

WEEK 31

SUNDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *2 Kings 24: 20b – 25:13, 18 – 21*

Jerusalem taken and devastated. Exile of Judah.

A reading from the second book of Kings.

Zedeki'ah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem, and laid siege to it; and they built siege-works against it round about. So the city was besieged till the eleventh year of King Zedeki'ah. On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. Then a breach was made in the city; the king with all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were around the city. And they went in the direction of the Arabah.

But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him. Then they captured the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, who passed sentence upon him. They slew the sons of Zedeki'ah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedeki'ah, and bound him in fetters, and took him to Babylon.

In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month -- which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon -- Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. And he burned the house of the LORD, and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down.

And all the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down the walls around Jerusalem. And the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, together with the rest of the multitude, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile. But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and ploughmen. And the pillars of

bronze that were in the house of the LORD, and the stands and the bronze sea that were in the house of the LORD, the Chalde'ans broke in pieces, and carried the bronze to Babylon. And the captain of the guard took Serai'ah the chief priest, and Zephani'ah the second priest, and the three keepers of the threshold; and from the city he took an officer who had been in command of the men of war, and five men of the king's council who were found in the city; and the secretary of the commander of the army who mustered the people of the land; and sixty men of the people of the land who were found in the city. And Nebu'zarad'an the captain of the guard took them, and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. And the king of Babylon smote them, and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was taken into exile out of its land.

Responsorial. *Ps. 78: 1, 4-5*

R: O God, the nations have invaded your land, they have profaned your holy temple. They have made Jerusalem a heap of ruins. * We have become the taunt of our neighbours, the mockery and scorn of those who surround us.

V: How long, O Lord, will you be angry forever? How long will your anger burn like fire?

R: We have become the taunt of our neighbours, the mockery and scorn of those who surround us.

Second Reading. *Nm. 165 – 167*

Mercy and truth meet on the way that is Christ.

A reading from the “Book against the heretic Petrobrusiani” of the blessed Peter the Venerable, abbot.

The sacrifice of the Christian world is not multiple but simple, not many victims, but only one; because as in the whole world only one is the Christian people which offers it, one the God to whom they offer and one the faith with which they offer it, so also the sacrifice which is offered is only one. The multiplicity of the Jewish victims has given place to the unique Christian victim: in fact, since the Hebrew sacrifice could not make perfect the one who was slave by its multiplicity, God got the victim that could purify with his simplicity those who offered him, in order to sanctify them and to make them perfect. Oxen, calves, rams, lambs, goats, he-goats

fill with their blood the altars of the Jews; only “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (Jn. 12: 9) is placed on the Christian altar. Do not listen to me, but to the Apostle of God: “Christ our Passover – he says – has been immolated” (1 Cor. 5: 7). That is, the Passover of the Jews is the immolated lamb, our Passover instead is Christ immolated. This is why Christ is the unique sacrifice of the Christians. This was the sacrifice reserved for the Christian time. Reserved, I say, for the time of grace and that it would not have been right to give it in the time of anger.

The Jews had the oxen, the Christian has Christ whose sacrifice is so much superior to the Jewish victims as much as Christ is more precious than the oxen. God, who is goodness by essence, having pity on man who had become lost, wanted to save him; but since he did not want nor could he save him if not with justice, while he searched in his eternal council how to use mercy on the wretched humanity maintaining safe the justice, he found this way preferable, whereby justice could be safeguarded, man freed, grace increased and God glorified. Therefore he sent his divine Son to the sons of men, so that assuming human nature but remaining immune to human vices, he could take upon himself not sin, but the punishment for sin, that is the death of the body, and he could annul in this way, with his single death, the double death of man: with his transitory death, the eternal death.

With this economy mercy acts and yet nothing is taken away from justice, while in the place of the eternal torment of man, the temporal torment of the man-God is offered; in the place of the eternal death of man, the temporal death of the man-God. This has so much weight on the scales of justice itself that, in order to act according to justice on the sins of the world, the temporal death of the Son of God weighed much more than the eternal death of the sons of men.

With the death of Christ justice has had a greater satisfaction than that which it could have had with the condemnation of man. Justice therefore receives its share, because the Son of God has died for the sins of men. In this way justice, which for a long time had been opposed to the salvation of men, finally has given way to mercy, and mercy and truth have met (cfr. Ps. 84: 11) in Christ who is the way, whereas for a millennium they had proceeded along different ways; and while justice and peace had been as if opposed to each other during the time of the condemnation of man, now that he is saved, also “justice and peace have embraced” (Ps. 84: 11). This is our sacrifice, this is the holocaust of the evangelical law of the New

Testament. This is the holocaust of the new people that was offered once on the cross by Christ, Son of God and of man, and which must always be offered on the altar by his people, as he himself has recommended and established. Nothing else in fact was offered then, nothing else is offered today, but, as it has been said: “Christ after having offered himself once for all” (Heb. 9: 28) left himself to his Church to be offered always.

Responsorial. *Heb. 10: 1, 14; 9: 9*

R: Since the law possesses only a shadow of things and not the reality itself, it does not have the power to lead to perfection, by means of those sacrifices that are offered continuously, by those who draw near to God; * Christ instead, with one unique oblation, has made perfect forever, those who are sanctified.

V: In conformity to the Law, they offer gifts and sacrifices that cannot make perfect, in his conscience, the one who offers.

R: Christ instead, with one unique oblation, has made perfect forever, those who are sanctified.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Wis. 8: 1 – 21*

You have to ask God for wisdom.

A reading from the book of Wisdom.

She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well. I loved her and sought her from my youth, and I desired to take her for my bride, and I became enamoured of her beauty.

She glorifies her noble birth by living with God, and the Lord of all loves her. For she is an initiate in the knowledge of God, and an associate in his works. If riches are a desirable possession in life, what is richer than wisdom that effects all things? And if understanding is effective, who more than she is fashioner of what exists? And if any one loves righteousness, her labours are virtues; for she teaches self-control and prudence, justice and courage; nothing in life is more profitable for men than these. And if any one longs for wide experience, she knows the things of old, and infers the things to come; she understands turns of speech and the solutions of riddles;

she has foreknowledge of signs and wonders and of the outcome of seasons and times. Therefore I determined to take her to live with me, knowing that she would give me good counsel and encouragement in cares and grief.

Because of her I shall have glory among the multitudes and honour in the presence of the elders, though I am young. I shall be found keen in judgment, and in the sight of rulers I shall be admired. When I am silent they will wait for me, and when I speak they will give heed; and when I speak at greater length they will put their hands on their mouths.

Because of her I shall have immortality, and leave an everlasting remembrance to those who come after me. I shall govern peoples, and nations will be subject to me; dread monarchs will be afraid of me when they hear of me; among the people I shall show myself capable, and courageous in war. When I enter my house, I shall find rest with her, for companionship with her has no bitterness, and life with her has no pain, but gladness and joy.

When I considered these things inwardly, and thought upon them in my mind, that in kinship with wisdom there is immortality, and in friendship with her, pure delight, and in the labours of her hands, unfailing wealth, and in the experience of her company, understanding, and renown in sharing her words, I went about seeking how to get her for myself. As a child I was by nature well endowed, and a good soul fell to my lot; or rather, being good, I entered an undefiled body. But I perceived that I would not possess wisdom unless God gave her to me -- and it was a mark of insight to know whose gift she was -- so I appealed to the Lord and besought him, and with my whole heart I prayed to him.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Wis. 7: 7, 8; Jam. 1: 5*

R: I prayed, and prudence was lavished on me; I implored, and the Spirit of Wisdom came into me: * I have preferred it to honours and to power.

V: If anyone of you is lacking in wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to every one generously, and he will be granted it.

R: I have preferred it to honours and to power

Second Reading. *Treat. 6*

The word of God is alive and efficacious.

A reading from the “Treatise” of Baldwin of Canterbury, bishop.

“The Word of God is alive, efficacious and sharper than any double edged sword” (Heb. 4: 12). Behold how great is the power and the wisdom that is enclosed in the word of God! The text is highly significant for the one who searches for Christ, who is precisely the word, the power and the wisdom of God. This word, from the beginning co-eternal with the Father, in his time was revealed to the apostles, and through them was announced and welcomed with humble faith by the believing people.

This word of the Father is alive, and to it the Father has given the power to have life in itself, not more nor less than the Father has life in himself. For which the word is not only alive, but he is also life, as he himself says: “I am the way, the truth and the life” (Jn. 14: 6).

He is therefore life, he is alive, and can give life. In fact “as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he wants” (Jn. 5: 21). And he gives life when he calls the dead man from the sepulchre and says: “Lazarus, come out” (Jn. 11: 43).

When this word is preached, the Christ gives to the voice of the preacher, which is perceived exteriorly, the virtue of operating interiorly, through which the dead reacquire life, and are reborn in the joy of the sons of Abraham.

This word is therefore alive in the heart of the Father, alive on the mouth of the preacher, alive in the heart of the one who believes and who loves. And exactly because this word is so alive, there is no doubt that it is also efficacious.

It is efficacious in the creation, it is efficacious in the government of the world, it is efficacious in the redemption. What could be more efficacious and more powerful? “Who could narrate the prodigies of the Lord and make all his praise resound?” (Ps. 105: 2). It is efficacious when it operates, it is efficacious when it is preached. In fact it does not return empty, but produces its fruit wherever it is announced. It is efficacious and “sharper than any double edged sword” (Heb. 4: 12) when it is believed and loved. What in fact is impossible for the one who believes, what is impossible for the one who loves? When this word speaks, his words pierce the heart, like the sharp darts thrown by a hero. They enter in deep like nails hit with force, and penetrate so much inside, that they reach the secret intimacy of the soul. In fact this word is sharper than any double-edged sword, because its power of incision surpasses that of the most tempered blade and its sharpness that of any intelligence. No human wisdom and no

product of intelligence is as fine and subtle as it is. It is sharper than any type of subtlety of the human wisdom and of the most ingenious reason.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Sir. 1: 5, 20 Vulg.*

R: The source of wisdom is the Word of God from on high, * and her paths are the eternal laws.

V: The fear of the Lord is the fullness of wisdom.

R: and her paths are the eternal laws.

YEAR A

Gospel. *Mt. 23: 1 – 12*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

Then said Jesus to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practise. They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honour at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Third Reading. *Nn. 23, 35, 38*

"We are men of faith for the salvation of our souls" (Heb. 10: 39)

A reading from the book of St. Orsisio abbot, which he handed over to the brothers at his death.

Brothers, we must be equal, from the smallest to the greatest, rich and poor, perfect in harmony and in humility, so that of us also can be said: "The man who gathered much had none too much, the man who gathered little did not go short" (2 Cor. 8: 15). Let no one of us who, though seeing the brother in poverty, thinks of procuring for himself delights and have that rebuke of the prophet "Has not one unique God created us?" addressed to him. Is not the Father of all one? Why has everyone abandoned his brother in a way as to make the testament of our fathers worthy of abomination? "Judah has broken faith and a detestable thing has been done in Israel" (Mal. 2: 11). Therefore, according to the word of the Lord and Saviour to the apostles: "I give you a new commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you; by this all will know that you are my disciples" (Jn. 13: 34, 35), we must love one another and show that we are truly servants of the Lord Jesus Christ and followers of those who led a life in common.

He who walks by day does not bump into obstacles, he who walks by night yes, because he is not illuminated. "We however", says the Apostle, "are not the sort of people who draw back and are lost by it; we are the sort who keep faithful until our souls are saved" (Heb. 10: 39). And in another place: "All of you are sons of the light" "and sons of God" (Ps. 28: 1); "we do not belong to the night or to darkness" (1 Thes. 5:5). If therefore we are sons of the light, we must know that which belongs to the light, and produce fruits of light in every good work: in fact that which is done openly is light. If we return to the Lord with all the heart and if we follow the precepts of his saints and of our Father, we will abound in all good works. If instead we let ourselves be overcome by the pleasures of the flesh, by day we will go groping as if we were in the middle of the night and we will not find the way to reach the city of our dwelling, of which it is said: The souls of the hungry and the thirsty were fainting because they despised the laws given to them by the Lord and they did not listen to the voice of the prophets (cfr. Ps. 106: 5, 11) and therefore they could not reach the promised peace.

The Lord is so good as to continuously press us towards salvation, let us turn our hearts to him, "it is already time to wake up from our sleep. The night is almost over, it will be daylight soon, let us give up all the things we prefer to do under the cover of the dark, let us arm ourselves with the weapons of light. Let us live decently as people do in the daytime" (Rm. 13: 12-13). My children, above all let us love God with all our heart, then let us love one another remembering the commandments of God our Saviour, in

which he says: "Peace I leave you, my peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you" (Jn. 14: 27). "On these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets also" (Mt. 22: 40).

Responsorial. *1 Jn. 3: 14, 23*

R: We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. * He who does not love remains in death.

V: This is his commandment, that we love one another.

R: He who does not love remains in death.

YEAR B

Gospel. *Mk. 12: 28 – 34*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Mark.

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that he is one, and there is no other but he; and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any question.

Third Reading. *Disc. 14: 1-2*

The soul, growing in charity, frees itself from fear.

A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Augustine, bishop.

Let us not ignore the fact that our hearts are nourished every day by the exhortations of the divine reading and with the word of God. Nevertheless we must speak together a little, of that desire of charity by which we are inflamed for each other. And of what did he speak to you if not of charity?

If someone wanted to speak of it, in fact, he need not be worried about the choice of readings that will give him a starting point: every page speaks of it. Of this the Lord himself bears witness, and we are informed of this by the gospel; in fact, when he is asked which is the greatest commandment of the law, he answers: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind and you shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Mt. 22: 37, 39). So that we may not search for anything else in the holy pages, he added: “On these two commandments depends the whole law and the prophets” (Mt. 22: 40). If all the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments, how much more the gospel? Charity renews man: as greed takes away the freshness of man, so also charity makes him new. Therefore groaning in the travail of greed, the psalmist says: I grow old in the midst of my many oppressors” (Ps. 6: 8).

That charity then belongs to the new man the Lord himself expresses in this way: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another” (Jn. 13: 34). If therefore the law and the prophets depend from charity, since with it is designated the Old Testament, how much more the gospel, which is likewise clearly called the New Testament! Did not the Lord in fact proclaim this only as his commandment: “that you love one another”? And he declared it to be new and he came for our renewal making us new men; and he promised a new inheritance: and this, eternal.

But then also there were those who loved God, and they loved him selflessly, purifying their own hearts with the chaste desire of him: they were those who, the veils of the ancient promise having been removed, reached the intuition of the future new covenant and understood that everything in the Old Testament which had been commanded or promised according to the old man, was a figure of that new pact, which the Lord would fulfill at the end of the ages, as the Apostle clearly says: “All this happened to them as a warning, and it was written down to be a lesson for us who are living at the end of the age” (1 Cor. 10: 11). Thus in those figures, our pact was shadowed and pre-announced.

The time of the New Covenant having arrived, they started to announce openly the good news and those figures were illustrated and explained in a way that the New Testament could be understood in the light of the ancient promise. Moses in fact, though being the prophet of the Old Testament understood also the New: he announced the Old to a carnal people, but he, spiritual, understood the New. The apostles instead were prophets and ministers of the New Testament, but not because in the Old there was not that which they would then have manifested.

Charity therefore is present in the one and in the other, but in the first it is more veiled while fear is more evident; in the second, instead, love is more evident than fear. In fact the more charity grows, the more fear diminishes. Growing therefore in charity, the soul frees itself from fear; this the apostle John tells us: "Perfect loves casts out fear" (1 Jn. 4: 18).

Responsorial. *1 Jn. 4: 7-8; 1 Cor. 16: 22*

R: Whoever loves is generated by God and knows God. He who does not love has not known God, * because God is love.

V: If anyone does not love the Lord, a curse on him,

R: because God is love.

YEAR C

Gospel. *Lk. 19: 1- 10*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchae'us; he was a chief tax collector, and rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchae'us, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully.

And when they saw it they all murmured, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchae'us stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him,

"Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost."

Third Reading. *For the dedication of a Church.*

The perfect conversion to God.

A reading from the "Homilies" of John Laspergio, Certosin.

The perfect conversion to God cuts all the roots of sins. Greed is the origin and cause of many sins. Zacchaeus in order to uproot them promised to give half of his goods for the necessity of the poor and "If I have cheated someone, I will pay back four times the amount" (Lk. 19: 8)

Do you see how much progress Zacchaeus had made immediately after Christ had illuminated him. He wanted then to declare in a public way this his intention, in order to defend Christ against those who grumbled and to demonstrate how much wisdom he had used with him; he had not avoided him, despising him as a publican, but speaking to him with kindness and inviting himself to his house, he had brought him to penance and to conversion with a change that was so great and sudden that, as in the past he had been greedy for money, in the same way now he desired to divest himself of it.

In fact he did not promise to lavish on the poor and to repay in future those whom he had defrauded, but he speaks of the present saying: "Behold, I give and I repay" (Lk. 19: 8). I give in alms, I repay that which I have robbed. And even if he has to first of all really repay that which has been robbed so that the alms may be acceptable to God, yet in this case, in order to demonstrate his readiness in giving, not only that which he has to give, but also that which he could and wanted generously to give, he speaks first of his donation and then of his repayment. "Jesus answered him: Today salvation has entered into this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. The Son of man in fact has come to search and to save that which was lost" (Lk. 19: 9-10).

Announcing the salvation worked "in this house", Christ wants to indicate the soul of Zacchaeus which has saved itself with the desire and with the adhesion of the good will, with love and obedience; and it is this soul that the Lord calls house of God, because God dwells in it. Jesus in fact came into the world in order to save that which was lost.

For this he wanted above all to be with those who knew themselves to be needful of his help and who searched for salvation.

Almost answering those who grumbled, he said: For what reason are you filled with indignation against me because I speak with a sinful man and invite myself to his house without being called?

I have come into the world, not so that the sinners may remain in their sins, but so that they may convert and may have life in me. I do not look at what the sinner has done up to now, but I consider that which he will do from now on. I offer him my grace and my friendship, which I offer also to you, if you desire it. If he accepts it and comes to me, if from a sinner he becomes just, why do you slander me for having gone to his house, judging evil he who from a sinner has become a friend of God?

He in fact is a son of Abraham, not because he is born of his blood, but because he is the imitator of the faith and piety of Abraham.

Our Lord Jesus Christ gifts us the knowledge of himself, the love and the trust in him, so that nothing will please us, nothing will attract us if not that which is pleasing to the will of God and which does not obstruct our salvation.

He is blessed forever and ever. Amen.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Ps. 40: 5; Ez. 33: 11*

R: You who know the secrets of every heart, purify me from my sin, grant me the time to repent, so that I can cry: * Have mercy on me, Lord, against you have I sinned.

V: You have said: I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked desists from his conduct and lives.

R: Have mercy on me, Lord, against you have I sinned.

MONDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Jer. 37: 21; 38: 14 – 28*

Jeremiah, in prison, exhorts king Zedekiah to make peace.

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah.

So King Zedeki'ah gave orders, and they committed Jeremiah to the court of the guard; and a loaf of bread was given him daily from the bakers' street, until all the bread of the city was gone. So Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard. King Zedeki'ah sent for Jeremiah the prophet and received him at the third entrance of the temple of the LORD. The king said to Jeremiah, "I will ask you a question; hide nothing from me." Jeremiah said to Zedeki'ah, "If I tell you, will you not be sure to put me to death? And if I give you counsel, you will not listen to me." Then King Zedeki'ah swore secretly to Jeremiah, "As the LORD lives, who made our souls, I will not put you to death or deliver you into the hand of these men who seek your life."

Then Jeremiah said to Zedeki'ah, "Thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel, If you will surrender to the princes of the king of Babylon, then your life shall be spared, and this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live. But if you do not surrender to the princes of the king of Babylon, then this city shall be given into the hand of the Chalde'ans, and they shall burn it with fire, and you shall not escape from their hand."

King Zedeki'ah said to Jeremiah, "I am afraid of the Jews who have deserted to the Chalde'ans, lest I be handed over to them and they abuse me." Jeremiah said, "You shall not be given to them. Obey now the voice of the LORD in what I say to you, and it shall be well with you, and your life shall be spared. But if you refuse to surrender, this is the vision which the LORD has shown to me: Behold, all the women left in the house of the king of Judah were being led out to the princes of the king of Babylon and were saying, 'Your trusted friends have deceived you and prevailed against you; now that your feet are sunk in the mire, they turn away from you.' All your wives and your sons shall be led out to the Chalde'ans, and you yourself

shall not escape from their hand, but shall be seized by the king of Babylon; and this city shall be burned with fire."

Then Zedeki'ah said to Jeremiah, "Let no one know of these words and you shall not die. If the princes hear that I have spoken with you and come to you and say to you, 'Tell us what you said to the king and what the king said to you; hide nothing from us and we will not put you to death,' then you shall say to them, 'I made a humble plea to the king that he would not send me back to the house of Jonathan to die there.'"

Then all the princes came to Jeremiah and asked him, and he answered them as the king had instructed him. So they left off speaking with him, for the conversation had not been overheard. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was taken.

Responsorial. *2 Cor. 6: 4-5; Jdt. 8: 23 Vulg.*

R: In every way we show ourselves to be servants of God: with great endurance in troubles, * in hardships and distresses, in beatings and in imprisonment.

V: All those who are pleasing to the Lord, remain faithful to him,

R: in hardships and distresses, in beatings and in imprisonment.

Second Reading. *N. 3, 88 – 90*

Do not fear, I have ransomed you: I have given my life for you.

A reading from the “Meditations” of St. Anselm, bishop.

Since on the cross salvation has been accomplished, it is with the cross that Christ has redeemed us. Behold, O Christian soul, this is the cause of your liberty, this is the price of your redemption. You were a prisoner, but in this way you have been redeemed. You were a slave and in this way you have been freed; in this way, exiled you have been brought back to the homeland, lost you have been restored to the ancient condition, dead you have been resurrected.

O man, let your heart eat this, ponder this, suck this, swallow this, when your mouth will receive the flesh and the blood of your Redeemer. Let this be down here your daily bread, your food and your last sacraments, because through this and only through this you will remain in Christ and Christ in you and in the future life your joy will be complete.

But, O Lord, you who have taken on yourself death so that I could live, how could I enjoy of my liberty, if it comes to me from your chains? How could I rejoice in my salvation, if it is none other than the fruit of your pains? How could I enjoy my life that comes only from your death? How could I enjoy of that which you have suffered and of the cruelty of those who inflicted it on you, given that if they had not done it you would not have suffered, and if you had not suffered I would not have had these goods? O, if I was to be saddened by those things, in what way could I enjoy these, for which those were and that would not have existed, if those had not been? But certainly their wickedness would not have been able to do anything if you, of your spontaneous will, had not permitted it; and you have suffered only because paternally you have wanted to. For this I must deplore their cruelty; imitating your death and your sufferings, suffering together with you; loving your will full of love giving thanks to you: and thus calmly I can exult for the benefits granted to me. Therefore, O wretch, leave the cruelty of those men to the judgement of God and you consider what you owe to your Saviour. Consider what has been done for you and judge with what love he who has done this for you is worthy of. Always have in front of your eyes your necessity and his goodness, and consider which thanksgiving you must give to him and how much you owe to his love. O good Lord Jesus Christ, like the sun you illuminated me who did not search for you or think of you, and you showed me how I was. You have freed me from the weight that was dragging me to the depths, you have removed the weight that oppressed me from on high; you have driven back the one who was beating me with temptations, exposing yourself in my place in my defence.

You have called me with a new name taken from your name and, bent as I was, you have raised me up to your vision saying: "Do not fear, I have ransomed you" (Is. 43: 1), I have given my life for you. If you remain united to me, you will flee the evils in which you find yourself and you will not fall into the abyss towards which you were running; but I will lead you into my kingdom and I will make you the heir of God and my co-heir.

From that moment you have taken me under your protection, so that nothing could harm my soul against your will. And behold, though not having as yet adhered to you as you had asked me, yet you have not allowed me to fall into hell: but always wait for me to adhere so that you can give me all that you have promised.

Responsorial. *Is. 53: 12; Lk. 3: 34*

R: He has handed himself over to death and let himself be taken for a sinner
* while he was bearing the faults of many and praying all the time for sinners.

V: Jesus said: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.

R: While he was bearing the faults of many and praying all the time for sinners.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Wis. 9: 1 – 18 (vulg. 9: 1 – 19)*

Prayer to obtain wisdom.

A reading from the book of Wisdom.

"O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, who have made all things by your word, and by your wisdom have formed man, to have dominion over the creatures you have made, and rule the world in holiness and righteousness, and pronounce judgment in uprightness of soul, give me the wisdom that sits by your throne, and do not reject me from among your servants. For I am your slave and the son of your maidservant, a man who is weak and short-lived, with little understanding of judgment and laws; for even if one is perfect among the sons of men, yet without the wisdom that comes from you he will be regarded as nothing. You have chosen me to be king of your people and to be judge over your sons and daughters. You have given command to build a temple on your holy mountain, and an altar in the city of your habitation, a copy of the holy tent that you did prepare from the beginning.

With you is wisdom, who knows your works and was present when you made the world, and who understands what is pleasing in your sight and what is right according to your commandments. Send her forth from the holy heavens, and from the throne of your glory send her, that she may be with me and toil, and that I may learn what is pleasing to you. For she knows and understands all things, and she will guide me wisely in my actions and guard me with her glory. Then my works will be acceptable, and I shall judge your people justly, and shall be worthy of the throne of my father. For what man can learn the counsel of God? Or who can discern

what the Lord wills? For the reasoning of mortals is worthless, and our designs are likely to fail, for a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthy tent burdens the thoughtful mind. We can hardly guess at what is on earth, and what is at hand we find with labour; but who has traced out what is in the heavens?

Who has learned your counsel, unless you have given wisdom and sent your Holy Spirit from on high? And thus the paths of those on earth were set right, and men were taught what pleases you, and were saved by wisdom."

Responsorial. *cfr. Wis. 9: 10, 4*

R: Send Wisdom, Lord, from your glorious throne, so that it may assist me and be besides me in my toils: * and that I may know in every moment what is pleasing to you.

V: Give me the wisdom, which sits enthroned besides you,

R: and that I may know in every moment what is pleasing to you.

Second Reading. *Book. II, 6, 2*

The mystery of the incarnate Word.

A reading from the books "The origins" of Origen, presbyter.

Among all the marvellous things that can be said of the Christ, there is one which surpasses absolutely the admiration of which the human spirit is capable, and the fragility of our mortal intelligence does not know how to understand or imagine it: that the omnipotence of the divine majesty, the Word itself of the Father, the Wisdom of God, in which all things were created – the visible and the invisible – has let himself be enclosed in the limits of a man who appeared in Judea. This is the object of our faith; but there is more. We believe that the Wisdom of God has entered into the womb of a woman and that he was born amidst wailing and crying like all the mortals. And we know that later the Christ has known the fear of death to the point of exclaiming: "My soul is sad to the point of death" (Mt. 26: 38), and that at the end he was led to the most ignominious death, even if he then was resurrected on the third day.

We notice in him contemporarily the human features common to our weakness as mortals, and the divine features that belong only to that sovereign and ineffable nature. In front of this, the human intelligence, too

small, is taken by such admiration that it does not know what to say and how to orient itself. It knows that Christ is God, and yet it sees him die; if then it considers him a man, behold it sees him rise with his booty after having destroyed the kingdom of death.

Our contemplation, meditating in the same Jesus the truth of the two natures, must proceed with reverent fear, avoiding both the attribution of things that are unworthy and unbecoming of the ineffable divine essence, as well as considering the historical events as illusory appearances. In truth to explain such things to the human intelligence and to try and express words, is an undertaking superior to our strengths and to our merits and surpasses the intelligence and the words. In fact, I think that it surpasses the capacities of the apostles themselves. Even more: the explanation of this mystery probably transcends all the order of the heavenly powers.

Responsorial. *Phil. 2: 6, 7; Jn. 1: 2*

R: Christ Jesus, though being of divine nature, did not consider his equality with God as something to be grasped, * but he undressed himself becoming similar to men, he appeared in human form.

V: He was with God in the beginning,

R: but he undressed himself becoming similar to men, he appeared in human form.

Gospel. *Lk. 14: 12 – 14*

Don't invite your friends, but the poor and the weak.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbours, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

TUESDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Jer. 32: 6 – 10, 16, 24 – 40*

Jeremiah in prison buys the field of Anathoth as a sign of hope.

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah said, "The word of the LORD came to me: Behold, Han'amel the son of Shallum your uncle will come to you and say, 'Buy my field which is at An'athoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.' Then Han'amel my cousin came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the LORD, and said to me, 'Buy my field which is at An'athoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself.'

Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD. "And I bought the field at An'athoth from Han'amel my cousin, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales.

"After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch the son of Neri'ah, I prayed to the LORD, saying: Behold, the siege mounds have come up to the city to take it, and because of sword and famine and pestilence the city is given into the hands of the Chalde'ans who are fighting against it. What you did speak has come to pass, and behold, you see it. Yet you, O Lord GOD, have said to me, "Buy the field for money and get witnesses" -- though the city is given into the hands of the Chalde'ans."

The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me? Therefore, thus says the LORD: Behold, I am giving this city into the hands of the Chalde'ans and into the hand of Nebuchadrez'zar king of Babylon, and he shall take it. The Chalde'ans who are fighting against this city shall come and set this city on fire, and burn it, with the houses on whose roofs incense has been offered to Ba'al and drink offerings have been poured out to other gods, to provoke me to anger. For the sons of Israel and the sons of Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth; the sons of Israel have done nothing but provoke me to anger by the work of their hands, says the LORD. This city has aroused my anger and wrath, from the day it was built to this day, so

that I will remove it from my sight because of all the evil of the sons of Israel and the sons of Judah which they did to provoke me to anger -- their kings and their princes, their priests and their prophets, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They have turned their backs to me and not their faces; and though I have taught them persistently they have not listened to receive instruction. They set up their abominations in the house that is called by my name, to defile it. They built the high places of Ba'al in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech, though I did not command them, nor did it enter into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

"Now therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city of which you say, 'It is given into the hand of the king of Babylon by sword, by famine, and by pestilence': Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation; I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.

Responsorial. *Jer. 32: 25, 27, 36, 37*

R: You, Lord God, said to me: Buy the field with money and call witnesses, while the city will be put into the hands of the Chalde'ans. * Behold, I am the Lord God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me?

V: Thus says the Lord with regard to this city: Behold, I will gather them from all the countries, I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety.

R: Behold, I am the Lord God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me?

Second Reading. *Lett. 38, 3 – 4. 6*

Christ is for us glory, possession and kingdom.

A reading from the "Letters" of St. Paolino of Nola, bishop.

From the beginning of the ages Christ suffered in all those who belonged to him. He in fact is the beginning and the end, he who hidden in the law is revealed in the gospel. Lord always wonderful, patient and

triumphant in his saints. It is he who was killed in Abel by the brother, derided in Noah by the son, who was a pilgrim in Abraham, who was offered in Isaac, enslaved in Jacob, sold in Joseph, exposed and cast out in Moses, stoned and cut in the prophets; again in the apostles he has been shaken by earth and by sea and in the many and various torments of the blessed martyrs frequently killed.

It is always him therefore who now also bears our weaknesses and sicknesses, because exactly he is the man who is placed constantly in suffering for us (cfr. Is. 53: 3, 4) and who is capable of bearing the sickness that we, without him, do not know or can bear.

It is always him who now also, for us and in us, bears the suffering that is there in the world, in order to destroy the evil in it, so that the power may be manifested in weakness (cfr. 2 Cor. 12: 9). He himself suffers insults in you, and it is exactly him whom the world hates in you.

But let us give thanks to him, because the Lord triumphs when he is judged (cfr. Rm. 3: 4) and, as it is written, he overcomes in us making himself a servant and procures for his servants the grace of liberty.

He does this with his incomprehensible love through which he made himself a servant and did not disdain to humiliate himself for us up to the death of the cross, in order to work in our hearts, with a visible humiliation, that heavenly exaltation that is invisible to us. Consider in fact from where we have fallen right from the beginning of the ages and you will understand that by the will of the divine wisdom and through his goodness we have been returned to life.

In Adam with pride we fell, therefore we are humiliated in Christ in order to cancel the ancient fault through obedience and while we offend God through pride, we placate him by serving him. Let us exult therefore and let us glory in him, who has made us the object of his battle and of his victory saying: "Have faith: I have overcome the world!" (Jn. 16: 33).

And now he, always victorious, will fight for us and in us he will overcome.

Then the prince of darkness will be thrown out, not however from this world but from man; when, faith entering in us, he will be forced to come out in order to make place for Christ, whose presence casts out sin and sends the defeated serpent into exile.

The orators also possess their literary studies, the philosophers their wisdom, the rich their riches, the kings their kingdoms: our glory, our

possession and kingdom is Christ.

For us wisdom is in the foolishness of the preaching, the strength in our weakness itself, our glory is the scandal of the cross “through which the world is crucified to me and I to the world” (Gal. 6: 14) “so that I can live for God; and it is not I who live anymore, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2: 19, 20).

Responsorial. *Is. 49: 22, 26; Jn. 8: 28*

R: I beckon to the nations and hoist my signal for the peoples. * Then all mankind shall know that I, the Lord, am your Saviour, and that your redeemer is the Mighty One of Jacob.

V: When you have lifted up the Son of man then you will know that I Am.

R: Then all mankind shall know that I, the Lord, am your Saviour, and that your redeemer is the Mighty One of Jacob.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Wis. 10: 1 – 11:4*

Wisdom was the salvation of the patriarchs.

A reading from the book of Wisdom.

Wisdom protected the first-formed father of the world, when he alone had been created; she delivered him from his transgression, and gave him strength to rule all things. But when an unrighteous man departed from her in his anger, he perished because in rage he slew his brother.

When the earth was flooded because of him, wisdom again saved it, steering the righteous man by a paltry piece of wood. Wisdom also, when the nations in wicked agreement had been confounded, recognized the righteous man and preserved him blameless before God, and kept him strong in the face of his compassion for his child.

Wisdom rescued a righteous man when the ungodly were perishing; he escaped the fire that descended on the Five Cities.

Evidence of their wickedness still remains: a continually smoking wasteland, plants bearing fruit that does not ripen, and a pillar of salt standing as a monument to an unbelieving soul.

For because they passed wisdom by, they not only were hindered from recognizing the good, but also left for mankind a reminder of their folly, so that their failures could never go unnoticed.

Wisdom rescued from troubles those who served her. When a righteous man fled from his brother's wrath, she guided him on straight paths; she showed him the kingdom of God, and gave him knowledge of angels; she prospered him in his labours, and increased the fruit of his toil.

When his oppressors were covetous, she stood by him and made him rich. She protected him from his enemies, and kept him safe from those who lay in wait for him; in his arduous contest she gave him the victory, so that he might learn that godliness is more powerful than anything. When a righteous man was sold, wisdom did not desert him, but delivered him from sin.

She descended with him into the dungeon, and when he was in prison she did not leave him, until she brought him the sceptre of a kingdom and authority over his masters. Those who accused him she showed to be false, and she gave him everlasting honour.

A holy people and blameless race wisdom delivered from a nation of oppressors.

She entered the soul of a servant of the Lord, and withstood dread kings with wonders and signs. She gave holy men the reward of their labours; she guided them along a marvellous way, and became a shelter to them by day, and a starry flame through the night. She brought them over the Red Sea, and led them through deep waters; but she drowned their enemies, and cast them up from the depth of the sea.

Therefore the righteous plundered the ungodly; they sang hymns, O Lord, to your holy name, and praised with one accord your defending hand, because wisdom opened the mouth of the dumb, and made the tongues of babes speak clearly.

Wisdom prospered their works by the hand of a holy prophet. They journeyed through an uninhabited wilderness, and pitched their tents in untrodden places. They withstood their enemies and fought off their foes. When they thirsted they called upon you, and water was given them out of flinty rock, and slaking of thirst from hard stone.

Responsorial. *Wis. 10: 17, 18, 19*

R: The Lord gave his saints the reward for their pains, he guided them along a marvellous road. * He became a shelter for them by day and starlight in the night.

V: Guiding them through many waters, he submerged their enemies instead.

R: He became a shelter for them by day and starlight in the night.

Second Reading. *Disc. Div. 21, 1 – 3*

The science of holiness consists in suffering temporarily here in order to rejoice in eternity.

A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Bernard, abbot.

The Lord “led the just along straight paths, he showed him the kingdom of God and gave him the knowledge of the holy things; he gave him success in his toils and multiplied the fruits of his work” (Wis. 10: 10). It refers to the just man who from the beginning of the discourse accuses himself, but he who lives by faith is also just, as also he who is already without fear. The first without doubt is good, because he has begun to run along the true way; the second is better because he runs along it; the third is excellent because he is already drawing near to the end of the way.

“The Lord leads the just along straight paths”. The ways of the Lord are straight ways, beautiful ways, ways that are frequented, level ways. Straight without deviations, because they lead to life; beautiful without filth, because they teach purity; crowded, because by now the whole world enters into the nets of Christ; level and without difficulty, because they give sweetness. His yoke in fact is sweet and his load is light (cfr. Jn. 11: 30).

“He shows the kingdom of God”. The kingdom of God is granted, promised, shown, received. Granted in the predestination, promised in the vocation, shown in the justification, received in the glorification. Therefore it is written: “Come, blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom” (Mt. 25: 34). Thus in fact the Apostle says: “Those then whom he has predestined, he has also called, those whom he has called, he has also justified; those whom he has justified he has also glorified” (Rm. 8: 30). In the predestination is manifested the grace, in the vocation the power, in the justification the joy, in the exaltation the glory.

“And he gave them the knowledge of the holy things”. The science of the saints is to suffer for a little while down here and then to rejoice in

eternity. Instead the science of the wicked is the contrary: it is the wisdom of the world which teaches vanity, it is that of the flesh that teaches pleasure.

“He gave him success in his toils”. Is not success given also to us in our toils, when all that we do is done in the sign of unity, and there is not in us a double weight and a double measure because these are two things that are “an abomination to the Lord” (Pr. 2: 70)? Woe to us if we were to rejoice in that which is not in Christ and for Christ. Woe to us if we were to offer a poverty that can still be seen!

“And he multiplied the fruit of his work”: down here in the perseverance, because till the end he remains steady in justice, up there in glory, because he rejoices in eternity. Happy is the one and the other place, because the just man dies down here full of days and is born up there to a life without end and is full here and there: here with grace and there with glory, since “the Lord grants grace and glory” (Ps. 83: 12). Amen.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Sir. 17: 6, 5; Lk. 9: 2*

R: The Lord fills them with doctrine and intelligence: * He gives them discernment and places his light in their hearts, in order to show them the greatness of his works.

V: Jesus sent the apostles to announce the kingdom of God;

R: he gives them discernment and places his light in their hearts, in order to show them the greatness of his works.

Gospel. *Lk. 14: 15 – 24*

Go out onto the streets and push the poor to enter, so that my house may be filled.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

When one of those who sat at table with him heard this, he said to him, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet, and invited many; and at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for all is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it; I pray you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them; I pray you, have me excused.' And another said,

`I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So the servant came and reported this to his master. Then the householder in anger said to his servant, `Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame.' And the servant said, `Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' And the master said to the servant, `Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

WEDNESDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Jer. 30:18 – 31: 9*

Promises of the restoration of Israel.

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah.

"Thus says the LORD: Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob, and have compassion on his dwellings; the city shall be rebuilt upon its mound, and the palace shall stand where it used to be. Out of them shall come songs of thanksgiving, and the voices of those who make merry. I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will make them honoured, and they shall not be small. Their children shall be as they were of old, and their congregation shall be established before me; and I will punish all who oppress them. Their prince shall be one of themselves, their ruler shall come forth from their midst; I will make him draw near, and he shall approach me, for who would dare of himself to approach me? says the LORD.

And you shall be my people, and I will be your God." Behold the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his mind. In the latter days you will understand this. "At that time, says the LORD, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people." Thus says the LORD: "The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the LORD appeared to him from afar. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall adorn yourself with timbrels, and shall go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. Again you shall plant vineyards upon the mountains of Sama'ria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit. For there shall be a day when watchmen will call in the hill country of E'phraim: `Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God.'"

For thus says the LORD: "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, `The LORD has saved his people, the remnant of Israel.' Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the farthest parts of the

earth, among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her who is in travail, together; a great company, they shall return here. With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and E'phraim is my first-born.

Responsorial. *Jer. 30: 18, 19; 31: 1*

R: Thus says the Lord: I will restore the tents of Jacob, the city will be rebuilt on the ruins and the palace will rise again in its place. * Out of them shall come songs of thanksgiving and the voices of those who make merry.

V: In those days – thus says the Lord – I will be God for the whole tribe of Israel, and they will be my people.

R: Out of them shall come songs of thanksgiving and the voices of those who make merry.

Second Reading. *Book 4, disc. 1*

The renewal has been done in Christ.

A reading from the “Commentary on the prophet Isaiah” of St. Cyril of Alexandria, bishop.

Everything has been renewed in Christ. St. Paul confirms this, writing: “Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old things have passed away” (2 Cor. 5: 17).

He writes again to those called to the new type of life, that is to the life of the spirit: “Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you, but let your behaviour change, modelled by your new mind. This is the only way to discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do” (Rm. 12: 2).

We have been renewed in Christ for the sanctification, being returned through him and in him to the ancient beauty of nature which is in the image of the one who created us. And we are instructed in view of a new life almost from the first elements: despising sin and every habit that tends towards evil we undress ourselves of the old man corrupted by the cupidity of error and we redress ourselves with the new man, renewed in the image of the one who has created him. It is in Christ that man is renewed and

called a new creature, because he is derived not from a corrupt seed, but from the living and eternal word of God. Not therefore of any person, but I, for my glory, have created, formed, elected this people, gathered from the four cardinal points and assembled in my name.

And for the glory of God the Father it is right to speak of the Son; through him and in him he is gloriously exalted, according to those words clearly said by he himself: "I have glorified you on earth" (Jn. 17: 4). We who believe in him, know with certainty that men have been moulded through him, so that they may be conformed to him and may have the luminous beauty of the divine nature in their souls.

Something similar the divine psalmist said: "Put this on record for the next generation, so that a race still to be born can praise God" (Ps. 101: 19).

And when he adds that he has made a blind people come out (cfr. Is. 43: 8), he shows clearly the superiority of his power which cannot be explained by any discourse, but which is truly admirable. Those in fact whose minds and hearts were once covered by the fog of the error of a diabolical perversity, were illuminated and as if irradiated by the source itself of light: by the sun of justice which has risen for them, making them sons not by now of the night and of darkness, but of the light and of the day, as St. Paul says. Therefore know that he has drawn out a blind people.

As they were covered in dense and thick darkness when they were in error, so also their nature assumed a new splendour and became supernaturally candid and luminous. What Paul says in fact is true: "There where sin abounded, grace was over abundant".

Responsorial. *Rm. 7: 6; 5: 5*

R: But now we are rid of the Law, freed by death from our imprisonment, * to serve in the new spiritual way and not the old way of a written law.

V: The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that has been given to us,

R: to serve in the new spiritual way and not the old way of a written law.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Wis. 11: 20b – 12: 2, 11b – 19*

The compassion and patience of God.

A reading from the book of Wisdom.

Even apart from these, men could fall at a single breath when pursued by justice and scattered by the breath of your power. But you have arranged all things by measure and number and weight. For it is always in your power to show great strength, and who can withstand the might of your arm? Because the whole world before you is like a speck that tips the scales, and like a drop of morning dew that falls upon the ground.

But you are merciful to all, for you can do all things, and you overlook men's sins, that they may repent. For you love all things that exist, and have loathing for none of the things which you have made, for you would not have made anything if you had hated it.

How would anything have endured if you had not willed it? Or how would anything not called forth by you have been preserved? You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord who loves the living. For your immortal spirit is in all things.

Therefore you correct little by little those who trespass, and remind and warn them of the things wherein they sin, that they may be freed from wickedness and put their trust in you, O Lord. For they were an accursed race from the beginning, and it was not through fear of any one that you did leave them unpunished for their sins.

For who will say, "What have you done?" Or will resist your judgment? Who will accuse you for the destruction of nations that you made? Or who will come before you to plead as an advocate for unrighteous men?

For neither is there any god besides you, whose care is for all men, to whom you should prove that you have not judged unjustly; nor can any king or monarch confront you about those whom you have punished. You are righteous and rule all things righteously, deeming it alien to your power to condemn him who does not deserve to be punished. For your strength is the source of righteousness, and your sovereignty over all causes you to spare all. For you show your strength when men doubt the completeness of your power, and rebuke any insolence among those who know it. You who are sovereign in strength judge with mildness, and with great forbearance you govern us; for you have power to act whenever you choose. Through such works you have taught your people that the righteous man must be kind, and you have filled your sons with good hope, because you give repentance for sins.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Wis. 11: 23, 24, 26; Sir. 36: 1*

R: You have compassion on all, O Lord, and you do not despise anything of all that you have created, nor do you look at the sins of men, in view of their repentance, * because you are the Lord, our God.

V: Have pity on us and see; manifest the light of your mercy,

R: because you are the Lord, our God.

Second Reading. *C. 135*

The solicitude of Divine Providence for man.

A reading from the “Dialogue of the Divine Providence” of St. Catherine of Siena, virgin.

The supreme and eternal Father with ineffable kindness turns the eye of his clemency towards my soul, saying to it: “O my dearest daughter, I want to show my mercy to the world and in every necessity to provide to my reasoning creatures in all their aspirations. But ignorant man changes in death that which I give for life, and so he makes himself cruel to himself. I always provide, and all that I have given to man is supreme providence.

With providence I created him. When I saw him in myself, I fell in love with my creature and I wanted to create him in my image and likeness as a gift of my providence. Therefore I hurried to give him memory, so that he could retain my benefits. I made him a participant of my power as the eternal Father.

I gave her intellect, so that in the wisdom of my only-begotten Son she could know and could understand with how much fire of love I opened to her the treasures of my grace.

I gave her the capacity and the will to love, making her participant of the gift of love of the Holy Spirit, so that she could love him whom she had known with the intellect.

This my sweet providence did, only because she could be capable of understanding and of tasting me, and of enjoying of my eternal goodness in my eternal vision.

The heaven was closed because of the fault of Adam. He did not take account of his dignity and he did not consider with how much providence and ineffable love I had created him. Thus he fell into disobedience and with it every type of evil came to him and to all his descendants.

In order to take away this death I provided man with all that was necessary. I gave him the Word, that is my only-begotten Son, and I freed him from his condition with great wisdom and providence.

I wanted him to become obedient and thus to be capable of eliminating that poison that he had drunk through disobedience.

Christ, moved by love, accepted the obedience and ran to the shameful death of the cross and with the death he gave back the life, certainly not because of the merits of man, but because of the divine concession”.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Ps. 16: 8, 7*

R: Keep me, Lord, like the apple of your eye, * protect me in the shadow of your wings.

V: Show me the prodigies of your love, you who save those who trust in your right arm;

R: protect me in the shadow of your wings.

Gospel. *Lk. 14: 25 – 33*

Whoever does not renounce to all his possessions cannot be my disciple.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

Now great multitudes accompanied him; and he turned and said to them, "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an envoy and asks terms of peace. So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

THURSDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Jer. 31: 15 – 22, 27 – 34*

Announcement of salvation and of a new Covenant.

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah.

Thus says the LORD: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not." Thus says the LORD: "Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says the LORD, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future, says the LORD, and your children shall come back to their own country. I have heard E'phraim bemoaning, 'You have chastened me, and I was chastened, like an untrained calf; bring me back that I may be restored, for you are the LORD my God. For after I had turned away I repented; and after I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, and I was confounded, because I bore the disgrace of my youth.' Is E'phraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the LORD.

"Set up waymarks for yourself, make yourself guideposts; consider well the highway, the road by which you went. Return, O virgin Israel, return to these your cities. How long will you waver, O faithless daughter?

For the LORD has created a new thing on the earth: a woman protects a man."

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the LORD.

In those days they shall no longer say: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.'

But every one shall die for his own sin; each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge. "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the

house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Responsorial. *Ps. 50: 12, 11*

R: A pure heart create for me, O God, * put a steadfast spirit within me.

V: From my sins turn away your face, and blot out all my guilt.

R: Put a steadfast spirit within me.

Second Reading. *Book 4, disc. 1*

Christ, as Son and Lord, is the realisation of the new Covenant.

A reading from the "Commentary on the prophet Isaiah" of St. Cyril of Alexandria, bishop.

The Lord God has appeared to us, as it is read in the Scriptures: and through him the wandering flock, conquered by faith, was brought to grace. He was the one awaited for by the nations, and through him God the Father attracted to the light of truth those who had their hearts and their intelligence obscured by dense darkness. He has made this known with a few words: "I, the Lord, have called you to serve the cause of right; I have taken you by the hand and formed you; I have appointed you as a covenant of the people and light of the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to free captives from prison and those who live in darkness from the dungeon" (Is. 42: 6-7).

Our Lord Jesus Christ in fact has been placed by God the Father as a covenant of the Israelites who are his race according to the flesh; and also through a prophet God renewed his promise when he said: "See, the days are coming – it is the Lord who speaks – when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and with the House of Judah, but not a covenant like the one I made with their ancestors" (Jer. 31: 31-32).

Moses by divine will, had to fulfil the job of guide as a shadow and type, behaving like a suppliant: but Christ, as the Son and Lord, became the accomplisher of the New Covenant; new, I say, because it brings back to the newness of a holy life, because it transforms man, and through the evangelical life it makes him good and a true worshipper. In fact “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4: 24). For this he was placed as a mediator of the people and light of the nations, in order to open the eyes of the blind and to tear away the chains from the prisoners. Satan, head and guide of the wicked, had obscured the hearts of the nations: “they made nonsense out of logic and their empty minds were darkened. The more they called themselves philosophers, the more stupid they grew, until they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for a worthless imitation, for the image of mortal man, of birds, of quadrupeds and reptiles” (Rm. 1: 21-23).

But Christ, true light, has been born for us like a comprehensible morning star and like the sun of justice: he has irradiated the splendour of the true knowledge of God, dissipating the darkness of the diabolic error which had covered the inhabitants of the earth and he has freed from prison those who were held prisoners by the inevitable chains of their crimes.

Responsorial. *1 Jn. 2: 1-2; Act. 4: 12*

R: We have our advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ who is just. * He is the sacrifice that takes our sins away.

V: In no one else there is salvation.

R: He is the sacrifice that takes our sins away.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Wis. 13: 1 – 10; 14: 15 – 21; 15: 1 – 6*

The wise man condemns the idols.

A reading from the book of Wisdom.

For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists, nor did they recognize the craftsman while paying heed to his works; but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water, or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world.

If through delight in the beauty of these things men assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them. And if men were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is he who formed them.

For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator. Yet these men are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him.

For as they live among his works they keep searching, and they trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful. Yet again, not even they are to be excused; for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things?

But miserable, with their hopes set on dead things, are the men who give the name "gods" to the works of men's hands, gold and silver fashioned with skill, and likenesses of animals, or a useless stone, the work of an ancient hand.

For a father, consumed with grief at an untimely bereavement, made an image of his child, who had been suddenly taken from him; and he now honoured as a god what was once a dead human being, and handed on to his dependents secret rites and initiations.

Then the ungodly custom, grown strong with time, was kept as a law, and at the command of monarchs graven images were worshiped. When men could not honour monarchs in their presence, since they lived at a distance, they imagined their appearance far away, and made a visible image of the king whom they honoured, so that by their zeal they might flatter the absent one as though present. Then the ambition of the craftsman impelled even those who did not know the king to intensify their worship.

For he, perhaps wishing to please his ruler, skilfully forced the likeness to take more beautiful form, and the multitude, attracted by the charm of his

work, now regarded as an object of worship the one whom shortly before they had honoured as a man. And this became a hidden trap for mankind, because men, in bondage to misfortune or to royal authority, bestowed on objects of stone or wood the name that ought not to be shared.

But you, our God, are kind and true, patient, and ruling all things in mercy. For even if we sin we are yours, knowing your power; but we will not sin, because we know that we are accounted yours. For to know you is complete righteousness, and to know your power is the root of immortality. For neither has the evil intent of human art misled us, nor the fruitless toil of painters, a figure stained with varied colours, whose appearance arouses yearning in fools, so that they desire the lifeless form of a dead image. Lovers of evil things and fit for such objects of hope are those who either make or desire or worship them.

Responsorial. *Rm. 1: 20; cfr. Wis. 13: 5, 1*

R: The invisible perfections of God can be contemplated with the intellect in the works accomplished by him. * In fact from the greatness and beauty of the creature the author can be known by analogy.

V: All the men who ignore God are fools.

R: In fact from the greatness and beauty of the creatures the author can be known by analogy.

Second Reading. *Lett. 8, 11*

“The Spirit of the Lord fills the universe” (Ws. 1, 7)

A reading from the “Letters” of St. Basil the Great, bishop.

In Scripture we find mention of three types of creations. The first is the evolution from non-being into being. The second is change from the worse to the better. The third is the resurrection of the dead. In these you will always find the Holy Spirit cooperating with the Father and the Son.

There is a bringing into existence of the heavens; and what does David say? “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.” (Ps. 32: 6)

Again, man is created through baptism, for “if any man be in Christ he is a new creature.” (2 Cor. 5: 17).

And what does the Saviour say to the disciples? “Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28: 19). Here too you see the Holy Spirit present with the Father and the Son.

And what would you say also as to the resurrection of the dead when we shall have failed and returned to our dust? Dust we are and unto dust we shall return. And He will send the Holy Spirit and create us and renew the face of the earth.

For what the holy Paul calls resurrection David describes as renewal.

Let us hear, once more, him who was taken up into the third heaven. What does he say? “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?” (1 Cor. 3: 16).

Now every temple is a temple of God, and if we are a temple of the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit is God.

It is also called Solomon’s temple, but this is in the sense of his being its builder. And if we are a temple of the Holy Spirit in this sense, then the Holy Spirit is God, for “He that built all things is God.” (Heb. 3: 4). If we are a temple of one who is worshipped, and who dwells in us, let us confess Him to be God, for you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve. (Mt. 4: 10)

Supposing them to object to the word “God,” let them learn what this word means.

We call God he who has created and sees everything. If therefore the Spirit knows all the things of God, as the spirit that is in us knows ours, then the Holy Spirit is God

Again, if the sword of the spirit is the word of God, then the Holy Spirit is God, inasmuch as the sword belongs to Him of whom it is also called the word. Is He named the right hand of the Father? For “the right hand of the Lord brings mighty things to pass;” (Ps. 117: 16). So the Holy Spirit is of the same nature as the Father and the Son.

Responsorial. *Wis. 1: 7; 21,: 23*

R: The Spirit of the Lord fills the universe: * embracing everything, it knows every voice.

V: Creator of all things, all-powerful, all-seeing:

R: embracing everything, it knows every voice.

Gospel. *Lk. 15: 1 – 10*

There is rejoicing in heaven for one sinner who converts.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

"Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

FRIDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Jer. 42: 1 – 16; 43: 4 – 7*

The fate of Jeremiah and of the people after the conquest of the city.

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah.

Then all the commanders of the forces, and Joha'nan the son of Kare'ah and Azari'ah the son of Hoshai'ah, and all the people from the least to the greatest, came near and said to Jeremiah the prophet, "Let our supplication come before you, and pray to the LORD your God for us, for all this remnant (for we are left but a few of many, as your eyes see us), that the LORD your God may show us the way we should go, and the thing that we should do."

Jeremiah the prophet said to them, "I have heard you; behold, I will pray to the LORD your God according to your request, and whatever the LORD answers you I will tell you; I will keep nothing back from you."

Then they said to Jeremiah, "May the LORD be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act according to all the word with which the LORD your God sends you to us. Whether it is good or evil, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God to whom we are sending you, that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the LORD our God."

At the end of ten days the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah. Then he summoned Joha'nan the son of Kare'ah and all the commanders of the forces who were with him, and all the people from the least to the greatest, and said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your supplication before him: If you will remain in this land, then I will build you up and not pull you down; I will plant you, and not pluck you up; for I repent of the evil which I did to you. Do not fear the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid; do not fear him, says the LORD, for I am with you, to save you and to deliver you from his hand. I will grant you mercy, that he may have mercy on you and let you remain in your own land. But if you say, 'We will not remain in this land,' disobeying the voice of the LORD your God and saying, 'No, we will go to the land of Egypt, where we shall not see war, or hear the sound of the trumpet, or be hungry for bread, and we will dwell there,' then hear the word of the LORD, O

remnant of Judah. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: If you set your faces to enter Egypt and go to live there, then the sword which you fear shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt; and the famine of which you are afraid shall follow hard after you to Egypt; and there you shall die.

So Joha'nán the son of Kare'ah and all the commanders of the forces and all the people did not obey the voice of the LORD, to remain in the land of Judah. But Joha'nán the son of Kare'ah and all the commanders of the forces took all the remnant of Judah who had returned to live in the land of Judah from all the nations to which they had been driven -- the men, the women, the children, the princesses, and every person whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahi'kam, son of Shaphan; also Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch the son of Neri'ah. And they came into the land of Egypt, for they did not obey the voice of the LORD. And they arrived at Tahpanhes.

Responsorial. *Jer. 42: 2; Lam. 5: 3*

R: Pray to the Lord your God for all of us, in favour of this remnant of your people; * we have remained few in number after having been many.

V: We have become orphans, without father; our mothers are like widows;

R: we have remained few in number after having been many.

Second Reading. *Disc. Advent. 2*

The Desired one of all the peoples will come.

A reading from the “Discourses” of the blessed Martin of Leon, monk.

Dearly beloved brothers, I want you to know that God, as he is Omnipotent by nature, so also by nature is kind and clement; he is very strong and wise in his works, rich in mercy. He alone governs, holds together and conserves everything; and “his tenderness embraces all his creatures” (Ps. 144: 9). God, therefore, kind and merciful, seeing the continuous slavery of the human race with which the ancient enemy cruelly oppressed them, in his mercy deciding to free them, consoled them through the prophet saying: “Strengthen all weary hands, steady all trembling knees and say to all faint hearts, Courage! Do not be afraid; look your God is coming to save you” (Is. 35: 3, 4).

He will remove the yoke of the terrible slavery, the yoke of misery and of unhappiness under which the ancient enemy had placed them because of

the fault of the first man. In fact that author of all wickedness afflicted the human race so much that, neither incense, or sacrifice, or holocaust of any patriarch or prophet could free them from hell. For which Isaiah, lamenting said: “All that integrity of ours was like filthy clothing” (Is. 64: 5).

But foreseeing the time of liberation from this very hard yoke, the prophet also said with joy: “The yoke will cease to weigh on his neck” (Is. 10: 27). Jeremiah also, foreseeing that the human race would one day be freed from the dominion of the ancient enemy and placed in the service of God, by order of the Lord proclaimed: “On that day – it is the Lord who speaks – I will break the yoke on their necks, and snap their chains. They will be no longer the servants of aliens, but will serve the Lord their God and David their king” (Jer. 30: 8-9), that is Christ. David in fact was already dead, but Christ would be born from his race. David himself was the object of desire, he distinguished himself in his race, prefiguring him of whom the prophet sang when he said: “The Desired of all the nations will come” (Hag. 2: 8 Vulg.), that is the Son of God, who had already been shown in the spirit to the fathers of the Old Testament.

Responsorial. *Is. 40: 2; Zac. 1: 16, 17*

R: Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and shout: * her slavery is ended.

V: I turn with compassion to Jerusalem; the Lord will have compassion again with Zion, he will elect Jerusalem again.

R: Her slavery is ended.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Wis. 16: 2b – 13, 20 – 26*

Benefits of God towards His people.

A reading from the book of Wisdom.

Instead of this punishment you showed kindness to your people, and you prepared quails to eat, a delicacy to satisfy the desire of appetite; in order that those men, when they desired food, might lose the least remnant of appetite because of the odious creatures sent to them, while your people, after suffering want a short time, might partake of delicacies.

For it was necessary that upon those oppressors inexorable wrath should come, while to these it was merely shown how their enemies were being tormented. For when the terrible rage of wild beasts came upon your people and they were being destroyed by the bites of writhing serpents, your wrath did not continue to the end; they were troubled for a little while as a warning, and received a token of deliverance to remind them of your law's command.

For he who turned toward it was saved, not by what he saw, but by you, the Saviour of all. And by this also you convinced our enemies that it is you who deliver from every evil. For they were killed by the bites of locusts and flies, and no healing was found for them, because they deserved to be punished by such things; but your sons were not conquered even by the teeth of venomous serpents, for your mercy came to their help and healed them.

To remind them of your oracles they were bitten, and then were quickly delivered, lest they should fall into deep forgetfulness and become unresponsive to your kindness. For neither herb nor poultice cured them, but it was your word, O Lord, which heals all men. For you have power over life and death; you lead men down to the gates of Hades and back again.

Instead of these things you gave your people food of angels, and without their toil you supplied them from heaven with bread ready to eat, providing every pleasure and suited to every taste. For your sustenance manifested your sweetness toward your children; and the bread, ministering to the desire of the one who took it, was changed to suit every one's liking. Snow and ice withstood fire without melting, so that they might know that the crops of their enemies were being destroyed by the fire that blazed in the hail and flashed in the showers of rain; whereas the fire, in order that the righteous might be fed, even forgot its native power.

For creation, serving you who have made it, exerts itself to punish the unrighteous, and in kindness relaxes on behalf of those who trust in you. Therefore at that time also, changed into all forms, it served your all-nourishing bounty, according to the desire of those who had need, so that your sons, whom you loved, O Lord, might learn that it is not the production of crops that feeds man, but that your word preserves those who trust in you.

Responsorial. *Wis. 16: 20, Jn. 6: 56*

R: You have fed your people with the food of angels, from heaven you have offered them a bread ready to eat without toil, * full of every delight.

V: He who eats of this bread will live forever; this is the bread that has come down from heaven,

R: full of every delight

Second Reading. *Disc. 7, 7-8*

In the time of our humiliation, hope will console us.

A reading from the “Commentary on psalm 118” of St. Ambrose, bishop.

In the time of our humiliation we are consoled by the hope that “does not disappoint” (Rm. 5: 5); I think that the time of the humiliation for our soul is that of the temptations. It is humiliated when it is abandoned to the tempter and put to the test with hard distress, because it fights and battles, experiencing the clash with the adverse power; but in these temptations it receives life from the word of God.

This is in fact the vital substance of our soul, that from which it is nourished, increased and guided. Nothing else makes the soul endowed with reason live as much as the meeting with God. The word of God, when it is received, understood and welcomed, gives fruit in our souls and it increases the life: on the contrary, if the meeting with God is lacking in our souls, his life fails.

And as this our consistence of soul and body is animated, nourished and sustained by the vital spirit, so also our soul is vivified by the word of God and by the grace of the Spirit. Therefore, putting aside all the rest, we must place every attention in accepting the words of God so that it can become in us the directive principle of the conscience, of the attentions, of the thoughts and of the actions, so that every action of ours may be in conformity to the words of the Scriptures and nothing may be discordant with the divine precepts; we also in this way can affirm: “Your word makes me live” (Ps. 118: 50).

“The proud insult me harshly, but I do not deviate from your laws” (Ps. 118: 51). The greatest sin of man, from which our fault draws its origins, is the pride: it is the first arrow with which the devil has wounded and knocked us down. In fact if man, deceived by the persuasive words of the

serpent, had not wanted to be like God and to know the true and the false, which he could not discern deeply because of the human fragility, and if for this he had not acted as he did, following from the happiness of paradise for a rash presumption: if, unsatisfied with his limits, he had not broken a prohibition, the inheritance of a mortal fault would never have fallen back on us.

Responsorial. *Sir. 3: 18-20; Pr. 29: 23*

R: The greater you are, all the more humble yourself; thus you will find grace in front of the Lord * Because great is the power of the Lord and he is glorified by the humble.

V: The pride of man provokes his humiliation, the humble of heart obtains honours,

R: because great is the power of the Lord and he is glorified by the humble.

Gospel. *Lk. 16: 1 – 8*

The sons of this world are more cunning towards their fellowmen, than the sons of light.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a steward, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.' And the steward said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that people may receive me into their houses when I am put out of the stewardship.'

So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' The master commended the dishonest steward for his shrewdness; for the sons of this world are shrewder in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

SATURDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Ez. 1: 3 – 14, 22 – 28*

Vision of the glory of God in the land of exile.

A reading from the prophet Ezekiel.

The word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chalde'ans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was upon him there. As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness round about it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming bronze. And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the form of men, but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: their wings touched one another; they went every one straight forward, without turning as they went.

As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man in front; the four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle at the back. Such were their faces. And their wings were spread out above; each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies. And each went straight forward; wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. In the midst of the living creatures there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures darted to and fro, like a flash of lightning.

Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of a firmament, shining like crystal, spread out above their heads. And under the firmament their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another; and each creature had two wings covering its body. And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the thunder of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of a host; when

they stood still, they let down their wings. And there came a voice from above the firmament over their heads; when they stood still, they let down their wings.

And above the firmament over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness as it were of a human form. And upward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw as it were gleaming bronze, like the appearance of fire enclosed round about; and downward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness round about him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Ez. 1: 26, 24; 3: 12; Ap. 5: 13*

R: I saw on high, as if on a throne, the figure of a man and I heard the tumult as of a camp: * Blessing and glory to the Lord of heaven.

V: To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, praise, honour, glory and power, forever and ever.

R: Blessing and glory to the Lord of heaven.

Second Reading. *Disc. 10 – 11 for Advent.*

Jerusalem, do not cry, because your salvation is near.

A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Bernard, abbot.

The prophet consoles the holy city of Jerusalem still exiled in the most squalid misery: Do not cry because your salvation is near (cfr. Is. 40: 1). In fact “by the rivers of Babylon there we sat down crying” (Ps. 136: 1). Babylon is the confusion. In Babylon they sit down and cry those citizens of Jerusalem, who though not being confused in their actions yet are confused in their thoughts, wanting but not being able to turn the eyes of their minds to God, because, even though unwillingly, they are distracted by vain things.

But “let us thank God for giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (1 Cor. 15: 57); because, if the wicked habits insinuate themselves, we will not stop in them, but we will sit down by the rivers of Babylon, so

that our soul quiet in front of the sweetness and the temptation of the secular life, will become deaf to the new invitations and harden itself in front of flattery.

Obstructed therefore by this vanity, it is not to be marvelled at if we cry remembering Zion, that is bringing back to the memory the sweetness and the pleasure that those who deserve to contemplate without veils the glory of God foretaste. And yet “if I was to walk in a dark valley I would fear no harm” if you are with me; on the contrary “I would not fear because you are with me” (Ps. 22: 4). And how can I presume to hope for this? Because the rod of your correction and your supporting staff console me.

Even if my pride corrects and represses me, driving me to the dust of death, yet you sustain my life, making it possible for me to not fall into the pit of death.

I will not neglect the laws of the Lord, nor will I get irritated when he corrects me. I know in fact that “everything contributes to the good of those who love God” (Rm. 8: 28). Then, with impatience? No, bearing patiently. Why? “By the will of he who has submitted it” in hope (Rm. 8: 20). In fact, the creature itself will be freed from the slavery to evil in order to reach the freedom of the glory of the sons of God.

Therefore, Jerusalem, do not cry, because your salvation is near (cfr. Rm. 13: 11). “If he takes his time” with regard to you yet “he will not delay” (Hab. 2: 3), because “to him, a thousand years are a single day, a yesterday now over” (Ps. 89: 4).

Responsorial. *Is. 40: 10*

R: Jerusalem, do not cry, for the Lord has pity on you; * and he will free you from all tribulation.

V: Behold, the Lord comes with power, his arm subduing all things to him.

R: And he will free you from all tribulation

First Reading. *Wis. 18: 1 – 16; 19: 3 – 9*

The night of Passover.

A reading from the book of Wisdom.

But for your holy ones there was very great light. Their enemies heard their voices but did not see their forms, and counted them happy for not having suffered, and were thankful that your holy ones, though previously wronged, were doing them no injury; and they begged their pardon for having been at variance with them.

Therefore you provided a flaming pillar of fire as a guide for your people's unknown journey, and a harmless sun for their glorious wandering. For their enemies deserved to be deprived of light and imprisoned in darkness, those who had kept your sons imprisoned, through whom the imperishable light of the law was to be given to the world.

When they had resolved to kill the babes of your holy ones, and one child had been exposed and rescued, you did in punishment take away a multitude of their children; and you destroyed them all together by a mighty flood. That night was made known beforehand to our fathers, so that they might rejoice in sure knowledge of the oaths in which they trusted. The deliverance of the righteous and the destruction of their enemies were expected by your people.

For by the same means by which you punished our enemies you called us to yourself and glorify us. For in secret the holy children of good men offered sacrifices, and with one accord agreed to the divine law, that the saints would share alike the same things, both blessings and dangers; and already they were singing the praises of the fathers.

But the discordant cry of their enemies echoed back, and their piteous lament for their children was spread abroad. The slave was punished with the same penalty as the master, and the common man suffered the same loss as the king; and they all together, by the one form of death, had corpses too many to count. For the living were not sufficient even to bury them, since in one instant their most valued children had been destroyed.

For though they had disbelieved everything because of their magic arts, yet, when their first-born were destroyed, they acknowledged your people to be God's son. For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, your all-powerful word leaped from

heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed, a stern warrior carrying the sharp sword of your authentic command, and stood and filled all things with death, and touched heaven while standing on the earth.

For while they were still busy at mourning, and were lamenting at the graves of their dead, they reached another foolish decision, and pursued as fugitives those whom they had begged and compelled to depart. For the fate they deserved drew them on to this end, and made them forget what had happened, in order that they might fill up the punishment which their torments still lacked, and that your people might experience an incredible journey, but they themselves might meet a strange death. For the whole creation in its nature was fashioned anew, complying with your commands, that your children might be kept unharmed.

The cloud was seen overshadowing the camp, and dry land emerging where water had stood before, an unhindered way out of the Red Sea, and a grassy plain out of the raging waves, where those protected by your hand passed through as one nation, after gazing on marvellous wonders. For they ranged like horses, and leaped like lambs, praising you, O Lord, who did deliver them.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Wis. 19: 5, 7; Ps. 77: 20*

R: Your saints, Lord, obeying your commands, undertook an extraordinary journey and were preserved unharmed from the violent waves. * Dry land and a free road appeared in the Red Sea.

V: Behold, he struck the rock and water gushed out and the torrents overflowed.

R: Dry land and a free road appeared in the Red Sea.

Second Reading. *N. 10*

The omnipotent word came down from his royal throne.

A reading from the treatise “The contemplation of God” of William of Saint-Thierry, abbot.

O Lord you who give salvation and bless your people, what is salvation if not to love you for your gift or better to be loved by you? Therefore, O Lord, you have wanted that the Son of your right hand, the man who for you, you have made strong (Cfr. Ps. 79: 18), was called Jesus, that is

Saviour; “he in fact will save the people from their sins” (Mt. 1: 21) and in no one else is there salvation. He has taught us to love him by loving us first of all and up to the point of death on the cross; with the love and the predilection he has aroused in us the love for him, who has loved us first up to the end. Among the sons of men justice consists in this: love me, because I love you. But it is rare to find one who can say: I love you first so that you can love me: not because you had need of our love, but because only loving you we would have been able to reach the end for which you had created us. Therefore “God, who had already spoken in ancient days many times and in various ways to the fathers through the prophets, in the final times, in these days, he has spoken to us through his Son” (Heb. 1. 1-2), your Word; in him “the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their hosts” (Ps. 32: 6).

To speak through your Son has been like manifesting in full light how much and how you have loved us. You did not spare your Son, but for all of us you have given him who has loved us and has offered himself in sacrifice for us. This is your Word, O Lord, the omnipotent Word that directs us. It “while a profound silence enveloped all things – the profound silence of error – launched himself from your royal throne” (Wis. 18: 14, 15) in order to weaken inexorably sin and to bring us the sweetness of his love.

And all that he did, all that he said on the earth, even the disgrace that he bore, even the spitting and the slaps, even the cross and the sepulchre, all that was nothing but yourself speaking in the Son, appealing to us by your love, and stirring up our love for you.

For you, O God, our souls’ creator, knew that this affection cannot be forced in the souls of the sons of men, but has to be evoked. And this is for the obvious reason that there is no freedom where there is compulsion, and, where freedom is lacking, so too is righteousness. But you, just Lord, wanted to save us with justice, you who do not save and do not condemn anyone if not justly; you who have sustained our right and our cause and who “just judge who sits on the throne” (Ps. 9: 5) judging the same justice created by you: so that every mouth be silenced, and all the world may be submitted to God, because you have compassion on whom you want to have compassion and show mercy to whom you want to show mercy (cfr. Ex. 33: 19).

You therefore have wanted us to love you, because we would not have been able to be saved with justice if not by loving you. And we would not

have been able to love you if this love had not proceeded from you. Therefore, O Lord, as the Apostle says of your love and as we already were saying: you have loved us first, and first you love all those who love you (cfr. 1 Jn. 4: 19).

Responsorial. *Is. 52: 9-10; Jn. 3: 17*

R: The Lord has consoled his people, he has ransomed Jerusalem. The Lord has uncovered his holy arm in front of all the nations. * All the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

V: God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world could be saved through him.

R: All the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

Gospel. *Lk. 16: 9 – 15*

*If you have not been faithful with the dishonest riches,
Who will trust you with the true one?*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations. "He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?

No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they scoffed at him. But he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts; for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.