It can’t. But your marriage can sustain your love!” The Eucharist is such a ritual-container for Christians. We can’t sustain our faith, charity, forgiveness, and hope on the basis of feeling or thought, but we can sustain them through the Eucharist.” *(Our One Great Act of Fidelity: Waiting for Christ in the Eucharist, Ronald Rolheiser, Doubleday, 2011, pgs. 121-122).* On explaining why she no longer attended Mass, one young adult said, “I don’t need to go to the mall to go shopping, so I don’t need to go to church to pray.” William Porter, a teacher, writes: “[Mass] is a cumulative experience, something that forms you. If you don’t do it, you get formed without it, formed in another way… To the young I can only say this: Do this for a long time and it will change the way you see. The familiar words you have heard and spoken hundreds of times, thousands of times, will no longer be boring. They will be like warm and familiar waters, and your spirit will float restfully in them. Over a lifetime, the words and gestures of the Mass will become heavy with the memory of all the people you’ve said and done them with. They will begin to speak to you of the living and the dead. You will see the Body of Christ.” *(“Assembly Required,” Commonweal)*

**Petition:**
That our participation in this Eucharist will deepen our bond to Christ and to one another; we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
How does the Eucharist impact your life? Can you share this with someone this week?
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Proverbs 9: 1-6

- Forsake foolishness to advance in the way of understanding.
- Marriage, in the eyes of the secular world, is foolishness and yet it does provide the context in which to understand God.
- The relationship between Christ and the Church is often referred to as similar to the relationship between a bridegroom and bride.
- How do we respond when the secular world challenges our Catholic vision of the sacrament of marriage?

Second Reading: Ephesians 5: 15-20

- St. Paul asks whether we are trying to understand the will of God.
- That is a powerful question, as it points to how we choose to integrate and reflect Christ in our lives.
- The phrase “singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts” is a wonderful way of exploring our prayer life within the context of a marriage/family. Is praying together as a family something that you have to do—in other words, a burden—or something you choose to do? Many families, before meals, go around the table and ask what they are thankful for that day; even the smallest child can join in this type of prayer.

Gospel: John 6: 51-58

- We, as Catholics, join in the Eucharist, our “communion,” our sacred time, to find ourselves drawn together as one in Christ.
- Married couples are also uniquely drawn together as one. The sacrament of marriage is where grace is manifest, where two become one, and where, through that shared mystery (“sacramentum” in Latin, “mysterion” in Greek), they experience God in their lives.

Food For Thought:
The relationship between Christ and the Church is often referred to as similar to the relationship of a bridegroom and bride. Jesus, we know, often went aside to pray. Do we set aside time each day to pray for our spouses? For our children?

Story:
A woman I know sends a text message to her children every morning, telling them that she loves them and is praying for them. These adult children cherish that message from Mom every day—even though it remains the same. Would you be brave enough to send a message like that to your children?
**Petition:**
That the sacred communion between husbands and wives serves to sanctify the lives of their children and friends, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Married couples are uniquely drawn together as one. The sacrament of marriage is where grace is manifest, where two become one, and where, through that shared mystery, they experience God in their lives. This week, pray for the grace to become more aware of the presence of God in your family life. It is His calling that drew you together as one, and it is His strength that guides your actions as loving spouses.
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Joshua 24: 1-2a, 15-17, 18b

- “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”
- You can almost imagine a tapestry hanging in every home with this quote from Joshua.
- In the people’s response to Joshua’s reminder, the people proclaimed, “…for He is our God.”
- Do we live our lives as married men and women, as husbands and wives, as parents, with this declaration on our lips?
- A simple reminder could be to keep a Baptismal candle in a candle holder where you can see it every day, rather than storing it in a hope chest. This would be a tangible reminder as you go out and enter into the world—and especially when you return—that we are “a household” of people baptized in Jesus Christ and it makes a difference in our lives every day.

Second Reading: Ephesians 5: 21-32

- This is one of St. Paul’s “tough” marriage readings if you don’t understand the context. “Wives, be subordinate to your husbands…” goes with “husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her…”
- These “household rules” offered by St. Paul were intended to help the early Christians to fit in with Roman society and not draw attention to themselves through any type of family controversies.
- As to the context, remember: Christ gave himself up to death for the Church. That is exactly what Paul is suggesting needs to be the commitment to love by husbands—and nothing less. Guys, are you willing to love your wife that deeply?

Gospel: John 6: 60-69

- In this conclusion of the “Bread of Life” discourse, Jesus challenges us to live a life that commits to both spirit (heaven) and earth, to choose our actions based on the deep desire to live as followers of Christ.
- In married life and in families, this translates into helping each other to live such lives. In this way, spouses help each other and parents help their children to seek the holiness that will lead to eternal life.
Food For Thought:
In your busy household, have you ever wondered how often you go in and out of the door at your home? When you head out into the world, do you choose to allow it to make a difference that you are a baptized, beloved son or daughter of Jesus? A simple reminder could be to place a Baptismal candle in a candle holder where you can see it every day, rather than store it in a hope chest. This could be a tangible reminder as you go out to enter the world—and especially when you return—that “we are a household of People baptized in Jesus Christ, and that it makes a difference in our lives every day.”

Petition:
For each parishioner, that as you make your houses homes that reflect your beliefs, you are able to declare to every visitor, “… as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord,” we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
In your busy household, have you ever wondered how often you go in and out of the door at your home? When you head out into the world, do you choose to allow yourself to be different because you are a baptized, beloved son or daughter of Jesus? A simple reminder could be to place a Baptismal candle, not stored in a hope chest, but in a candle holder where you can see it every day, a tangible reminder as you go out to enter the world and especially when you return, that “we are a household of people who are baptized in Jesus Christ, and it makes a difference in our lives every day.”
22rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8
- As to the commandments of God, “… you shall not add to what I command you nor subtract from it.”
- What context do we choose as the foundation for our lives: God’s commandments or the secular world?

Second Reading: James 1-17-18, 21b-22, 27
- “Welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls. Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves.”
- How do we delude ourselves? Do we, especially when things are going well, presume that the good in our lives is a result of our own accomplishments, or do we continue to count our gifts each day?
- Do we see how our family life, and our roles as parents, spouses, children, brothers and sisters all have the opportunity to reflect our Christian values.

Gospel: Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23
- “You disregard God’s commandment but cling to human tradition.” When we link this with the first and second readings, we need to consider just how we embrace God’s commandments within our families.
- Never lose sight of the obligation which parents accept at the Baptism of their children: to be the first and best teachers of the ways of our faith. Do our actions, in fact, reflect this reality? Imagine for a moment the questions that we would typically ask in a parish reconciliation service as part of our examination of conscience, questions which challenge us to consider where we place God and His commandments in our lives.
- Next, consider how, as parents, our role is both to teach these precepts and to help make them happen when our children cannot do them on their own, such as the obligation for Mass and getting to religious education.

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

Petition:
For married couples, that together they strive to conform to the Gospel and Jesus’ plan for their lives before they strive for success as the world knows it, we pray to the Lord.
**Bulletin Announcement:**
In the Baptism Rite, as each child is welcomed into the Church, we have this reminder: “Dear parents and godparents: … On your part, you must make it your constant care to bring them up in the practice of the faith. See that the divine life which God gives them is kept safe from the poison of sin, to grow always stronger in their hearts.” Something to ponder for all parents is this: how am I living this sacred promise in the hectic chaos of our busy families? Am I teaching my children all they need about our faith with my words, action and time?
First Reading: Isaiah 35:4-7a

- “Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not!”
- When we gather with spouses and family members in the midst of any crisis, we gather with frightened hearts. That fear is only natural, but simply by sharing the fear with another – a spouse or parent – we find a source of strength in the midst of the fear; we realize that we are not alone.
- The next line of Isaiah reveals why we can shed our fear: “Here is your God!”
- When we pray together, we remind each other of the presence and power of God in our lives when we are facing any sort of crisis.

Second Reading: James 2:1-5

- “…show no partiality as you adhere to the faith of our glorious Jesus Christ.”
- This lesson from Saint James is part of what parents must teach children: to avoid judging “…a poor person in shabby clothes …” and those who are less fortunate than ourselves.
- In our society, care for the anawim, those on the edges of society, does not seem to come naturally. Within the family home, the first domestic church, we have an opportunity to create a new community where care for the less fortunate is our focus, guided by parents teaching their children.

Gospel: Mark 7:31-37

- The miracle of the deaf man is often viewed from a distance and with a detachment that is quick to admire Jesus’ action, but has little to do with my life.
- But each of us, especially within families, may be deaf in our own ways. Do we really hear with our hearts the cries and the needs of those in our own home, of our brothers and sisters, of our neighbors?
- Only when we make the effort to listen deeply to others can we respond to their cries for help, cries of despair, and cries of fear. This listening begins first and foremost within our families, or it will never be heard outside out homes.

Food for Thought:

St. Mark’s Gospel reminds us this week that Jesus cured the deaf man. We should consider how each of us may be deaf; do we hear the cries of the poor around us in our homes and community? Do I choose to be deaf, or to selectively hear only what is convenient? Do I remain open to hearing the needs of my spouse and family, or do I choose to block their cries and focus instead on my own needs?
**Petition:**
As Jesus cured the deaf man, may His healing power enter into our lives so that we hear and remain open to those in our lives who share our homes, and so that families are able to listen with an open heart to each other and to the needs of those around them, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
St. Mark’s Gospel reminds us this week that Jesus’ cured the deaf man. We should consider how each of us may be deaf. Do we hear the cries of the poor around us in our homes and community? Do I choose to be deaf, or to selectively hear only what is convenient? Do I remain open to hearing the needs of my spouse and family, or do I choose to block their cries and focus instead on my own needs?
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 50: 5-9a

- “The Lord God opens my ear that I may hear…The Lord is my help.”(Isaiah 50: 4)
- One of the main tenants of marriage is that spouses help each other to get to heaven, for that is our ultimate reward and promise.
- Recognizing that God opens our ears and our hearts to His message is an invitation to couples to consider how they might pray together, helping and guiding each other to a closer relationship to Jesus through their shared hopes, fears and dreams.

Second Reading: James 2: 14-18

- Faith and works…not faith or works.
- James reminds us that our faith is not something to be placed on a shelf, or even to be brought out for an hour each week at Mass.
- Consider the role of parents as teachers of their children; how do the children learn? Stories of faith and praying together are important, but children learn best from watching their parents put faith into action. The bedtime prayer that becomes the actions of mom or dad the next day is a far more powerful message to offer your child. Praying together—yes; working for the kingdom of God together—priceless.

Gospel: Mark 8: 27-35

- Let’s forget for a moment what others say. Jesus asks us the same question He asks Peter: “Who do you say that I am?”(Mark 8:29)
- Each husband and wife needs to answer this question every day. Each parent needs to answer this question every day. Every son and daughter and every child needs to answer this question each day.
- How? We answer the question by what we say and do with every person we meet.
- Know that we do not answer this question alone, or in a vacuum; relate this to the first reading about putting our faith into action in our works.

Food for Thought:
Consider placing a Baptismal candle in a stand near your front door, perhaps where you pick up and drop your keys. As you head out each day, and most importantly as you arrive back at your home each night, it will help you remember that you are baptized. Remembering will make a difference in your actions.
Petition:
That the love shared within each family home guides each husband and wife, and each child, to discover more deeply the love of Jesus for each one of us, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
“Who do you say that I am,” is the question Jesus asks Peter in this week’s Gospel. This is a question that Jesus asks of each of us, and we must answer each day with our words and our actions. Will others recognize in the lives of each married couple their implicit answer to Jesus? Will they, through watching us, be witnesses to the Gospel in the world?
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Wisdom 2: 12, 17-20

- This first reading begins with the phrase, “The wicked say…” And this is the theme we are reading, that what is described are the actions of those who are wicked against the righteous man or woman. In the verses that are skipped this week, verses 13-16, we would find their description of the righteous person as one who professes a knowledge of God, who the wicked say is “…a reproof to our thoughts because the very sight of him is a burden because his manner of life is unlike others.”(Wisdom 2:14-15)

- This begs, for you and I, the question as to whether we have chosen to be the righteous or the wicked, and I hope you choose the righteous path! That also serves as a reminder that the very best witness to living as true disciples of Jesus starts in our homes, where husbands and wives love each other without limits, and where their love for their children is allowed to direct their actions. Thus from love, and from love alone, we find the foundation of faith-filled family life.

Second Reading: James 3: 16-4:3

- The second reading connects with the first when the wise, which should be all of Jesus’ disciples, reflect God’s peace, gentleness, compliance and mercy.

- We choose the paths of faithfulness each day; parents have the chance (and obligation) to remind their children through words and actions to make good choices in life.

Gospel: Mark 9:30-37

- Jesus’ chosen disciples were arguing; they were trying to decide who was the greatest among them. But Jesus reminds them that this way of thinking is completely backwards.

- When He places a child in their midst, He is pointing to a little one who has no great wisdom and who has no particular strength to offer. By His action, Jesus reminds us to treat the least as the greatest.

- Love, particularly married love, must be lived in this way. Actions must be free of all selfishness, and are offered freely for the benefit of the other. As with the second reading, married love reflects not jealously seeking to be the greatest, but instead reflects peacefulness, gentleness and a depth of forgiveness for each other’s weaknesses and failings that is without limits.

Food for Thought:

Saint Mark recounts in today’s Gospel which of the disciples would be the greatest. When Jesus places a child in their midst, He is pointing to a little one who has no great wisdom and who has no particular strength to offer. By His action, Jesus reminds us to treat the least as the greatest. Love, particularly married love, must be lived in this way. Actions must be free of all selfishness, and are offered freely for the benefit of the other.
**Petition:**
As Jesus invited His disciples to model the trust and love in the life of a simple child, may each of our homes reflect the tender love of Jesus, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Saint Mark recounts in today’s Gospel which of the disciples would be the greatest. When Jesus places a child in their midst, He is pointing to a little one who has no great wisdom and who has no particular strength to offer. By His action, Jesus reminds us to treat the least as the greatest. Love, particularly married love, must be lived in this way. Actions must be free of all selfishness, and are offered freely for the benefit of the other. How do we make ourselves the least in our marriage, so that we encourage our spouse to be the greatest?
26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Numbers 11:25-29

- “Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets! Would that the Lord might bestow His spirit on them all!”

- From our Baptism, we are called to be “priest, prophet, and king.” We make sacrifices for others (priest). We are the princes and princesses of the kingdom of God (royalty). We are called to be prophets with our lives.

- How do I serve as a prophet in my married life? As a parent? As a spouse?

- Consider that “whenever two or more are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst” (Mt 18:20). Couples in the sacrament of Matrimony are those two gathered in the name of Jesus who created this sacrament. Will others recognize Jesus in your lives together? More importantly, as disciples, do you reflect that wherever you go – work, family gatherings, picnics, etc. - you bring Jesus as your guest from within your marriage?

Second Reading: James 5:1-6

- The verses in James, of course, have a corollary in positive statements; it is not all about those who store up treasure on earth, but those who store up treasure in heaven through their lives here on earth.

- One of the tenets of Christian marriage is that spouses help each other get to heaven. This means helping each other to recognize what type of treasure you are accumulating and valuing the most.

- In the previous chapter, James wrote, “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you” (Jas 4:8). Helping each other, you indeed do draw near to God, and in doing so, you invite Him to be part of your home and lives together.

Gospel: Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

- “Whoever is not against us is for us. Anyone who gives a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward.”

- A cup of water seems so simple; it does not reflect wealth or status. We may take it for granted, simply turning on a faucet and there it is. Yet water is priceless for life, and the Gospel reminds us that even that simple cup of water may be given because one belongs to Christ.

- When did you last offer a cup of water to someone for Christ? Perhaps this is a metaphor, but it is also a wise truth. Serving Jesus within your family life can be done through the little things - the everyday actions offered to spouses, children, or neighbors. These small actions are absolutely essential to a Christian life in the community of our home, our parish, our country, and our world.
• Connect this thought to the first reading and the call to serve as a prophet with your very life.

**Food For Thought:**
All baptized persons are called to be prophets, to have their words and actions become examples of faithful discipleship. When couples are prepared for the sacrament of marriage, we often ask them to look to their parents’ and grandparents’ lives of faith for examples of where their beliefs were first formed. The reality is that our youngest parishioners are watching and learning from parents, grandparents, neighbors, and friends. They are learning from watching YOU. Am I offering them the best example I can in my daily life? Am I giving them something worth watching to form their tender ideas about marriage and family life as Christian disciples?

**Petition:**
That faithful families in our parish community will serve as role models for others who may be struggling in their relationships, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
All baptized persons are called to be prophets, to have their words and actions become examples of faithful discipleship. When couples are prepared for the sacrament of marriage, we often ask them to look to their parents’ and grandparents’ lives of faith for examples of where their beliefs were first formed. The reality is that our youngest parishioners are watching and learning from parents, grandparents, neighbors, and friends. They are learning from watching YOU. Am I offering them the best example I can in my daily life? Am I giving them something worth watching to form their tender ideas about marriage and family life as Christian disciples?
27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Genesis 2: 18-24

• Because it was not “good” for man to be alone, God created a helper for him.

• The term “helper” does not imply subservience. God himself is referred to as helper. (Ps 46:2; Dt 33:7) The term suggests a supportive, nurturing relationship.

• One body (one flesh) indicates the deep affinity between husbands and wives.

• The sacrament of Matrimony unites husband and wife in the strong next of kin relationship.

Second Reading: Hebrews 2: 9-11

• By sharing our humanity, and by suffering and dying for us, Jesus showed us what love and unity looks like.

Gospel: Mark 10: 2-16

• The Pharisees’ question about divorce was meant to trap Jesus in a legalistic debate. Instead, Jesus brought the issue back to God’s original intention for marriage—an intimate partnership of life and love.

• The sacrament of Matrimony mirrors God’s love for us. Conjugal love “in Christ” involves mutual and total self-giving.

• Nevertheless, we live in a broken world and the intimate partnership of husband and wife may be damaged or broken by abuse, infidelity, conflict, and the like.

• The truths of any particular marriage are personal and known only by the individuals involved. We must be careful not to judge others’ situations. For specific questions, speak with a priest or pastoral minister qualified in this area.

Food For Thought:
When challenged, instead of entering a legalistic debate about divorce, Jesus brought up God’s original intention for marriage. Isolation isn’t good, so God created a helper for man. The term helper doesn’t imply subservience, but a supportive, nurturing relationship. God himself is referred to as helper in Scripture.

Mutual self-giving is supposed to lead spouses to a deeper understanding of God’s love and reflect that love to the world. This vocation calls for God’s grace.

Becoming “one flesh” reveals a unity joined by God that no human should separate. However, in this broken world, that intimate partnership may be damaged or broken by abuse, infidelity, and the like. We believe that Christ offers grace to heal relationships damaged by sin, but the truth of an individual situation is known only to the two people involved. We must be careful not to judge other people’s situations. For specific questions, talk to a priest or qualified pastoral minister.
Story:
Two days after Jim and Cathy got married, Jim was admitted to the hospital for surgery. Kathy was listed as “next of kin” on the admission form—a week earlier they weren’t related at all. On their wedding day, Jim and Cathy freely united themselves in that most intimate union, the sacrament of marriage. Living out that sacrament will take them a lifetime.

Of course Cathy looked after Jim’s needs and took on all the household duties while he recuperated, but when he recovered, Jim assumed his share of the responsibilities. Although at times one or the other spouse may need more support, the self-giving of spouses is meant to be mutual.

Self-giving to anyone—family or friends—doesn’t mean doing things for others that they can and should do for themselves. Loving others never means being a doormat. Sometimes loving means allowing others the dignity of taking responsibility for what should be their tasks. Neither Jim nor Cathy should take over all the practical or emotional responsibilities of the marriage. That’s not self-giving. It’s a subtle form of co-dependency. The mutual self-giving in marriage reflects God’s love, not subservient co-dependence.

Petition:
That married couples may reflect God’s love as they give themselves in loving service to each other and to their community, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
Both respect and self-giving are essential in order for relationships to reflect God’s love. Mutual self-giving leads spouses to a deeper understanding of God’s love for each person, and allows husbands and wives to serve as witnesses to God’s love with family and friends.
First Reading: Wisdom 7: 7-11

- Solomon prayed for wisdom and valued it more than power, money, or status. Because he put wisdom first, Solomon received all the other gifts as well.
- Wisdom is God’s gift and goes beyond the limits of human understanding.

Second Reading: Hebrews 4: 12-13

- The word of God penetrates deep into our whole being. God knows us intimately, including the deepest desires of our hearts.

Gospel: Mark 10: 17-30

- A rich man asked what he needed to do to inherit (rather than earn) eternal life. Although Jesus recited commandments such as you shall not kill, steal, or commit adultery, Jesus left out the commandments against worshipping idols and against coveting, that is, wanting what belongs to others. These commandments involve more than external compliance.
- When the rich man said he’d kept all the (external) commands mentioned, Jesus, looking at him with love, went to the heart of the matter. Jesus told the man he needed only to sell his riches and give the money to the poor.
- The rich man went away sad. He couldn’t bring himself to value things with eternal value more than his riches, which seemed to include both his possessions and what he saw as blameless compliance with the externals of the law.
- We can get caught up in externals and lose sight of our deepest desires.

Food For Thought:

A rich man asked Jesus what he needed to do to *inherit* (rather than earn) eternal life. When Jesus recited commandments such as don’t steal, don’t murder, and don’t commit adultery, the man claimed to have kept them all. Apparently this man’s riches included not only his possessions, but what he saw as his blameless (outward) compliance with Mosaic Law.

Jesus, filled with love, invited the man to share his wealth with the poor and follow Him. This involved more than external compliance, but went to the heart of the matter—the commandments against coveting (craving) or making an idol out of riches.

Unlike Solomon, who valued wisdom over worldly success, the man couldn’t bring himself to put eternal values before wealth. As we’re reminded in Hebrews, God knows us intimately. There’s no use trying to pretend. God knows the desires of our hearts—but no matter what He finds there, He loves us. It’s safe to be honest with God.

Wisdom and eternal life are not do-it-yourself projects. They are gifts from God. We respond by receiving, rejoicing, and saying thank you.
**Story:**
Do we make idols out of our own accomplishments? Focusing on externals can blind us to the deeper needs of our loved ones and the values that give meaning to our lives. God knows us intimately and understands what we want and need. It’s safe to be honest with God and “receive” the healing our hearts can’t achieve on their own.

Nancy tried to show love for her family by being the perfect wife and mother. It wore her out. For example, she’d come home from her full time job every night and cook dinner from scratch, meanwhile resenting the laughter she heard as her husband and their preschooler played in the living room. Tired and irritable, she complained her family didn’t appreciate all she did for them.

Nancy was so focused on what she thought she had to do to be the perfect homemaker that she lost sight of the love her family needed from her. Her misguided goal blocked Nancy from the deepest desire of her heart, a richer family life.

Finally, Nancy poured out all her resentment, exhaustion, and demoralization in prayer. She was led to a support group that showed her the pressure she put on herself wasn’t what God wanted for her or her family. Nancy stopped trying so hard—even though it was scary, because her self-worth was wrapped up in how much she accomplished. As she trusted her new heart-wisdom and eased up on herself, Nancy’s relationship with her family deepened.

**Petition:**
That family members who trust in their own resources may learn to trust in God’s wisdom and love, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Spiritual growth is not a do-it-yourself project but involves humbly trusting God rather than our own accomplishments.
First Reading: Isaiah 53: 10-11

- Isaiah’s prophecy about the suffering servant foreshadowed the suffering that Jesus willingly accepted for our redemption.

Second Reading: Hebrews 4: 14-16

- Jesus, though fully God, was also fully human. He shared our human experience in every way and experienced the same temptations we do.
- Because of this, He can sympathize with our weaknesses.
- Though sinless, Jesus stood in solidarity with us to become a conduit for God’s mercy and grace. Just as the Old Testament priests offered sacrifices for their own sins and the sins of the people, Jesus offered the sacrifice of His own Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

Gospel: Mark 10: 35-45

- On three separate occasions, Jesus told his disciples about the suffering and death that awaited Him in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, on the way to Jerusalem, James and John asked Jesus for places of honor in the coming kingdom.
- The other disciples, perhaps feeling threatened with loss of prestige, were offended that James and John jockeyed for positions of honor.
- All the disciples failed to understand that following Jesus, who was giving His life to save others, didn’t mean basking in glory. It meant surrendering self-will, serving others, and sometimes enduring suffering. We often fail to understand that, too.
- Jesus plainly told the disciples, as He tells us, that sharing His glory involves personal sacrifice and being of humble service. Family life affords many opportunities to give up our own egos in order to serve our loved ones.

Food For Thought:

We all want to feel special. There’s nothing wrong with healthy self-esteem, needing validation, or accepting a pat on the back for a job well done. The danger is when pumping up our egos comes at someone else’s expense. EGO is an acronym for Easing God Out. We all have talents and weaknesses. That doesn’t make us better or worse than others who happen to have different talents and weaknesses. When we waste our time comparing ourselves to others, we lose sight of the fact that we’re all special in our uniqueness. We’re already precious beyond comprehension. The Son of God loved each of us enough to suffer and offer His life for us. Maybe Jesus could accept humiliation and pain instead of the earthly glory due Him because He was anchored so deeply in His Father’s love that He didn’t need to prop up His ego.
**Story:**
“The Praying Hands,” a well-known picture by Albrecht Durer, depicts a pair of disfigured arthritic hands folded in prayer. Durer drew the hands in tribute to his brother Albert, who worked as a miner to support Albrecht’s art studies. They agreed that when Albrecht completed his studies, he would support his brother Albert, who also dreamed of being an artist, during his studies. Unfortunately, four years of working in the mines damaged Albert’s hands so badly he could no longer paint or draw. Although Albrecht got the renown his talent deserved, his brother’s loving sacrifice is no less worthy of honor.

Family life creates daily opportunities to sacrifice personal glory and humbly serve our loved ones. A father gives up perfecting his weekend golf game to coach his child’s soccer team. A single mother doesn’t dress in trendy fashions so her children can have nice clothes to wear to school. An adolescent gives up time he could be winning the latest video game to help his little sister with long division. These sacrifices might not make headlines, but they are ways families choose humble service over ego-pumping.

When we give in to our egos we can acknowledge it honestly. We have a great high priest who understands our weaknesses. Jesus stood in solidarity with us and became like us in every way but sin. He offered Himself as a sacrifice for us and became a conduit for God’s mercy and grace. When we remember that, we don’t need ego. We have something better. We have love.

**Petition:**
That families, anchored in God’s grace, live out their love in humble service to one another, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Opportunities for both the glory and sacrifice of humble service abound as we follow Christ in our daily lives.
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Jeremiah 31: 7-9

- God promised to save his people, bringing them back from the ends of the earth and especially caring for those who are vulnerable.
- God promised to guide them (and us) to life-giving water with the care a loving father gives his firstborn child and to protect them from stumbling on the path.

Second Reading: Hebrews 5: 1-6

- Christ endured human suffering and death for our sake, offering the perfect sacrifice of Himself, once and for all, for the forgiveness of our sins.
- The Son of God understands our challenges and has compassion for our weaknesses because He shared our human experience.

Gospel: Mark 10: 46-52

- Although physically blind, Bartimaeus recognized Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of David, and called out to Him for mercy.
- When the people told him to be quiet, Bartimaeus called out even louder—perhaps realizing he was on his own and couldn’t count on support from the people nearest him. He put his hope in Jesus.
- After Jesus called him, Bartimaeus threw down his cloak, his protective covering, and approached Jesus, who welcomed him.
- Once Jesus restored his sight, Bartimaeus, although free to go his own way, followed where Jesus led.

Food For Thought:
Like a loving parent, God cares for us, especially when we’re vulnerable. He offers us a sure path to life-giving water. Christ, our great High Priest, understands our weaknesses and challenges because He shared our human experience.

Bartimaeus, when called by Jesus, threw down his cloak. What are we wrapped up in that keeps us from answering Jesus’ call? Like Bartimaeus, we’re invited to throw off our protective covering—whatever insulates or entangles us and keeps us from drawing closer to Christ.

Once his sight was restored, Bartimaeus freely chose to follow Jesus. Once we can see clearly, will we follow the path that leads to the living water Jesus offers? That water will refresh, sustain, and strengthen us to share God’s love in our daily lives.
Story:
As a child, Jane got her ideas about marriage from watching her parents. Their love, filtered through the fog of alcoholism, influenced Jane into young adulthood. Her need for approval, her high tolerance for criticism, her idea that silent co-existence was preferable to daily arguments contributed to Jane’s idea of what marriage looked like.

Being Catholic, Jane heard about Marriage Encounter, but didn’t really think too much about it until, as a single young adult, she volunteered as an RCIA sponsor. She met several couples serving as RCIA leaders, all of whom had been through Marriage Encounter and applied it to their daily lives. Jane saw husbands and wives having frank discussions without belittling each other. She saw spouses cooperating as a team instead of having an “every man for himself” mentality. She saw them share the frustrations of married life and parenting with a healthy touch of humor.

Jane decided that’s what she wanted from a marriage. She sought the help she needed to grow in her ability to participate in a healthy relationship. It took courage to throw off the encumbrances of childhood impressions. Jane found a support group that helped her correct her outlook on acceptable and unacceptable behavior in relationships. Faith and hope helped her follow the path her heavenly Father lovingly laid out for her. After several years, Jane met the man who became her husband, and they are now living out their vocation in a healthy marriage.

Petition:
For those struggling with the challenges of marriage, that God draws them closer to Him and to each other, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
God lovingly invites us to draw closer to Him. Faith, hope, and love enable us to let go of whatever encumbrances keep us from responding.
31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Deuteronomy 6: 2-6

- God’s laws aren’t arbitrary. They’re for our benefit. We’re called to obey so that “it may go well” for us.
- The first and foremost commandment is to love God with all our heart, mind, and strength. Loving God isn’t just a feeling of affection or an intellectual exercise. It involves our whole being.
- God manifested His love by choosing the people of Israel to be His own, calling them out of slavery, and leading them to the land He promised them.
- Loving God with all our being is not something we manufacture on our own. It’s a response to the love He first lavished on us.

Second Reading: Hebrews 7: 23-28

- God’s love for us was manifested through Christ’s perfect and totally self-giving sacrifice on the cross.
- We’re called to respond to this lavish love by loving God in return.

Gospel: Mark 12: 28b-34

- In agreement with the Jewish Levitical teaching, Jesus affirmed that the greatest and most important commandment is to love God with all our heart, mind, and strength. Our love for God is a response to God’s love for us.
- Jesus united this commandment with the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. If we love God, how can we not love all those He loves?
- But as the first commandment reminds us, love is more than a feeling of affection. Feelings come and go. We can’t command ourselves to feel a certain way. We respond to God’s total, self-giving love with our whole being.
- Love is a choice, a decision to act in someone’s best interests, regardless of our feelings.
**Food For Thought:**

God lavished His love on His chosen people by leading them out of slavery to the Promised Land. He lavished His love on us through Christ’s perfect sacrifice for our salvation. We respond by loving God with all our being. Love is more than feelings, thoughts, or words. Authentic love shows itself in actions. As Jesus made clear, loving God is closely connected with loving our neighbor as (not instead of) ourselves. How? We take care of our bodies. We nurture our hearts by connecting with friends and family. We nourish our minds with positive input. We feed our souls through the sacraments and prayer. To love others in the same way sounds a lot like the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy: feed the hungry, clothe the naked, instruct the ignorant, comfort the sorrowful, visit the sick, and so on.

Love isn’t feeling permanent affection but investing in someone’s well-being. We take care of ourselves whether we feel like it or not; we can act in our loved ones’ best interest whether we feel like it or not. Opportunities abound—especially in marriage and family life.

**Story:**

In a scene from *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevya asks his wife if she loves him. She responds by saying for 25 years she washed his clothes, cooked for him, fought with him, starved with him…if that’s not love, what is?” Romantic feelings are impossible to sustain over the ups, downs, and monotony of every-day life. But commitment to serve each other, to share responsibilities, to trust that love is stronger than passing arguments is a choice husbands and wives make every day. Every time a husband or wife does the laundry or balances the check-book, they are loving with their mind, heart, and strength. When they go the extra mile they are reflecting and responding to Christ’s sacrificial love. Maybe dad takes the two a.m. feeding so mom can get some extra rest, or mom chaperones the Cub Scout fishing trip so dad can go to a men’s conference.

This kind of love doesn’t happen on its own but through God’s grace. Picture a triangle, with the husband and wife as the two bottom angles and God at the top. Both sides taper inward and upward. As each spouse grows closer to God, they also grow closer to each other.

Taking quiet time to pray can be challenging in the hectic world of raising a family together, but every effort to corral the kids and get them to Sunday Mass—under heroic conditions of lost shoes, sleepy heads, and morning chaos—is putting their love for God and for each other into action.

**Petition:**

That husbands and wives nurture each other and their families through loving words and actions, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**

As we respond to the love God has lavished on us, we’re empowered to reach out beyond ourselves in love.
32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: 1 Kings 17: 10-16

- When Elijah asked a poor widow for some bread, she told him she had only enough flour to prepare one last meal for herself and her son. Elijah assured her of God’s promise that the flour would not run out until the drought was over.

- Although a foreigner, she trusted the prophet and his God enough to obey, and, as promised, the three of them had enough food to last throughout the drought.

- After she had used the last of the flour, how did it feel to reach in for more for the next meal? What gave her the willingness to bother reaching in again?

- When have you felt like you had nothing left and were running on empty, yet somehow, reached deep inside and found the resources to rise to the occasion or make it through one more day? Can you see God’s hand providing and doing for you what you could not do for yourself?

Second Reading: Hebrews 9: 24-28

- Jesus did for us what we could never do for ourselves. Unlike the Old Testament high priests, Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice of his own body and blood once and for all.

- Nothing we could do on our own could achieve our own salvation. We are dependent on God’s grace and mercy.

- Although God’s love, grace, and mercy are available to all, we receive this grace and mercy when we recognize our need for it. If we are self-righteous and sure of our own goodness, we won’t recognize our need to have God do for us what we can’t do for ourselves.

Gospel: Mark 2: 38-44

- Jesus commended the poor widow who, although she donated only a few pennies, showed more generosity than the rich people who gave only what they had to spare. Her generosity and her faith empowered her to share all she had to live on.

- Like the widow in the first reading, this poor woman was willing to share all she had, trusting God to take care of her.

- It’s easy to trust our wealth instead of God. We want to hang on to what we depend on, so trusting our wealth leads to self-absorption, stinginess, and a “me first” mentality, quite the opposite of the love, compassion, and community of the kingdom of heaven.

- Financial poverty isn’t the only way to be poor and material wealth isn’t the only way to be rich. We can trust our talents, our ability to work hard, or our intellects, instead of trusting God. Trusting our gifts instead of the Giver leads to self-centeredness and makes it difficult share with others because we feel the need to cling to or prove our own strengths.
Food For Thought:
A widow had enough compassion and trust in God that she shared her last bit of food. Elijah promised her that her flour wouldn’t run out until the famine was over. So she took her last bit of flour and made some bread for Elijah. When the time came for the next meal, what made her willing to reach back into that empty jar?

Ever felt like you’re running on empty? Ever wonder how you are going to make it through the day? Sometimes we don’t feel like we have the resources to face our daily challenges. Spouses acting as caregiver or coping with a rocky marriage or parents struggling to be patient with a difficult child can feel like they’ve got nothing left to give.

God might not sweep away our problems, but we might find we have just enough strength to put one foot in front of the other, day by day. God probably didn’t zap that widow with a year’s supply of flour, but every time she reached into the empty jar, she got just what she needed for that moment. Can we trust God to do the same for us?

Story:
Judy and Ted loved their newborn baby Jenna, but found adjusting to parenthood wasn’t easy. Judy flipped to over-responsible, super-mom mode. She wanted Ted’s support, but Ted, struggling with his own insecurities, didn’t have much to give. He took the 1 a.m. feedings and did the laundry, but found himself needing more time away from the house and started going out with his buddies every night.

By the time baby Jenna was two months old, Ted resented all of Judy’s time being spent on the baby. Judy resented Ted’s nightly abandonment. Judy, frustrated and worn out, fantasized about running away: I’m tired of this. I just want to run away. But I couldn’t leave Jenna. I’d have to take her with me. Where would I go? Then I’d have no one to help. At least Ted takes the late night feeding and does the laundry…and takes the garbage out…and plays with the baby while I make dinner…and…. You get the picture.

Every lonely evening, Judy complained to God, who was the only one around to listen. And every evening, she’d find just enough energy to nurture herself and the baby until bedtime. Sometimes she put on her favorite music and danced the baby around the living room or did some other thing she enjoyed. She wasn’t as frustrated when Ted got home. Eventually Ted stopped going out so much. As the baby got a little older, Ted accepted more hands-on responsibility. Their challenge passed.

We don’t always have a lot to give. When we give what we have, God blesses it. Then it’s always enough.

Petition:
That through God’s grace family members will be empowered to serve each other with love, we pray to the Lord.
Bulletin Announcement:
We all have God-given gifts. When we share what we have with others, we can trust that God will continue to provide us with all we need.
33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Daniel 12: 1-3

- Written during a time of the Maccabean revolt against Hellenistic oppression, the Book of Daniel combines actual historical situations with apocalyptic (end-time) images.

- During a time of national suffering, this passage offered hope and reassurance that God would ultimately triumph.

- The passage demonstrates a belief in the resurrection by stating that some people will go to everlasting life and some to everlasting disgrace.

Second Reading: Hebrews 10: 11-14, 18

- In contrast to the Levitical priests, Jesus’ sacrifice of His body and blood inaugurated the new covenant and brought forgiveness of our sins once and for all.

- Jesus’ sacrifice was so effective that He is now seated at the Father’s right side, waiting until “his enemies are made His footstool,” a theme that reflects the coming of final judgment when evil is punished and good triumphs.

Gospel: Mark 13: 24-32

- Like the first reading, today’s Gospel combines references to an actual occurrence—the Roman persecution and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem—along with images of the end times.

- This is also a message of hope in spite of tribulation, promising that the Son of Man would come again with power and glory to deliver the faithful.

- Tribulation doesn’t have to happen on a national or world-wide level for us to need reassurance that the present troubles aren’t forever. Personal trials often seem like they’ll never end.

- Because no one knows the day or hour when Christ’s return will signal the end times, we’re warned against complacency and urged to act with awareness and live all our days with love.

Food For Thought:
Most death-bed regrets aren’t about working more, but about lost opportunities with loved ones. Today’s readings speak about the end times. No one knows exactly when that will happen, nor do we know when we’ll be called home personally. Because it might come when we’re not expecting it, we should prepare by living every day as God’s children.
Today’s readings invite us to reflect on the choices we’re making in our lives now. Important as it is to help the poor and suffering in our world, how about the people we live with every day? Do we have regrets about our relationships with family members? Can we have the courage to say “I’m sorry” when we’ve hurt someone? Can we have the courage to forgive someone who has hurt us? Every time we do, we get a little more ready for the heavenly kingdom, where the Lord of love, who died to bring us forgiveness, reigns.

As Catholic Christians, we believe in an afterlife where there will be no more sin or pain. How ready are we to participate in God’s kingdom of love? What can we do here and now to get ready?

**Story:**
Bonnie and Jim’s marriage had a lot of mileage on it. Bonnie felt an emotional emptiness in their relationship that didn’t seem to bother Jim. He was content with business as usual. Many would have started looking for a way out, but Bonnie took her marriage vows seriously. She started reading the Bible, hoping for inspiration. She learned some things and found some comfort but when she got to the Book of Revelation and started reading about the end times, she got scared. Bonnie didn’t think to ask for guidance (that’s why Bible studies and spiritual mentoring can be so helpful) but she did pray.

Her thoughts went something like this: *I hope the end of the world doesn’t come in my lifetime. Wait a minute. The end of the world will come in my lifetime for me personally. Whether everybody else goes at the same time or not is purely coincidental. So how do I get ready for the end? Well, I guess I’ll just have to trust God’s love and forgiveness but meanwhile live today the best I can.*

Bonnie didn’t become perfect, but she did start thinking more about love and forgiveness. She started focusing less on what she wanted from Jim and began acting as the kind of person she wanted to be—regardless of how Jim was acting. When Bonnie started treating him with more respect and consideration, Jim noticed and began responding in kind. Although not perfect, their relationship grew in the love that reflects God’s kingdom.

**Petition:**
That families prepare for the coming of God’s kingdom through loving actions, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
Christ will come again at the end of time. How will your faith in the coming kingdom affect your choices here and now?
The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King

First Reading: Daniel 7:13-14

- “…the one like a Son of Man received dominion, glory and kingship; all peoples, nations, and languages serve him.”

Second Reading: Revelation 1:5-8

- “…Behold, He is coming amid the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced Him.”

Gospel: John 18:33b-37

- “…For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

Food for Thought:

On this feast of Christ as our King, it is good to reflect upon what that means within our homes. We belong to Him, we belong to Our King. Some might question that language of “belonging to God,” but it is something that we need to celebrate as a particular honor. We belong to God because he chose us; each family belongs to God because he chose you to be a family, because he planned for each bride and groom to meet, and for many to receive the gift of children. With Jesus Christ as King, we always need to remember that we are the citizens of His Kingdom. The question then becomes: how do we invite the Kingdom of God to be present in our homes, in our lives? As parents, there is an obligation to share with your children that they, too, are citizens of the Kingdom of God.

Petition:

That mothers and fathers each day serve Christ the King and His Kingdom by sowing their children the love of God, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:

The Kingdom of God is here, and Jesus Christ is King! On this feast celebrating His Kingdom, may each child and parent recognize that we are citizens of the Kingdom of God, and are the beloved sons and daughters, the princes and princesses of God’s Kingdom.
The Most Holy Trinity

First Reading: Deuteronomy 4: 32-34, 39-40

- Moses tells the people there is no other besides our God and to fix that truth in their hearts! If you’re looking for an answer, no matter what the question is, the answer is God. There is no other.

- Keep His statutes and commands that you and your children may prosper.

Second Reading: Romans 8: 14-17

- Through Jesus, we have become true children of God—and not only children, but heirs—full members of God’s household, able to call God “Abba,” that is, “Father.”

- This adoption identifies us with Christ as co-heirs and brings the inevitable suffering that comes with it. The good news is that it is very suffering that leads us to be glorified with Christ.

Gospel: Matthew 28: 16-20

- On yet another mountain (previous were mount of transfiguration and the mount which served as the location of Sermon on the Mount), Jesus reaffirms His relationship with His Father and the authority that comes with it. Jesus then teaches/directs His disciples as to what they are to do when He leaves.

- The Trinitarian formula for Baptism is given.

- Jesus promises that he will be them until the end of the world.

Food For Thought:
Do we ever fully grasp the idea or the reality that we are children of God and what that means for us? Often we talk about how Jesus revealed God to us as Father. Jesus calls us brothers and sisters. This family happens to us without our having to do anything but follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. There is no baggage that ought to accompany our adoption as God’s sons and daughters—God’s love for us is constant and unconditional. The Father, the almighty God, has done great things for us and our ancestors in faith. By keeping God’s commandments, our ancestors have passed this special relationship on to us. A quote, attributed to Nelson Mandela says, “You are a child of God. Your playing small, does not serve the world. . . We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.” Let’s ask ourselves how being an adopted child of God affects how we live our lives.
Story:
His name is James. He was brought home from the hospital just 3 days after his birth by his adoptive parents. They were so excited and grateful that their nearly ten year quest to adopt had finally come to this point. They were now parents to their beautiful baby, James. Growing up, James was always certain of his parents’ love for him. He knew he had been adopted. However, when he became a young man it became harder for him to wrap his head around his unknown origin and ancestry. As many young men are wont to do, he did not share his pain and turned for relief in illegal substances, which left him near death and struggling to stay alive. Thankfully, rehab and the unconditional love of his mother and father brought healing, understanding, and wholeness to this now married young father of his own child. Sometimes, in spite of all good intentions, perceptions are confused and truth is hard to grasp. This young man, adopted at birth and greatly blessed, still had to walk through the pain of life to find truth. Now, he is on the true path and better for the experience of his past.

Petition:
God our Lord, we are your adopted children, joint heirs with Christ your Son. That all those oppressed by evil discover the freedom to live worthy of this great calling, we pray to the Lord.

Bulletin Announcement:
God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have a plan for each one of us, God’s adopted sons and daughters. How do we hear and receive this Good News?
The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

First Reading: Exodus 24:3-8

- Moses prepares an elaborate ritual so that the promise of the people will be memorable.
- The covenant with the Lord is sealed in the blood of the sacrificed animals.

Second Reading: Hebrews 9:11-15

- The blood of Jesus, the Christ, will purify our inner selves.
- Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant.
- Under the new covenant, we move from dead works to worship of the living God.

Gospel: Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

- Similar to Moses’ preparations in the first reading, Jesus arranges for the ritual with His disciples that will be remembered forever.
- Jesus offers the words of institution.

Food For Thought:
The gift of the Eucharist is grounded in the ritual we commonly refer to as the Mass. The Mass is a ritual that has remained substantively unchanged over many years. Moses prepared the elaborate ritual for the Israelites in the desert to commemorate their allegiance to the Lord and His statutes and commandments. Jesus gave very specific instructions to His disciples to prepare for the ritual of the Passover supper. That supper was to be unlike any other, as Jesus changed the words deliberately to express the new covenant in His body and blood. This ritual would replace all that preceded it and become for believers the way through which Jesus would be with us forever.

Story:
Growing up in a small house with a mother and father and four children, ritual played a big part in defining our way of life. Mealtime involved setting the table, pouring the water, milk or whatever beverage was on for that meal, washing hands before sitting down to food, and of course, saying Grace before meals. After the meal there were dishes to clear and clean, leftovers (sometimes) to pack up, and then homework. Not always, but most of the time, if all did their job, an observer might comment that we were a well-oiled machine since everyone knew his part.

With only one bathroom, Sundays before church required a different kind of coordination and maybe more patience. Somehow hair was groomed, whiskers shaved, outfits assembled and approved, and all the other things that go into getting the family out the door and into the car for Mass were accomplished.
No matter what we think of ritual, it is part and parcel of the fabric of our lives. The ritual of Mass requires preparations. While most of us don’t have to remember to buy more wine or hosts or launder the linens involved in the Eucharist, someone does. Someone also sets the ribbons in liturgical books for lectors to proclaim the readings and for presiders to offer the prayers. Someone vacuums the carpets, repairs broken kneelers, returns hymnals to their place, and retrieves abandoned bulletins. Flowers are selected, and decorations placed. The music leader chooses hymns, and the choir members rehearse. Eucharistic ministers, lectors, acolytes, and ushers are routinely trained and scheduled. And of course, preachers thoughtfully prepare homilies every single week!

Why do these armies of folks prepare so much for Sunday Mass? They do it because Jesus asks us to celebrate this covenant supper with Him. It reminds us that His life and ours are one life. This ritual keeps the whole church united with Christ until His Kingdom Come. We are all on the same page and moving toward the same goals. Ritual keeps the community, and this community is a light to the world.

**Petition:**
That the church may be a witness of the salvation and healing of Christ’s sacrifice, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
The gift of the Eucharist is grounded in the ritual we commonly refer to as the Mass. How do we experience the Eucharist? Are we passive observers or active participants? In our own participation, do we try and recognize how *my prayer* and *my singing* and *my voice* are part of our community celebration of Jesus’ gift of salvation?
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.

That the righteousness of Saint Joseph and his zeal to care for Mary and Jesus may inspire parish priests and bishops in their service to the People of God, 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….”

(Mass During The Day) First Reading: Isaiah 49: 1-6

- “…From 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…”)}

Mass During the Day Readings

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.
The Transfiguration (August 6th)

**First Reading: Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14**
- God is shown in power and authority.
- Jesus, one like a Son of Man, is given that authority.
- God’s kingship will never be destroyed.

**Second Reading: The Second Letter of St. Peter 1:16-19**
- Jesus received honor and glory from the Father, which the apostles were eyewitnesses to.
- God’s message is reliable.
- People should pay attention to God’s message of Jesus’ impending return as they would to a light in the darkness.

- Jesus takes Peter, James and John to the mountain to witness His glory in the Transfiguration.
- The three saw Jesus in the appearance described in the first reading.
- Moses and Elijah appear as a sign of Jesus’ being the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.
- The apostles are flabbergasted upon seeing Jesus and His company in this way and can’t really process it. They know enough to be in awe.
- The voice of the Father is heard restating the announcement made at Jesus’ Baptism: “This is My Son,” and “Listen to Him.”
- This event was a foreshadowing of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

**Food For Thought:**
Jesus’ sonship of God makes Him the heir to all of God the Father’s glory, honor, majesty, and power. This authority is prophesied by Daniel (and the other prophets) and is revealed to the apostles as a sign for them of what was to come. As children of God ourselves, we are promised a share in the inheritance, too. Jesus’ kingship will never be destroyed, His reign will never end. As heirs to Jesus’ inheritance, this is significant for us. While we are on earth, we have that light in the darkness to attend to, to guide us. If we embrace God’s glory, acknowledge Jesus’ power, and allow our lives to be ruled by it, we, like the apostles, will witness that glory, too. Jesus didn’t just choose one of the apostles to go up to the mountain with Him—He invited three. We are never left to witness to God’s glory all by ourselves. We are always given companions to verify, validate, and encourage us as we witness to the truth in our daily lives.
**Story:**
Monica went on a retreat for the first time in her life. She didn’t know what to expect, but figured it would be a lot of praying, silence, and boring lectures. There was a lot of praying and there was some silence, but a good deal of it was self-reflection—looking into areas of her life that were particularly meaningful to her and discovering where God had been present in them. As Monica sifted through the details of the events, she paid attention to her emotions—some that she remembered fondly were now bittersweet, some that she remembered being angry about, she now had peace with. Taking each of these things to prayer, Monica became aware of how God had been working on her healing throughout her life—bringing particular people into it, bringing understanding about others’ motives, habits and weaknesses, bringing her into a deeper peace through loving relationships that helped her to know her value. With each revelation, Monica began to feel closer and closer to God. A wave of gratitude swept over her that she had never known. She was in awe of the love and power of God. She wasn’t sure how she was going to be able to share her experience with her family when she returned. Not having gone through the experience themselves, she didn’t know if what she would say would be relatable to them. On one hand, she had never felt closer to God, and on the other hand, she suddenly felt a sort of isolation from her family. Maybe an explanation wouldn’t serve a purpose; for now, this might have to be something special between her and God.

**Petition:**
That we will be open to seeing God’s glory in our daily lives and to share it according to God’s plans, we pray to the Lord.

**Bulletin Announcement:**
We have all witnessed remarkable things—things that some might even call miracles. In those special events, we can see a glimmer of the glory of God. The apostles saw Jesus’ glory in living color, up close and personal, without any question of what they were seeing. It was overwhelming, confusing, and exactly what they were going to need in the dark time after Jesus’ death. Think back to a time when you experienced something magnificent. How do you see God’s glory through that event? What does the story of Jesus’ Transfiguration tell you about God’s self-revelation to humanity?
Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15th)

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 be bitten 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.
Story:
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 gave the other credit for being a saint yet each 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: 1 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 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 were some holidays that she was unable to celebrate at 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 make-shift—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: 1 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.
**Story:**
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