

WEEK 27

SUNDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 22: 1 – 14*

Against the false security of the people of Israel.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

The oracle concerning the valley of vision. What do you mean that you have gone up, all of you, to the housetops, you who are full of shouting, tumultuous city, exultant town? Your slain are not slain with the sword or dead in battle. All your rulers have fled together, without the bow they were captured. All of you who were found were captured, though they had fled far away.

Therefore I said: "Look away from me, let me weep bitter tears; do not labour to comfort me for the destruction of the daughter of my people." For the Lord GOD of hosts has a day of tumult and trampling and confusion in the valley of vision, a battering down of walls and shouting to the mountains.

And Elam bore the quiver with chariots and horsemen, and Kir uncovered the shield. Your choicest valleys were full of chariots, and the horsemen took their stand at the gates. He has taken away the covering of Judah. In that day you looked to the weapons of the House of the Forest, and you saw that the breaches of the city of David were many, and you collected the waters of the lower pool, and you counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall. You made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool. But you did not look to him who did it, or have regard for him who planned it long ago.

In that day the Lord GOD of hosts called to weeping and mourning, to baldness and girding with sackcloth; and behold, joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." The LORD of hosts has revealed himself in my ears: "Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven you till you die," says the Lord GOD of hosts.

Responsorial. *Joel. 2: 12-13*

R: Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with tears and lamentation. * Rend your hearts and not your garments.

V: Return to the Lord your God, because he is merciful and kind.

R: Rend your hearts and not your garments.

Second Reading. *Hom. 9, 6*

The Father dominates all things.

A reading from the “Paschal homilies” of St. Cyril of Alexandria, bishop.

“Only one Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ep. 4: 5-6). God the Father reigns in fact and rules over all things and governs everything, giving them life completely and sustaining them, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit and not as through an instrument, of which I could make use of for a work. In fact God, Word generated by him sits at his right hand and participates of the same throne, and his Spirit reigns together with him. Since the Son who is the power and the wisdom of the Father (cfr. 1 Cor. 1: 24), brings to fulfilment every thing in the Spirit precisely as his power and wisdom, he rules in himself all things, and God the Father dominates over all.

He places therefore in our hearts as the foundation before every other thing an upright and uncorrupted faith, and then in an opportune way all those things that make us blessed, that is to say every kind of virtue. We will be capable also of fulfilling all the actions that belong to a heart that is inflamed with the divine love. “Faith without works is dead” (Jam. 2: 17) so also the works, if first there is no faith, is of no use to our souls, as it is written: “Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor’s crown unless he competes according to the rules” (2 Tm. 2: 5).

In fact as much as one may be well versed in the art of fighting, for as much as he may be considered superior to the others because of his strength, yet it will never happen that he will be honoured with the crown, if first he has not sustained the fight which is the reason of the glory and has not had, as a spectator of the actions accomplished valiantly by him, the head of the stadium. Let us fight therefore in the presence of God, having in honour his divine laws and let us direct the course of our lives there where

it will be more pleasing to him, subjects everywhere at his service. Then presenting ourselves in a sweet-smelling perfume to God who presides the fights of the saints, we will show ourselves enflamed by all that which is excellent and lit up with uncontrollable longing.

Let us think then of those words pronounced by God: “Be holy, because I am holy” (Lev. 11: 44); thus let us present ourselves to God as risen from the dead, so that pure we may be received by him who is pure, communicating in this way of the mystical blessing we will have our hearts filled with all the goods.

Responsorial. *1 Jn. 3: 1; cfr. 2 Pet. 1: 4*

R: How great is the love that the Father has lavished on us, * that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are.

V: God has given himself through Christ, so that we could become participants of the divine nature,

R: that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Sir. 1: 1 – 18 (vulg. 1:1. 25)*

The mystery of divine wisdom.

A reading from the book of Sirach.

All wisdom comes from the Lord and is with him forever. The sand of the sea, the drops of rain, and the days of eternity -- who can count them? The height of heaven, the breadth of the earth, the abyss, and wisdom -- who can search them out? Wisdom was created before all things, and prudent understanding from eternity. The root of wisdom -- to whom has it been revealed? Her clever devices -- who knows them? There is One who is wise, greatly to be feared, sitting upon his throne.

The Lord himself created wisdom; he saw her and apportioned her, he poured her out upon all his works. She dwells with all flesh according to his gift, and he supplied her to those who love him. The fear of the Lord is glory and exultation, and gladness and a crown of rejoicing. The fear of the Lord delights the heart, and gives gladness and joy and long life. With him

who fears the Lord it will go well at the end; on the day of his death he will be blessed.

To fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; she is created with the faithful in the womb. She made among men an eternal foundation, and among their descendants she will be trusted. To fear the Lord is wisdom's full measure; she satisfies men with her fruits; she fills their whole house with desirable goods, and their storehouses with her produce. The fear of the Lord is the crown of wisdom, making peace and perfect health to flourish. He saw her and apportioned her; he rained down knowledge and discerning comprehension, and he exalted the glory of those who held her fast. To fear the Lord is the root of wisdom, and her branches are long life.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Sir. 1: 5, 7, 8, 1*

R: To whom has been revealed the root of wisdom? Who knows his designs? The Lord has poured it out on every living being, * and he gives it to all those who love him.

V: All wisdom comes from the Lord: it is always with him

R: and he gives it to all those who love him.

Second Reading. *Nm. 10 – 11*

Each one of us has an angel who prays for us.

A reading from the treatise “On prayer” of Origen, presbyter.

Through the purification of which we have spoken we participate in the prayer of the Word of God, who is in the midst of those who confess him and is never absent from the prayers of anyone, because he prays to the Father, together with the man of whom he is a mediator. The Son of God is in fact the high Priest of our oblations and the advocate in front of the Father: he prays with those who pray and pleads their cause. But he will not pray for those who do not pray assiduously through him as he does for his intimate friends, nor will he sponsor as his own in front of God those who do not obey his orders of “praying always without tiring” (Lk. 18: 1).

And it is not only the high Priest who prays for those who pray worthily, but also the angels, who have greater joy “in heaven for one converted sinner than for the ninety-nine just ones who have no need of conversion” (Lk. 15: 7); so also do the souls of the saints who have already

fallen asleep in the Lord. This appears as evident from the fact that Raphael offered to God the spiritual cult of Tobias and Sarah.

Now one of the highest virtues is, according to the divine word, the charity towards the neighbour: therefore it is necessary to believe that the saints who are already dead exercise this charity towards those who still fight on the earth, much more than those who finding themselves still in the human condition help the weaker in battle. With this not only is the saying realized: “If one member suffers, all the members suffer together; and if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with him”(1 Cor. 12: 26); but the charity of those who have passed from this life can rightly say: “And besides all the external things, there is, day in and day out, the pressure on me of my anxiety for all the Churches. If anyone weakens, I am weakened as well, and when anyone is made to fall, I burn in agony myself” (2 Cor. 11: 28-29); so much so that Christ has proclaimed himself to be ill in each of the faithful who are sick and so also prisoner, nude, foreigner, hungry and thirsty.

Who, from among all those who have read even only the Gospel, ignores that Christ refers to himself and assumes as his own all that which happens to his faithful? And if the angels of God “drew near” to Jesus “and they served him” (Mt. 4: 11), you must not think that they gave this service limitedly for the brief period of the bodily presence of Christ amongst men, when he was still in the midst of his disciples, not as a table-companion, but “as he who serves” (Lk. 22. 27). How many angels are there, probably, at the service of Jesus who wants to reunite one by one the sons of Israel and to gather the dispersed and who saves those who fear him and invoke him! How many co-operate much more than the apostles in the increase and multiplication of the Church!

They therefore, informed during the prayer by he who prays with regard to his necessities, fulfil as much as they can, according to the universal mandate that they have received. It is God who during the time of prayer who has led to the same place, both the one who prays as well as the one who can come to his help, He who because of his generosity is incapable of despising the destitute. Therefore, when all this happens, you must not believe that it is all by chance, because he for whom “even the hairs of our head are counted” (Lk. 12: 7), in that same time of prayer unites opportunely and offers to the needy who pray with faith the angel who with solicitude renders the service that is asked for to them. So also we must

think that at times the angels, who are the inspectors and the ministers of God, make themselves present to this or that man who prays in order to contribute to the carrying out of his requests. On the other hand the angel of each one of us, even of those who are the smallest in the Church, who “always see the face of the Father who is in heaven” (Mt. 18: 10) and who contemplate the divinity of our Creator, prays with us and co-operates as much as they can in the granting of our prayers.

Responsorial. *Ps. 137: 1-2*

R: Before the angels I want to sing to you, * I prostrate myself towards your holy temple and I give thanks to your name.

V: Let the angel who escorted Jacob accompany me in my pilgrimage and may God bless my journey;

R: I prostrate myself towards your holy temple and I give thanks to your name

YEAR A

Gospel. *Mt. 21: 33-43*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

"Hear another parable. There was a householder who planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to tenants, and went into another country.

When the season of fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants, to get his fruit; and the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first; and they did the same to them. Afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' And they took him and cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: `the very stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it."

Third Reading. *Bk 4. t, 4*

The judgement pronounced by the Father.

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

For the Word to assume our condition and to submit himself to the human misery was a suffering. But he said: my judgement is with the Lord and my punishment is before my God. The Father knows which sufferings I have accepted for their salvation. Therefore he has also pronounced judgement.

Do you want to see the judgement of the Father and the sentence pronounced over them? Listen to what the Saviour says to the leaders of the Jews: "There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey" (Mt. 21: 33).

He then sent his servants to collect the fruit; and all of them were ill-treated. When at the end he sent his son, they having seen him, said to one another: "This is the heir, come let us kill him and take his inheritance" (Mt. 21: 38). And they really killed him.

After the narration of this parable the Lord said again: "Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? (Mt. 21: 40). And they said to him: "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time" (Mt. 21: 41). Christ then added: "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and be given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Mt. 21: 43). This is what then happened.

Other guardians and wise farmers were therefore then designated, that is the disciples of the Lord. With them the clouds gave rain, even if they had been given the order of not irrigating anymore the vineyard of the Jews. With them Christ has not harvested thorns but grapes. For this we say:

“When the Lord will pour out his goods, our land will give its fruits” (Ps. 84: 13).

Someone could also observe that the toil of the Son was present in front of the eyes of the Father and therefore he enacted a just judgement. Consider well the strength of the discourse and reflect on the plan of the divine economy which the most wise Paul explains to us, when he says: “Though being of divine nature he did not consider his equality with God as something to be grasped”, but he emptied himself making himself obedient to the Father “up to the point of death, and even death on the cross; therefore God has exalted him and has given him the name that is above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” (Phil. 2: 6, 8-10).

The Word in fact was and is God, but after he was proclaimed man and he truly became man, he ascended in his glory with the body. He in fact was recognised as God and did not suffer in vain. The plan of the Father assured him his glory; he did not have to become a pilgrim and a strange being, but he declared himself the Saviour and Redeemer of the world. Knowing this, the heavens and the earth and even the abyss prostrated themselves in front of him.

Responsorial. *Jn. 5: 22, 23; 1 Sam. 2: 10*

R: The Father has handed over all judgement to the Son, * so that all may honour the Son as they honour the Father.

V: The Lord will give strength to his king, he will raise up the power of his Messiah.

R: So that all may honour the Son as they honour the Father.

YEAR B

Gospel. *Mk. 10: 2-16*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Mark.

And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to put her away." But Jesus said to them, "For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, `God made them male and female.' `For this reason a man shall leave his father

and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder."

And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

And they were bringing children to him, that he might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it he was indignant, and said to them, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them.

Third Reading. *Disc. 37: 5-7*

This mystery is great.

A reading from the "Discourses" of St. Gregory Nazianzen, bishop.

"Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked: Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" (Mt. 19: 3). The Pharisees put him to the test again, again they, who read the law, do not understand the law, again they who claim to be the interpreters of the law need other masters. It is not enough that the Sadducees had questioned him about the resurrection, the doctors of the law on perfection, the Herodians on tribute and others again on power. Also on marriage someone questions him who cannot be tempted, who has created marriage and who is the first cause of the whole human race.

And he answered: "Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female?" (Mt. 19: 4). I see that this problem proposed by you regards the esteem and the honour of chastity and that it awaits a human and just answer. And I realize that on this problem many are badly informed and their laws are unjust and incoherent. Was this, in fact, the

reason for which they oppressed with punishment the wives, while using indulgence with the husband, leaving him free? If a woman had thought of dishonouring the nuptial bed, she would have been forced to expiate her adultery and was punished by the law with a very hard legal punishment; how come instead, the husband who had violated with adultery the faithfulness promised to the wife, was not struck with a condemnation?

I do not approve at all of this law, I do not accept at all this tradition.

Those who instituted this law were men, therefore it was made against the women; and since they submitted the children to the paternal authority, they left the weaker sex in ignorance and in neglect. Do you see the impartiality of the law? One is the Creator of man and of woman, the one and the other are the same dust, one and the same image; one is the law, one death, one the resurrection. We have been procreated equally from a man and from a woman: only one and identical duty do the children have towards their parents.

With what courage, therefore, do you demand an honesty that you in turn do not maintain? How dare you demand that which you do not give? And how can you establish laws different for a person who is as worthy as you of respect? If you look at the fault, the woman has sinned, but also Adam has sinned equally: the serpent deceived the one and the other, in order to push them to the fault. One was not found to be weaker and the other stronger. Do you want to reflect rather on the plan of salvation? Christ saved both with his passion. Did he become incarnate for the man? Also for the woman! Did he suffer death for the man? With his death he has offered salvation to the woman also.

But he has been proclaimed descendant of the descendants of David and from this perhaps you conclude that the men must have precedence in receiving honour. I know, but he was also born from a Virgin, and this is valid also for the woman. Therefore he said: "The two will be only one flesh" (Mt. 19: 5); as a consequence the flesh that is one only, has equal honour.

Already Saint Paul, also with the example, prescribed the laws of chastity. In what way and for what reason? This mystery is great: I say this in reference to Christ and to the Church" (Ep. 5: 32). It is beautiful, for a woman, to venerate Christ in the husband; but it is also beautiful for the man not to despise the Church in the wife. "The wife, he says, must be respectful towards the husband" (Ep. 5: 33) as towards Christ. And also the

husband must sustain and love the wife, exactly as Christ did with the Church (cfr. Ep. 5: 29).

Responsorial. *Jn. 2: 24; Mk. 10: 9; Ep. 5: 32*

R: For this the man will leave his father and his mother and will join himself to his wife and the two will be only one flesh. * Let man therefore not separate that which God has joined together.

V: This mystery is great: I say this in reference to Christ and to the Church.

R: Let man therefore not separate that which God has joined together.

YEAR C

Gospel. *Lk. 17: 5-10*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" And the Lord said, "If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, 'Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

"Will any one of you, who has a servant ploughing or keeping sheep, say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down at table'? Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and gird yourself and serve me, till I eat and drink; and afterward you shall eat and drink'? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

Third Reading. *Ps. 147, 3*

Awaken your faith: Look at eternal life with the eyes of faith.

A reading from the "Commentary on the Psalms" of St. Augustine, bishop.

"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" (1 Cor. 15: 19). There is therefore another life. Let each one interrogate Christ with regard to his own faith. But faith sleeps. It is logical that it is fluctuating, because the Christ is sleeping in the boat. Jesus in fact, was asleep in the boat and it was tossed about on the water amidst many storms. The heart therefore becomes agitated when Christ sleeps. But Christ

is always awake; what does it mean then that the Christ sleeps? It is your faith that sleeps. Why are you still agitated by the storms of doubt? Awaken Jesus, awaken your faith: look at the future life in view of which you have believed, for which you have been sealed with his seal, with the eyes of faith. He has lived this life in order to show you how contemptible is that which you love and how much it is to hope for that which you did not hope for. If therefore you have awakened the faith and fixed your gaze on the ultimate reality, on the joys of the future age which we will enjoy after the second coming of the Lord and his judgement, when the kingdom of heaven will be handed over to the saints; if you will have directed your thoughts towards that life and towards the pacific activity that will be carried out there; then, O dearly beloved, your toil will not be agitated, your work will be overflowing with a unique sweetness, not molested by anything, not damaged by any tiredness, not disturbed by any cloud.

What will be our occupation? To praise God, to love and to praise, to praise loving and to love praising. “Blessed is he who dwells in your house, for ever singing your praise” (Ps. 83: 5).

For what reason, if not because they will love you forever? For what reason, if not because they will see you forever? What a spectacle will the contemplation of God be therefore, my brothers! We, brothers, if we live with the continuous desire of belonging to him and if we persevere in it until the end, will reach the vision and we will be filled with joy. The citizens of that city will all be pure and no one who is rebellious and unruly will be admitted there.

That same enemy who here obstructs us so that we may not reach that homeland, will not be able to threaten us anymore there, because he will not even be permitted to enter there.

If already now in fact he is excluded from the hearts of the believers, how will he not be excluded from the city of the living? What will it not be, O brothers, what will it not be, I ask you, to dwell in that city, if already only speaking of it gives so much joy? We must prepare the heart for this future life; he who prepares the heart for it, despises completely this one; the despising of this one, then, makes him wait with confidence that day which the Lord invites us to wait for in fear.

Responsorial. *Ps. 26: 13, 4; Heb. 13: 14*

R: I am certain to contemplate the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. * One thing have I asked of the Lord, this only do I seek: to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

V: We do not have a stable city down here, but we go in search of that future one.

R: One thing have I asked of the Lord, this only do I seek: to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

MONDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 30: 1 – 18*

The uselessness of alliances made with other nations.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

"Woe to the rebellious children," says the LORD, "who carry out a plan, but not mine; and who make a league, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin; who set out to go down to Egypt, without asking for my counsel, to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh, and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt! Therefore shall the protection of Pharaoh turn to your shame, and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt to your humiliation.

For though his officials are at Zo'an and his envoys reach Ha'nes, every one comes to shame through a people that cannot profit them, that brings neither help nor profit, but shame and disgrace."

An oracle on the beasts of the Negeb. Through a land of trouble and anguish, from where come the lioness and the lion, the viper and the flying serpent, they carry their riches on the backs of asses, and their treasures on the humps of camels, to a people that cannot profit them.

For Egypt's help is worthless and empty, therefore I have called her "Rahab who sits still." And now, go, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book, that it may be for the time to come as a witness forever. For they are a rebellious people, lying sons, sons who will not hear the instruction of the LORD; who say to the seers, "See not"; and to the prophets, "Prophecy not to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophecy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more of the Holy One of Israel." Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel, "Because you despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and rely on them; therefore this iniquity shall be to you like a break in a high wall, bulging out, and about to collapse, whose crash comes suddenly, in an instant; and its breaking is like that of a potter's vessel which is smashed so ruthlessly that among its fragments not a shred is found with which to take fire from the hearth, or to dip up water out of the cistern."

For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength."

And you would not, but you said, "No! We will speed upon horses," therefore you shall speed away; and, "We will ride upon swift steeds," therefore your pursuers shall be swift. A thousand shall flee at the threat of one, at the threat of five you shall flee, till you are left like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain, like a signal on a hill. Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you; therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.

Responsorial. *Is. 30: 15, 18*

R: In returning and rest you shall be saved. * In trust shall be your strength.

V: The Lord waits to be gracious to you: blessed are those who hope in him.

R: In trust shall be your strength.

Second Reading. *Ps. 48, 13 – 14*

One only is the mediator between God and men: the man Christ Jesus.

A reading from the "Commentary on the psalms" of St. Ambrose, bishop.

"Brother does not redeem; a man shall redeem; he shall not give to God his ransom, nor the price of the redemption of his soul" (cfr. Ps. 48: 8-9 Vulg.); that is, "Why shall I fear in the evil day?" (Ps. 48: 6) For what can hurt me, who not only do not need a redeemer, but am myself the redeemer of all? I shall make others free, and shall I be afraid for myself? See, I make all things new, surpassing the affection and duty of kinship. The one whom a brother, delivered into the light of day from the same mother's womb, cannot redeem, because he is held by the weakness of an equal nature, him will a man redeem: the man, however, of whom it was written that the Lord "will send them a man who will save them" (Is. 19: 20); one who said of himself: "You seek to kill me, a man who has spoken the truth to you" (Jn. 8: 40).

But although he is a man, who shall know him? Why shall no one know him? Because just as there is one God, so also there is one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus. He is the only one who will redeem man, surpassing kinsfolk in duty; because he sheds his own blood for strangers, whereas a brother cannot do this for a brother. And so to redeem us from sin he did not spare his own body; and he gave himself a ransom for all, as his true witness the apostle Paul affirmed, who claimed: "I tell the truth, I do not lie" (Rm. 9: 1).

But why is only this man the redeemer? Because no one can equal him in goodness, insofar as he lays down his life for his own servants; no one can equal him in innocence, for all are under the yoke of sin, all lie under Adam's fall. Alone he is chosen as redeemer since he cannot be affected by the ancient sin. Therefore, by 'man' let us understand the Lord Jesus, who assumed the state of man, to crucify the sin of all in his own flesh, and by his own blood wipe out the condemnation of all.

You may perhaps say: 'How is a brother denied the possibility of redeeming, when he himself said: "I will proclaim your name to my brothers"' (Ps. 21: 23)' but it was not as brother to us, but as the man Christ Jesus, in whom was God, that he did away with our sins. So it is written: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5: 19), in that Christ Jesus of whom alone it was said that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. So it was not as a brother but as Lord that he dwelt among us when he dwelt in the flesh.

Responsorial. *Is. 53: 12; Lk. 23: 24*

R: He surrendered himself to death, letting himself be taken for a sinner. *
He bore the sins of many while praying for sinners.

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

R: He bore the sins of many while praying for sinners.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Sir. 2:1 – 18 (vulg. 2:1 – 23)*

Patience in temptation.

A reading from the book of Sirach.

My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation. Set your heart right and be steadfast, and do not be hasty in time of calamity. Cleave to him and do not depart, that you may be honoured at the end of your life. Accept whatever is brought upon you, and in changes that humble you be patient. For gold is tested in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation. Trust in him, and he will help you; make your ways straight, and hope in him. You who fear the Lord, wait for his mercy; and turn not aside, lest you fall. You, who fear the Lord, trust in him, and your reward will not fail; you who fear the Lord, hope for good things, for everlasting joy and mercy. Consider the ancient generations and see: who ever trusted in the Lord and was put to shame? Or who ever persevered in the fear of the Lord and was forsaken? Or who ever called upon him and was overlooked? For the Lord is compassionate and merciful; he forgives sins and saves in time of affliction.

Woe to timid hearts and to slack hands, and to the sinner who walks along two ways! Woe to the faint heart, for it has no trust! Therefore it will not be sheltered.

Woe to you who have lost your endurance! What will you do when the Lord punishes you?

Those who fear the Lord will not disobey his words, and those who love him will keep his ways.

Those who fear the Lord will seek his approval, and those who love him will be filled with the law.

Those who fear the Lord will prepare their hearts, and will humble themselves before him. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, but not into the hands of men; for as his majesty is, so also is his mercy.

Responsorial. *Sir. 2: 10, 11; Ps. 33: 6*

R: You who fear the Lord, love him and your hearts will be illuminated; consider, O children, the generations of men and understand: * no one who has trusted in the Lord has remained deluded.

V: Look at him and be radiant, your faces will not be confused.

R: No one who has trusted in the Lord has remained deluded.

Second Reading. *Nm. 12 – 13*

Unceasing prayer.

A reading from the treatise “On prayer” of Origen, presbyter.

I believe that the same words pronounced by the faithful in prayer, specially when they pray with the spirit and the intellect, contain a divine virtue, which like a light that has risen in the mind and come out from the mouth of the person who prays, extinguishes the spiritual poison that the adverse powers instil in the souls who neglect prayer and do not observe that which Paul recommended according to the teaching of Christ: “Pray incessantly” (1 Th. 5: 17).

The science and the doctrine, in fact, or the faith, throw out of the soul of the faithful in prayer, like an arrow which defeats definitely and wounds to death, the enemy spirits of God who desire to trick us in the snares of sin. Besides, given that the acts of virtue and the fulfilment of the precepts form a part of prayer, he who unites his oration to the works of good and the good actions to the oration, prays incessantly. The precept “pray incessantly” can be considered possible only in this way and that is affirming that the whole life of the faithful is a great and continuous prayer, of which that which is commonly called oration constitutes only one part. Above all it must be done not less than three times a day as it appears clearly from the prophet Daniel, who under the threat of a very serious danger prayed three times a day.

The final prayer is indicated with these words: “My hands raised like the evening sacrifice” (Ps. 140: 2).

But without this type of prayer we will not even pass the hours of the night well, since David said: “In the heart of the night I arise to give praise to you for your just decrees” (Ps. 118: 62) and in the Acts of the Apostles it is narrated that at Philippi Paul prayed and praised God together with Silas, so much so that they were also heard by the other prisoners.

If Jesus also prayed and he did not pray in vain, but obtained with prayer that which he would perhaps not have obtained without it, who among us will under value prayer? Mark in fact says: “In the morning he rose while it was still dark and, going out of the house, he retired to a deserted place and there he prayed” (Mk. 1: 35).

And the words: “I know that you always listen to me” (Jn. 11: 42), pronounced by the Lord and written by the evangelist, demonstrate that he who prays always, is always answered.

How many things could each one of us narrate if now, remembering with grateful hearts the benefits received, we wanted to give thanks to God

for this?

Often in fact, for any one faithful “God has broken the jaws of the lions and they have dissolved like water that is dispersed” (cfr. Ps. 57: 7-8). Often we have also known that the transgressors of the divine commandments, before being overcome and swallowed up by death, have been saved by a disaster so great through penance, because, even when they were enclosed in the stomach of death, they had not despaired of salvation. This is what it seemed to me to be necessary to display after the enumeration of those to whom the prayer has been of use, in order to dissuade whoever aspires to a spiritual life in Christ from asking in prayer for insignificant and earthly goods and to push the readers of this writing towards the mystical graces, of which the things previously displayed were the figure.

Responsorial. *Jm. 5: 16; 1 Th. 5: 17*

R: Pray for one another in order to be healed. * The prayer of the just man made with insistence is worth a lot.

V: Pray incessantly.

R: The prayer of the just man made with insistence is worth a lot.

Gospel. *Lk. 10: 25 – 37*

Who is my neighbour?

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live." But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and

wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back'. Which of these three, do you think, proved a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

TUESDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *2 Kings 18:17 – 36*

Threats of the ambassadors of the king of the Assyrians against Jerusalem.

And the king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rab'saris, and the Rab'sshakeh with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. And they went up and came to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is on the highway to the Fuller's Field.

And when they called for the king, there came out to them Eli'akim the son of Hilki'ah, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and Jo'ah the son of Asaph, the recorder. And the Rab'sshakeh said to them, "Say to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you rest this confidence of yours? Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? On whom do you now rely, that you have rebelled against me? Behold, you are relying now on Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of any man who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to all who rely on him. But if you say to me, "We rely on the LORD our God," is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, "You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem"?"

Come now, make a wager with my master the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders upon them. How then can you repulse a single captain among the least of my master's servants, when you rely on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? Moreover, is it without the LORD that I have come up against this place to destroy it? The LORD said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.'"

Then Eli'akim the son of Hilki'ah, and Shebna, and Jo'ah, said to the Rab'sshakeh, "Pray, speak to your servants in the Aramaic language, for we understand it; do not speak to us in the language of Judah within the hearing of the people who are on the wall." But the Rab'sshakeh said to them, "Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the men sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and to drink their own urine?" Then the Rab'sshakeh stood and called

out in a loud voice in the language of Judah: "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you out of my hand. Do not let Hezekiah make you to rely on the LORD by saying, The LORD will surely deliver us, and this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.' Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria: 'Make your peace with me and come out to me; then every one of you will eat of his own vine, and every one of his own fig tree, and every one of you will drink the water of his own cistern; until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey, that you may live, and not die. And do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you by saying, The LORD will deliver us. Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharva'im, Hena, and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who among all the gods of the countries have delivered their countries out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?'"

But the people were silent and answered him not a word, for the king's command was, "Do not answer him."

Responsorial. *Cfr. Is. 37: 22, 29; 10: 24, 25, 5*

R: This is the sentence of the Lord against the king of Assyria: "Since you rage against me, your insolence has risen to my ears. Therefore thus says the Lord: * My people, do not fear Assyria. Just a little while, and my disdain will come to an end.

V: Oh! Assyria, rod of my rage, stick of my disdain! In your hands is my anger.

R: My people, do not fear Assyria. Just a little while, and my disdain will come to an end.

Second Reading. *Ps. 47: 7*

Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.

A reading from the "Commentary on the psalms" of St. Augustine, bishop.

“As we have heard, so we have seen!” (Ps. 47: 9) O happy Church, at a certain time you have heard and at a certain time you have seen. The Church has heard the promises that were made, she sees their fulfilment; she has heard in the prophecies, she sees in the gospel. Everything that is now being fulfilled was prophesied beforehand. Lift up your eyes therefore and look around the world. See the inheritance already reaching to the ends of the earth. See already the fulfilment of what was said: “all the kings of the earth will fall down before him, all nations will serve him!” (Ps. 71: 11) See the fulfilment of these words: “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!” (Ps. 107: 6) See the one whose hands and feet were held by nails, whose bones could all be numbered as he hung upon the wood of the cross, for whose clothes lots were cast. See him reigning, whom they saw hanging: see him seated in heaven, whom they despised as he walked on the earth. See, therefore, the fulfilment of the words: “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him” (Ps. 21: 28). See all these things and cry out with joy: “As we have heard, so we have seen” (Ps. 47: 9).

It can rightly be said that the Church herself is called from among the Gentiles: “Hear, O daughter, and see; forget your people and your father’s house” (Ps. 44:11). Listen and see: at first you hear what you do not see, afterwards you will see what you have heard. It is written: “People whom I had not known served me. As soon as they heard of me they obeyed me” (Ps. 17: 44-45). If they heard, then they did not see. And where is it that we read: “Those who have not been told shall see, and those who have not heard shall understand” (Is. 52: 15)?

Those to whom the prophets were not sent were the first to hear and understand the prophets. Those who at first did not hear, when they did hear later on, were astounded. There remained those to whom they were sent, those who had the sacred books but did not understand the truth, who held the tablets of the covenant but did not possess the inheritance. But “as we have heard, so we have seen!”

“In the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God” (Ps. 47: 9). There we have heard and there too we have seen. “God has established it forever” (Ps. 47: 9). Those who say: “Lo, here is the Christ” or “there he is” have no cause for boasting. The man who says: “Lo, here is the Christ” or “there he is” is creating divisions. But God promised unity: the kings were

gathered together, not divided by schisms (cfr. Ps. 47: 5). Perhaps this city, which upheld the world, will one day be destroyed? Not at all: "God has established it forever". If, therefore, God has established it forever, why are you afraid that the firmament may fall?

Responsorial. *Lev. 25: 11-12; 2 Cor. 6: 16*

R: I will set up my dwelling place among you, and I will not cast you off; *
I will live in your midst; I will be your God and you shall be my people.

V: You are the temple of the living God. God himself has said:

R: I will live in your midst; I will be your God and you shall be my people.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Sir. 3: 1 – 16 (vulg. 3: 1 – 18)*

Duties of the children towards the parents.

A reading from the book of Sirach.

Listen to me your father, O children; and act accordingly, that you may be kept in safety. For the Lord honoured the father above the children, and he confirmed the right of the mother over her sons. Whoever honours his father atones for sins, and whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure. Whoever honours his father will be gladdened by his own children, and when he prays he will be heard.

Whoever glorifies his father will have long life, and whoever obeys the Lord will refresh his mother; he will serve his parents as his masters. Honour your father by word and deed, that a blessing from him may come upon you. For a father's blessing strengthens the houses of the children, but a mother's curse uproots their foundations.

Do not glorify yourself by dishonouring your father, for your father's dishonour is no glory to you. For a man's glory comes from honouring his father, and it is a disgrace for children not to respect their mother. O son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; in all your strength do not despise him. For kindness to a father will not be forgotten, and against your sins it will be credited to you; in the day of your affliction it will be remembered in your favour; as frost in fair weather, your sins will

melt away. Whoever forsakes his father is like a blasphemer, and whoever angers his mother is cursed by the Lord.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Sir. 3: 5, 7; Deut. 5: 16*

R: He who honours his father will receive joy from his own children and he will be answered in the day of his prayer. * He who fears the Lord respects his parents and serves as masters those who have generated him.

V: Honour your father and your mother as the Lord your God has commanded you.

R: He who fears the Lord respects his parents and serves as masters those who have generated him.

Second Reading. *Nm. 13, 14*

You who want to be spiritual, ask for the heavenly goods in prayer.

A reading from the treatise “On prayer” of Origen, presbyter.

Every prayer that is relative to the spiritual and mystical graces always comes from a soul that does not walk “according to the flesh” (Rm. 8: 4), but “with the help of the Spirit” makes “the works of the body die” (Rm. 8: 13), and holds in great consideration the anagogic sense indicated by the scholars of the Scriptures rather than the benefit that is received by the one who prays according to the letter.

We in fact must make sure that our soul is not sterile and listen to the spiritual laws with spiritual ears in order to become fecund and to be answered like Anna and Hezekiah and in order to be liberated from the snares of the spiritual enemies, like Mordecai, Esther and Judith.

He then who knows of what beast of which the fish that swallowed Jonas was a figure, understands that it is the same one of which Job said: “Let it be cursed by those who curse days and are ready to rouse Leviathan” (Jb. 3: 8): he, if for some fault of the unfaithful came to find himself in the stomach of the beast, prayed with a contrite heart and was able to come out.

And once he had come out, if he persevered in obedience to the divine commandments, enflamed by the Spirit of prophecy, he would be the occasion of salvation for the shaky Ninevites; however he would not have to bear reluctantly the divine goodness, nor to hope himself that God would persevere in his will to destroy those who repented.

The great prodigy, then, that it is said that Samuel worked with prayer, can be accomplished now spiritually by all those who are truly consecrated to God, if each one will make himself worthy of being answered. In fact it is written: “Now pay heed and observe this great thing that the Lord wants to work in front of your eyes. Is this perhaps not the time of the wheat harvest? But I will cry to the Lord and he will send thunder and rain” (1 Sam. 12: 16-17). The Lord himself says to all the faithful, to his true disciples: “Lift up your eyes and look at the fields which are already white, ready for the harvest. And he who reaps receives a salary and gathers fruit for eternal life” (Jn. 4: 35-36). At the time of the harvest the Lord works a great miracle in front of those who listen to the prophets; if, in fact, he who is united to the Spirit invokes the Lord, God grants from heaven the thunder and rain that irrigates the souls, so that he who before was in sin fears greatly the Lord and also the mediator of the divine benefit, whose holiness worthy of veneration is manifested by the answering of his prayer. After having displayed the graces that the saints obtain with prayer, we will understand that saying: ask for the great things and the smaller ones will be given to you as well: ask for the heavenly goods and the earthly ones will be given to you in addition (cfr. Mt. 6: 33). All the symbols and the figures are small and earthly things in comparison to those true and spiritual things. Therefore, when the Divine Word invites us to imitate the prayers of the saints, so that we ask in truth that which they obtained only in figure, he affirms precisely that the great and heavenly goods are shadowed in the earthly and insignificant realities; as if he was to say: You who want to be spiritual, ask in prayer for the goods of heaven in a way that when you have obtained them, similar to heavenly creatures you will be heirs of the kingdom of heaven and, like the great saints, can make use of the supreme good; with regard to the earthly goods and those of little importance, necessary for the body, the Father will give it to you according to your need.

Responsorial. *2 Cor. 5: 7, 9; Heb. 13: 14*

R: We walk in faith and not yet in vision; * therefore we exert ourselves either dwelling in the body or exiled from it, to be pleasing to him.

V: We do not have a stable city down here, but we search for that future one.

R: therefore we exert ourselves either dwelling in the body or exiled from it, to be pleasing to him.

Gospel *Lk 10:38 – 42*

Martha welcomes Jesus in her house.

Mary has chosen the better part.

Now as they went on their way, he entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her."

WEDNESDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading *2 Kings 18:37 – 19:19, 35 – 37*

The prayer of Hezekiah. Isaiah comforts him.

The salvation of Jerusalem.

Then Eli'akim the son of Hilki'ah, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and Jo'ah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes rent, and told him the words of the Rab'sshakeh. When King Hezekiah heard it, he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD.

And he sent Eli'akim, who was over the household, and Shebna the secretary, and the senior priests, covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz. They said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth. It may be that the LORD your God heard all the words of the Rab'sshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words which the LORD your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left." When the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah, Isaiah said to them, "Say to your master, `Thus says the LORD: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me. Behold, I will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumour and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.'" The Rab'sshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah; for he heard that the king had left Lachish. And when the king heard concerning Tirha'kah king of Ethiopia, "Behold, he has set out to fight against you," he sent messengers again to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus shall you speak to Hezekiah king of Judah: `Do not let your God on whom you rely deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, destroying them utterly. And shall you be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them, the nations which my fathers destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Tel-assar? Where is the

king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharva'im, the king of Hena, or the king of Ivvah?"

Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said: "O LORD the God of Israel, who are enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennach'erib, which he has sent to mock the living God. Of a truth, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone; therefore they were destroyed. So now, O LORD our God, save us, I beseech you, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone."

And that night the angel of the LORD went forth, and slew a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. Then Sennach'erib king of Assyria departed, and went home, and dwelt at Nineveh.

And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adram'melech and Share'zer, his sons, slew him with the sword, and escaped into the land of Ar'arat. And Esarhad'don his son reigned in his stead.

Responsorial. 2 Kgs. 19: 6, 7, 19

R: Isaiah said to the ministers of the king: "The Lord says: Do not fear the words that you have heard: * Behold, I will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumour and shall return to his own land, and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land".

V: Now, Lord our God, free us from his hand, so that all the kings of the earth may know that you are the Lord, the only God.

R: Behold, I will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumour and shall return to his own land, and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.

Second Reading. Disc. 27: 4, 6 – 7

I will make you my bride in kindness and love.

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

“I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Ap. 21: 2). And he added: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them” (Ap. 21: 3). Why? I believe in order to take for himself a bride from men. What an incredible thing! He came to his bride, and he did not come without the bride. He searched for the bride and she was with him. Then they were two? Never. He says in fact: “Unique is my dove” (Sg. of Sgs. 6: 9). But as of different sheep he wants to make one flock, in a way that there will be only one sheepfold and only one shepherd, so also, though having from the beginning united the multitude of the angels to himself as a bride, he was pleased also to gather the Church from the midst of men and to unite her to that of heaven, so that there would be only one bride and only one bridegroom.

Thus the one and the other come from heaven, that is the bridegroom Jesus and the bride Jerusalem. And he, exactly so that he could see her, undressed himself assuming the condition of a servant and appeared in human form. But in what form or aspect did the one who had the vision see the bride coming down from heaven? Perhaps in the multitude of angels that he saw descending and ascending on the Son of man? But let us say better that he saw the bride, when he saw the Word in the flesh, recognizing the two in the one unique flesh.

When that holy Emmanuel brought the teaching of the heavenly doctrine on earth, when in Christ and through him was revealed to us a certain visible image of that marvellous Jerusalem which is our mother and a vision of her beauty, what did we see if not the bride in the bridegroom, admiring the unique and identical Lord of glory: “as a bride that is crowned with the tiara and like a bride that adorns herself with jewels” (Is. 61: 10)?

Therefore the same one who has descended is the one who has ascended, so that no one ascends into heaven if not he who has descended from heaven, the only and same Lord, the bridegroom in the head and the bride in the body. Nor in vain did the heavenly man appear on the earth if as earthly he rendered heavenly the greater number of men, similar to himself, so that that which is read could be fulfilled: “As is the man from heaven, so

also are those who are of heaven”(1 Cor. 15: 48). From then he lives on the earth according to the habits of the heavenly man, while similarly to that superior and blessed creature, the man who comes from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, also adheres with a love that is not less to the heavenly man; and though he is not yet joined as that of the man in the full vision, yet he is married through faith, according to the promise of the Lord which he made through the mouth of the prophet: “I will make you my bride in kindness and in love, I will get married to you in faithfulness” (Hos. 2:21, 22).

As a consequence he does his best to become always more conformed to the model which came from heaven, learning to suffer and to forgive and, finally to be meek and humble of heart. With such behaviour he makes efforts to be pleasing, even if he is absent, to the one whom the angels long to see, in order to demonstrate himself to be burning with angelic desire, co-citizen of the saints and family of God, truly the beloved bride.

Responsorial. *Sg. of Sgs. 3: 16; Gal. 2: 20*

R: He is all delights. * This is my beloved, this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

V: It is not anymore I who live, but Christ lives in me.

R: This is my beloved, this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Sir. 3:17 – 4: 10 (vulg. 3: 19 – 4:11)*

Humility and pride.

A reading from the book of Sirach.

My son, perform your tasks in meekness; then you will be loved by those whom God accepts. The greater you are, the more you must humble yourself; so you will find favour in the sight of the Lord. For great is the might of the Lord; he is glorified by the humble. Seek not what is too difficult for you, nor investigate what is beyond your power. Reflect upon what has been assigned to you, for you do not need what is hidden.

Do not meddle in what is beyond your tasks, for matters too great for human understanding have been shown you. For their hasty judgment has led many astray, and wrong opinion has caused their thoughts to slip. A

stubborn mind will be afflicted at the end, and whoever loves danger will perish by it. A stubborn mind will be burdened by troubles, and the sinner will heap sin upon sin.

The affliction of the proud has no healing, for a plant of wickedness has taken root in him. The mind of the intelligent man will ponder a parable, and an attentive ear is the wise man's desire. Water extinguishes a blazing fire: so almsgiving atones for sin. Whoever requites favours gives thought to the future; at the moment of his falling he will find support.

My son, deprive not the poor of his living, and do not keep needy eyes waiting. Do not grieve the one who is hungry, nor anger a man in want. Do not add to the troubles of an angry mind, nor delay your gift to a beggar. Do not reject an afflicted suppliant, nor turn your face away from the poor. Do not avert your eye from the needy, nor give a man occasion to curse you; for if in bitterness of soul he calls down a curse upon you, his Creator will hear his prayer.

Make yourself beloved in the congregation; bow your head low to a great man. Incline your ear to the poor, and answer him peaceably and gently. Deliver him who is wronged from the hand of the wrongdoer; and do not be fainthearted in judging a case. Be like a father to orphans, and instead of a husband to their mother; you will then be like a son of the Most High, and he will love you more than does your mother.

Responsorial. *Sir. (Vulg) 3: 31, 32*

R: The heart of the wise man is made known in wisdom. * The good ear will listen to wisdom with a livelier desire.

V: The wise and intelligent heart will keep itself away from sin and will succeed happily in works of justice.

R: The good ear will listen to wisdom with a livelier desire.

Second Reading. *N. 28*

Render to each one that which is his right.

A reading from the treatise “On prayer” of Origen, presbyter.

We are debtors and we have certain duties not only with regard to giving, but also to the affability in speaking and to the fulfilment of determinate actions. In fact we must be in a certain way full of zeal towards

the others. These debts then, either we settle them fulfilling the prescriptions of the divine law or, if despising good sense we do not pay them, we will remain debtors. In this way we must consider that which from our side is due to the brothers: both to those who together with us have been regenerated in Christ through the words of religion, as well as to those who have been born from our mother or from our father.

We have a duty also towards the co-citizens and also a common one towards men; a special one towards those whom it is just to honour as children or brothers. Therefore he who does not fulfil his duty with regard to the brothers, remains a debtor of all that he has omitted; if then we are lacking with regard to men in that which we are obliged to give them through a most human spirit of wisdom, the debt becomes greater. Also with regard to ourselves, we must make use of the body, but not wear it out by love of pleasure; we must however take care also of our soul, keep vigil on the thoughts and on the language so that it may be without bitterness, useful to all and never idle. If we do not fulfil this duty towards ourselves, the debt will get worse.

Besides, since first of all and above all we are the work and creation of God, we must conserve a particular affection towards him and love him with all the heart, with all the strength and with all the soul; if we do not do so, we will remain debtors towards God, sinning against the Lord. And in that case who will pray for us? In fact as Eli said “if a man sins against another man, God could intervene in his favour; but if he sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him?” (1 Sam. 2; 25).

We are also debtors to Christ, who has redeemed us with his blood, as every slave is a debtor to the one who has bought him, paying for him a sum that is so remarkable. We have a debt towards the Holy Spirit also and we repay it by not saddening the Spirit of God, with whom we were marked for the day of redemption (cfr. Ep. 4: 30); not saddening him, let us carry with his help and with the vivifying actions that he exercises on our soul, the fruits that it is right for him to expect from us.

All the more, even if we do not know our guardian angel who always sees the face of the Father in heaven well, considering however how much we know, it is evident that we are debtors also to him. So also, if “we have become a spectacle for the world, to the angels and to men” (1 Cor. 4: 9), let us realize that when one exhibits himself in a spectacle he is obliged to say and do this and that in front of the spectators, and if they were not to do so

they would be punished for the insult to the public; so also we must exhibit to the whole world, to all the angels and to all the human race that which the wisdom, if you want, will teach us.

Other than these duties of a general order, there is a debt towards the widow, of whom the Church takes care; one of the deacon, one of the priest, very serious then is the debt of the bishop, for which the Saviour of the whole Church will demand compensation on the day of judgement if not settled.

Responsorial. *Gal. 5: 13, 14; Rm. 13: 8*

R: Be at the service of one another through love. * The whole of the law in fact finds its fullness in only one precept: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.

V: Do not have any debt with anyone, if not that of a reciprocal love.

R: The whole of the law in fact finds its fullness in only one precept: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.

Gospel. *Lk. 11: 1 – 4*

Lord, teach us to pray.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."

And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread; and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive every one who is indebted to us; and lead us not into temptation."

THURSDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 37: 21 – 35*

Oracle of Isaiah against the king of Assyria.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Because you have prayed to me concerning Sennach'erib king of Assyria, this is the word that the LORD has spoken concerning him: 'She despises you, she scorns you -- the virgin daughter of Zion; she wags her head behind you -- the daughter of Jerusalem. Whom have you mocked and reviled? Against whom have you raised your voice and haughtily lifted your eyes? Against the Holy One of Israel! By your servants you have mocked the Lord, and you have said, "With my many chariots I have gone up the heights of the mountains, to the far recesses of Lebanon; I felled its tallest cedars, its choicest cypresses; I came to its remotest height, its densest forest. I dug wells and drank waters, and I dried up with the sole of my foot all the streams of Egypt".

Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass, that you should make fortified cities crash into heaps of ruins, while their inhabitants, shorn of strength, are dismayed and confounded, and have become like plants of the field and like tender grass, like grass on the housetops, blighted before it is grown.

I know your sitting down and your going out and coming in, and your raging against me. Because you have raged against me and your arrogance has come to my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will turn you back on the way by which you came.' "And this shall be the sign for you: this year eat what grows of itself, and in the second year what springs of the same; then in the third year sow and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat their fruit.

And the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward; for out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this. "Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city, or shoot an arrow

there, or come before it with a shield, or cast up a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, says the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David."

Responsorial. *Is. 52: 9-10*

R: The Lord has consoled his people, he has ransomed Jerusalem. * All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

V: The Lord has uncovered his holy arm in front of all the nations.

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

Second Reading. *Ps. 48, 14 – 15*

Christ through his blood reconciled the world to God

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

When Christ reconciled the world to God, he himself certainly did not need reconciliation. For what sin of his own was he to make propitiation, when he knew no sin? When the Jews were asking for the drachma, which according to the law was given for sin, he said to Peter: “Simon, from whom do kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their sons or from others?” Peter answered: “From others”. Jesus said to him: “Then the sons are free. However, not to give offence to them, go to the sea and cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel, take that and give it to them for me and for yourself” (Mt. 17: 25-27).

He is pointing out that he is not obliged to propitiation for sins on his own behalf, because he is not a slave of sin, but the Son of God, free from all fault. For the Son sets free; it is the slave who is guilty. So he was free from all sin, and gives no price of redemption for his own soul: the price of his blood was more than sufficient to redeem all the sins of the world. Justly then he sets others free, owing nothing for himself.

Furthermore: not only does Christ owe no price of redemption for himself or propitiation for sin, but if you take the case of any man, it can be understood that no individuals owe propitiation for themselves, since Christ is the propitiation of all, and himself the redemption of all.

What man's blood has now the power to redeem him, when Christ shed his own blood for the redemption of all? Is there anyone's blood comparable to the blood of Christ? Or what man is so mighty that he can offer propitiation for himself surpassing that which Christ offered in himself, Christ who alone reconciled the world with God through his own blood? What greater victim is there, what superior sacrifice, what better advocate than he who has made the atonement for the sins of all, and gave his life as the redemption for us?

Individual propitiation or redemption, therefore, is not sought, because the price of all is the blood of Christ, by which the Lord Jesus redeemed us, who alone reconciled the Father. He laboured to the end, since he took upon himself our labours, as he says: "Come to me, all you who labour, and I will refresh you" (Mt. 11: 28).

Responsorial. *Cfr. Col. 1: 21-22; Rm. 3: 25*

R: You were estranged from God, you were his enemies in heart and mind, and your deeds were evil. But now, by Christ's death in his earthly body, God has reconciled you to himself, * in order to bring you, holy, pure and faultless into his presence.

V: God offered him so that by his death he should become the means by which men's sins are forgiven, through their faith in him,

R: in order to bring you, holy, pure and faultless into his presence.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Sir. 5: 1 – 6:4*

The divine recompense.

A reading from the book of Sirach.

Do not set your heart on your wealth, nor say, "I have enough." Do not follow your inclination and strength, walking according to the desires of your heart. Do not say, "Who will have power over me?" for the Lord will surely punish you. Do not say, "I sinned, and what happened to me?" for the Lord is slow to anger. Do not be so confident of atonement that you add sin to sin.

Do not say, "His mercy is great, he will forgive the multitude of my sins," for both mercy and wrath are with him, and his anger rests on sinners.

Do not delay to turn to the Lord, nor postpone it from day to day; for suddenly the wrath of the Lord will go forth, and at the time of punishment you will perish. Do not depend on dishonest wealth, for it will not benefit you in the day of calamity. Do not winnow with every wind, nor follow every path: the double-tongued sinner does that. Be steadfast in your understanding, and let your speech be consistent. Be quick to hear, and be deliberate in answering.

If you have understanding, answer your neighbour; but if not, put your hand on your mouth. Glory and dishonour come from speaking, and a man's tongue is his downfall. Do not be called a slanderer, and do not lie in ambush with your tongue; for shame comes to the thief, and severe condemnation to the double-tongued.

In great and small matters do not act amiss, and do not become an enemy instead of a friend; for a bad name incurs shame and reproach: so fares the double-tongued sinner. Do not exalt yourself through your soul's counsel, lest your soul be torn in pieces like a bull. You will devour your leaves and destroy your fruit, and will be left like a withered tree. An evil soul will destroy him who has it, and make him the laughingstock of his enemies.

Responsorial. *Sir. 5: 7, 8; Ap. 22: 12*

R: Do not wait to convert yourself to the Lord and do not postpone it from day to day; * because with the Lord is mercy and anger.

V: Behold I will come soon, says the Lord, and I will bring my recompense with me, to give to each one according to his works:

R: because with the Lord is mercy and anger.

Second Reading. *Nm. 28 – 33*

We all have the power of remitting sins committed against us.

A reading from the treatise "On prayer" of Origen, presbyter.

We are debtors to many, without doubt there are also others who have debts towards us. Some in fact owe us as men, others as co-citizens, others as fathers, others as children, finally there are women who have duties towards us as husbands, and friends as to friends. If therefore, amongst all

our debtors, some act with little zeal in the services that are due to us, let us behave humanely with them, remembering, rather than the wrongs received, the debts that we in our turn have often neglected to pay not only to men, but even to God.

Keeping present therefore the debts that we have not paid, but have evaded in the time in which we had to give to the neighbour some service, we will be more indulgent towards those who do not pay their debts towards us: and this especially if we do not forget the sins that we have committed against God and the iniquitous words hurled by us against the Most High (cfr. Ps. 72: 8 Vulg.), be it out of ignorance of the truth as well as because of the intolerance of the adversities of life.

Because, if we will not be kind to our debtors, we will suffer the same punishment that fell on that man who did not remit the hundred denarii to his companion. According to the evangelical parable, even though he had first been forgiven his debt, the Lord gave orders to put him in chains and to demand from him all that he had remitted before, saying: Wicked and lazy servant, should you not have had pity on your companion as I had pity on you? Put him in prison, until he has paid his entire debt (cfr. Mt. 18: 32). And the Lord added: "So also my heavenly Father will do to each one of you, if you do not forgive from your heart your brother" (Mt. 18: 35). Therefore we have all the power of remitting the sins committed against us, as it appears evident from the words: "as we forgive our debtors" (Mt. 6: 12) and also from these other: "as we forgive all our debtors" (Lk. 11: 4).

I think that I can conclude my exposition when I have dealt with the various forms of prayer. It seems to me that I have to describe four, that I have found spread in the Scriptures, in accordance with which everyone must gather in one unity his own prayer. And above all: the first movement of prayer must be that of giving glory to God, according to our poor strengths, through Christ who together with the Father is glorified, in the Holy Spirit who with both is praised. To this every one must make the action of universal graces follow for the benefits granted to all and then for the personal graces received from God. After the thanksgiving it is good that he accuses bitterly his sins in front of God and implores above all the medicine, which frees him from the habit and from the inclination to evil and in the second place the forgiveness of sins committed. It seems to me that to the confession has to be added, as the fourth point, the request for the great heavenly goods, as much for himself as for all those similar to him, as

also for the family members and friends. Finally, above all this, the prayer must end with the glorification of God through Christ in the Spirit. It is just in fact that the prayer initiated with the glorification concludes in the same way, praising and glorifying the Father of all the creatures through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Responsorial. *Mt. 5: 44-45; ep. 4: 32*

R: Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors: * that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.

V: Be kind to one another, merciful, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ:

R: that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.

Gospel. *Lk. 11: 5 – 13*

Ask and it will be given to you.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything'? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

And I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

FRIDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *2 Kings 21: 1 – 18, 23 – 22: 1*

The kingdoms of Manasseh and of Amon.

Beginning of the kingdom of Josiah.

A reading from the second book of Kings.

Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Heph'zibah. And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he erected altars for Baal, and made an Ashe'rah, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served them. And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem will I put my name." And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.

And he burned his son as an offering, and practiced soothsaying and augury, and dealt with mediums and with wizards. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger. And the graven image of Ashe'rah that he had made he set in the house of which the LORD said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name for ever; and I will not cause the feet of Israel to wander any more out of the land which I gave to their fathers, if only they will be careful to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them."

But they did not listen, and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations had done whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel. And the LORD said by his servants the prophets, "Because Manasseh king of Judah has committed these abominations, and has done things more wicked than all that the Amorites did, who were before him, and has made Judah also to sin with his idols; therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such evil that the ears of every one who hears of it will tingle. And I will

stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab; and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. And I will cast off the remnant of my heritage, and give them into the hand of their enemies, and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies, because they have done what is evil in my sight and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day."

Moreover Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides the sin which he made Judah to sin so that they did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.

Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and all that he did, and the sin that he committed, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? And Manasseh slept with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his house, in the garden of Uzza; and Amon his son reigned in his stead.

And the servants of Amon conspired against him, and killed the king in his house. But the people of the land slew all those who had conspired against King Amon, and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead.

Now the rest of the acts of Amon which he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? And he was buried in his tomb in the garden of Uzza; and Josiah his son reigned in his stead.

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedi'dah the daughter of Adai'ah of Bozkath.

Responsorial. *Cfr. 2 Chr. 33: 9, 10, 11*

R: Manasseh led the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray forcing them to do evil.

* Then the Lord sent the heads of the army of the Assyrian king against them.

V: The Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they did not listen to him.

R: Then the Lord sent the heads of the army of the Assyrian king against them.

Second Reading. *Nm. 3 – 4*

Return to me, says the Lord.

A reading from the treatise “The advantages of patience” of St. Cyprian, bishop and martyr.

But for us, beloved brethren, who are philosophers, not in words, but in deeds, and do not put forward our wisdom in our garb, but in truth — who are better acquainted with the consciousness, than with the boast, of virtues — who do not speak great things, but live them, — let us, as servants and worshippers of God, show, in our spiritual obedience, the patience which we learn from heavenly teachings.

For we have this virtue in common with God. From Him patience begins; from Him its glory and its dignity take their rise. The origin and greatness of patience proceed from God as its author.

Man ought to love the thing that is dear to God; the good that the Divine Majesty loves, it commends. If God is our Lord and Father, let us imitate the patience of our Lord as well as our Father; because it is good for servants to be obedient, no less than it becomes sons not to be degenerate.

But what and how great is the patience in God, that, most patiently enduring the profane temples and the images of earth, and the sacrilegious rites instituted by men, in contempt of His majesty and honour, He makes the day to begin and the light of the sun to arise alike upon the good and the evil; and while He waters the earth with showers, no one is excluded from His benefits, but upon the righteous equally with the unrighteous He bestows His indiscriminating rains. We see that with undistinguishing equality of patience, at God’s behest, the seasons minister to the guilty and the guiltless, the religious and the impious; and while God is provoked with frequent, yes, with continual offences, He softens His indignation, and in patience waits for the day of retribution, once for all determined; and although He has revenge in His power, He prefers to keep patience for a long while, bearing, that is to say, mercifully, and putting off, so that, if it might be possible, the long protracted mischief may at some time be changed, and man, involved in the contagion of errors and crimes, may even though late be converted to God, as He Himself warns and says, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he desists from his evil conduct and lives.” (Ez. 33: 11)

And again,” Return to me, says the Lord.” (Mal. 3: 7) And again: “Return to the Lord your God; for He is merciful, and gracious, and patient,

and of great pity, and who inclines His judgment towards the evils inflicted.” (Ex. 34: 6,7).

Responsorial. *Heb. 10: 35-36; 12: 3*

R: So do not throw away your confidence, it will be richly rewarded. * You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

V: So that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

R: You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Sir. 6: 5 – 37*

Friendship. The yoke of wisdom is gentle.

A reading from the book of Sirach.

A pleasant voice multiplies friends, and a gracious tongue multiplies courtesies. Let those that are at peace with you be many, but let your advisers be one in a thousand. When you gain a friend, gain him through testing, and do not trust him hastily. For there is a friend who is such at his own convenience, but will not stand by you in your day of trouble. And there is a friend who changes into an enemy, and will disclose a quarrel to your disgrace.

And there is a friend who is a table companion, but will not stand by you in your day of trouble. In prosperity he will make himself your equal, and be bold with your servants; but if you are brought low he will turn against you, and will hide himself from your presence. Keep yourself far from your enemies, and be on guard toward your friends. A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter: he that has found one has found a treasure. There is nothing so precious as a faithful friend, and no scales can measure his excellence. A faithful friend is an elixir of life; and those who fear the Lord will find him.

Whoever fears the Lord directs his friendship aright, for as he is, so is his neighbour also. My son, from your youth up choose instruction, and until you are old you will keep finding wisdom. Come to her like one who

ploughs and sows, and wait for her good harvest. For in her service you will toil a little while, and soon you will eat of her produce. She seems very harsh to the uninstructed; a weakling will not remain with her. She will weigh him down like a heavy testing stone, and he will not be slow to cast her off.

For wisdom is like her name, and is not manifest to many. Listen, my son, and accept my judgment; do not reject my counsel. Put your feet into her fetters, and your neck into her collar. Put your shoulder under her and carry her, and do not fret under her bonds. Come to her with all your soul, and keep her ways with all your might. Search out and seek, and she will become known to you; and when you get hold of her, do not let her go. For at last you will find the rest she gives, and she will be changed into joy for you. Then her fetters will become for you a strong protection, and her collar a glorious robe. Her yoke is a golden ornament, and her bonds are a cord of blue. You will wear her like a glorious robe, and put her on like a crown of gladness.

If you are willing, my son, you will be taught, and if you apply yourself you will become clever. If you love to listen you will gain knowledge, and if you incline your ear you will become wise. Stand in the assembly of the elders. Who is wise? Cleave to him. Be ready to listen to every narrative, and do not let wise proverbs escape you. If you see an intelligent man, visit him early; let your foot wear out his doorstep. Reflect on the statutes of the Lord, and meditate at all times on his commandments. It is he who will give insight to your mind, and your desire for wisdom will be granted.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Jn. 15: 14, 12; Sir. 6: 14*

R: You are my friends, if you do what I have commanded you: * Love one another, as I have loved you.

V: A faithful friend is a powerful protection: he who finds him, finds a treasure.

R: Love one another, as I have loved you.

Second Reading. *Book 2*

A faithful friend is a balm of life.

A reading from the treatise “On spiritual friendship” of St. Aelred, abbot.

In this mortal life there is nothing holier than to desire, more useful to search for, more difficult to find, sweeter to experience, more advantageous to maintain than friendship. It bears fruit in the present life and in the future. With its sweetness it gives taste to all the virtues, with its strength it defeats the vices, it sweetens the adversities and puts in order the favourable events, so among mortals there cannot be anything pleasant without a friend. A man who does not have a friend with whom to rejoice in the happy hours and to cry in the sad ones, with whom to pour out the suffering that weighs on his heart, with whom to communicate the sublime and luminous ideas that by chance shine in his mind, can compare himself to a beast. “Woe to the one who is alone: if he falls, he will not have anyone to lift him up” (Qo. 4: 10) and he who is without a friend is really alone.

But what happiness, what security, what joy to have one with whom you can speak as with yourself; to whom you are not afraid to confess your eventual mistakes; to whom you are not embarrassed to reveal the possible progresses in the spiritual life, to whom you can confide all the secrets of your heart and entrust your projects! What is there that is more amiable than to be able to unite in this way heart to heart and to make of the two only one thing, without fear of vainglory, without diffidence? Without one lamenting for being corrected by the other, nor having to notice or to blame adulation in his praise. “A faithful friend” says the sage, “is a balm of life” (Sir. 6: 16). Well said! There is not in fact a remedy more valid, more efficacious or more qualified for our wounds in all the earthly circumstances than to have a person, who knows how to meet us half way, suffering together with us in every misfortune and enjoying with us all our successes; in a way that, uniting back to back, they carry the weight of one another (cfr. Gal. 6: 2) as the Apostle said: except that each one finds the wrong done to him lighter than that received from the friend.

Therefore friendship makes the favourable events much more beautiful and lightens those adverse ones by sharing them. Truly “a friend is an excellent balm of life”. In fact, as the pagans also thought, we make use of a friend more often than we use water or fire. In every action, in every commitment, in security and in insecurity, in any eventuality or condition, in secret or in public, in every decision, at home or outside, wherever, friendship proves to be pleasing, the friend necessary, the mutual agreement useful.

And above all friendship is like a step that brings us near to perfection, which consists in the love and in the knowledge of God: so man, as friend of man, becomes the friend of God, according to what the Saviour says in the gospel: "I do not call you servants anymore, but friends" (Jn. 15: 15).

Responsorial. *1 Jn. 3: 11; Gal. 5: 14*

R: This is the message that you have heard from the beginning: * that we love one another.

V: All the law in fact finds its fullness in only one precept:

R: that we love one another.

Gospel. *Lk. 11: 15 – 26*

*If I cast out demons with the finger of God,
The kingdom of God has arrived in the midst of you.*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Be-el'zebul, the prince of demons"; while others, to test him, sought from him a sign from heaven. But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Be-el'zebul. And if I cast out demons by Be-el'zebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace; but **when one stronger than he assails him and overcomes him**, he **takes away his armour in which he trusted**, and **divides his spoil**. He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.

"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest; and finding none he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."

SATURDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Zep. 1: 2 – 7, 14 – 2:3*

The judgement of God.

A reading from the prophet Zephaniah.

"I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth," says the LORD. "I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. I will overthrow the wicked; I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth," says the LORD.

"I will stretch out my hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal and the name of the idolatrous priests; those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the heavens; those who bow down and swear to the LORD and yet swear by Milcom; those who have turned back from following the LORD, who do not seek the LORD or inquire of him." Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is at hand; the LORD has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests.

The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter, the mighty man cries aloud there. A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements. I will bring distress on men, so that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the LORD. In the fire of his jealous wrath, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full, yea, sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Come together and hold assembly, O shameless nation, before you are driven away like the drifting chaff, before there comes upon you the fierce anger of the LORD, before there comes upon you the day of the wrath of the LORD. Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the wrath of the LORD.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Zep. 2: 3; Lk. 6: 20*

R: Seek the Lord all you humble of the land, who do his commands. * Seek justice, seek humility and meekness.

V: Blessed are you, poor, because yours is the kingdom of God.

R: Seek justice, seek humility and meekness.

Second Reading. *N. 39*

Hope in a better world.

A reading from the pastoral constitution “Gaudium et Spes” of the second Vatican Council on the Church in the contemporary world.

We do not know the time for the consummation of the earth and of humanity, nor do we know how all things will be transformed. As deformed by sin, the shape of this world will pass away; but we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice will abide, and whose blessedness will answer and surpass all the longings for peace which spring up in the human heart. Then, with death overcome, the sons of God will be raised up in Christ, and what was sown in weakness and corruption will be invested with incorruptibility. Enduring with charity and its fruits, all that creation which God made on man's account will be unchained from the bondage of vanity.

Therefore, while we are warned that it profits a man nothing if he gain the whole world and lose himself, the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age.

Hence, while earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God.

For after we have obeyed the Lord, and in His Spirit nurtured on earth the values of human dignity, brotherhood and freedom, and indeed all the good fruits of our nature and enterprise, we will find them again, but freed of stain, burnished and transfigured, when Christ hands over to the Father: "a kingdom eternal and universal, a kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace." On this earth that Kingdom is already

present in mystery. When the Lord returns it will be brought into full flower.

Responsorial. *Ps. 95: 11; Is. 49: 13; Ps. 71: 7*

R: Rejoice O heavens, exult O earth; O mountains, shout for joy: * the Lord has mercy on the poor.

V: In his days justice will flourish and peace will abound:

R: the Lord has mercy on the poor.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Sir. 7: 22 – 36 (vulg. 7: 24 – 40)*

Duties towards the children, parents, priests, poor.

A reading from the book of Sirach.

Do you have cattle? Look after them; if they are profitable to you, keep them. Do you have children? Discipline them, and make them obedient from their youth. Do you have daughters? Be concerned for their chastity, and do not show yourself too indulgent with them. Give a daughter in marriage; you will have finished a great task. But give her to a man of understanding.

If you have a wife who pleases you, do not cast her out; but do not trust yourself to one whom you detest. With all your heart honour your father, and do not forget the birth pangs of your mother. Remember that through your parents you were born; and what can you give back to them that equals their gift to you? With all your soul fear the Lord, and honour his priests.

With all your might love your Maker, and do not forsake his ministers. Fear the Lord and honour the priest, and give him his portion, as is commanded you: the first fruits, the guilt offering, the gift of the shoulders, the sacrifice of sanctification, and the first fruits of the holy things. Stretch forth your hand to the poor, so that your blessing may be complete.

Give graciously to all the living, and withhold not kindness from the dead. Do not fail those who weep, but mourn with those who mourn. Do not shrink from visiting a sick man, because for such deeds you will be loved. In all you do, remember the end of your life, and then you will never sin.

Responsorial. *Sir. 7: 29, 32; Rm. 12: 15. 13*

R: Fear the Lord with all your soul and honour his priests. * Stretch forth your hands to the poor, so that your blessing may be perfect.

V: Rejoice with those who are happy, cry with those who are in tears, be solicitous for the necessities of the brothers.

R: Stretch forth your hands to the poor, so that your blessing may be perfect.

Second Reading. *Book 1. 1- 2*

If you remain faithful to my word, you will truly be my disciples.

A reading from the treatise “On baptism” attributed to St. Basil the Great, bishop.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, only-begotten Son of the living God, after his resurrection from the dead received the promise of God the Father by the mouth of the prophet David: “You are my son, today I have generated you. Ask of me, I will give you in possession the nations and in dominion the ends of the earth” (Ps. 2: 7-8). He took with him therefore his disciples and for the first time revealed to them the power conferred on him by the Father with these words: “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Mt. 28: 18). Then he in turn sent them, saying: “Go therefore and teach all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt. 28: 19-20). The Lord commanded above all: “Teach all the nations” and then he added: “baptizing them” with that which follows; but you, having omitted the first part, have asked us to explain to you the second and, if we were not to answer you immediately, we would consider ourselves as acting against the precept of the apostle who says that he is “ready always to answer to whoever asks you for the reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3: 15). Therefore we have displayed the doctrine of baptism according to the gospel of the Lord, baptism which is much more illustrious than that of John, but in a way as to present only a few arguments of the many available in the sacred Scriptures.

We have above all considered it necessary to refer to the order of the Lord, in a way that you are first instructed on the power and the significance of this expression: “Teach” and in a second moment you will

receive the doctrine of the glorious baptism. You will arrive thus to the perfection, learning and observing all that which the Lord has commanded, as it is written. Here therefore we have heard him say: "Teach", but now we need to remember what is said elsewhere with regard to this mandate; thus, having first discovered a formula that is pleasing to God and observing then the corresponding and indispensable commands, we will not draw far away from the significance of this precept, according the proposal of pleasing God.

The Lord usually explains clearly that which in a text has been taught hastily, making use of arguments quoted in other passages. Such is the case of the advice: "Accumulate treasures in heaven" (Mt. 6: 20). In fact after having here mentioned simply that which he has to do, in another text he explains how, saying: "Sell all that you have and give it in almsgiving, make for yourselves bags that do not get old, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven" (Lk. 12: 33).

Therefore, as we have understood from the Lord himself, whoever draws near to him in order to follow him, that is to listen to his words, to believe in him and to obey him as a Lord, king, doctor and master of truth, for the hope of eternal life, is his disciple; provided he perseveres in all this, as it is written: "Jesus then said to those Jews who had believed in him: If you remain faithful to my word, you will truly be my disciples; you will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (Jn. 8: 31-32).

Responsorial. *Ps. 118: 104, 105; Jn. 6: 68*

R: I receive intelligence from your decrees, for this I hate all untruthful ways. * Your word is the lamp for my steps, light on my way.

V: Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.

R: Your word is the lamp for my steps, light on my way.

Gospel. *Lk. 11: 27 – 28*

Blessed the womb that bore you!

Blessed instead are those who listen to the Word of God.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

As he said this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!" But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"