

FEBRUARY

2 February

THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

Feast

First Reading. *Ex. 13: 1-3a, 11-16*

Consecration of the first-born.

A reading from the book of Exodus.

The LORD said to Moses, "Consecrate to me all the first-born; whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine."

And Moses said to the people, "Remember this day, in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage, for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place; no leavened bread shall be eaten. This day you are to go forth, in the month of Abib.

"And when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, you shall set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb. All the firstlings of your cattle that are males shall be the Lord's.

Every firstling of an ass you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every first-born of man among your sons you shall redeem. And when in time to come your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage. For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of cattle. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb; but all the first-born of my sons I redeem.' It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes; for by a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt."

Responsorial. *Cfr. Lk. 2: 28*

R: Sion, prepare your bridal chamber, and receive Christ your Lord, * whom a virgin conceived, brought forth and adored, remaining forever a virgin.

V: Simeon took the child into his arms, and giving thanks, he blessed the Lord.

R: whom a virgin conceived, brought forth and adored, remaining forever a virgin.

Second Reading. *Orat. 3: 6-7*

Let us accept the clear and eternal Light.

A reading from a Sermon by St. Sophronius.

Let us all run to meet him, we who honour and venerate the mystery of the Lord with pious devotion. Let us all go to meet him with eager minds. Let there be no one who does not share in this meeting, let no one refuse to carry a light.

We add to this the bright shining of candles. In this way we show forth the divine splendour of the coming of him who makes all things bright, in the abundance of whose eternal light all things are bathed in light when the evil shadows have been driven away. In this way we show the brightness of the soul with which we must go to meet Christ.

The most chaste Virgin Mother of God bore in her arms the true light and came to the help of those who were lying in darkness. In the same way we must hurry out to meet him who is truly light, enlightened by the beams of his brightness and bearing in our hands the light which shines for all men.

Indeed this is the mystery which we celebrate, that the light has come into the world and has given it light when it was shrouded in darkness, and that the dayspring has visited us from on high and given light to those who were sitting in darkness (Cfr. Lk. 1: 78). That is why we go in procession with lamps in our hands and hasten bearing lights showing both that the light has shone upon us, and signifying the glory which is to come to us through him. Therefore let us all run together to meet God.

That true light which enlightens every man coming into this world (cfr. Jn. 1: 9), has come. Brethren, let us all be enlightened, let us all be filled with light.

Let none of us remain a stranger to this brightness, let no one who is filled with it continue in the darkness, but let us all go forth shining with light, let us all go together bright with that light to welcome with old Simeon that everlasting shining light. Rejoicing with him in our souls, let us sing a hymn of thanks to the Begetter and Father of the light, who has sent

the true light and driven away the darkness and made us all to shine with light.

For we too have seen through him the salvation of God which he has prepared before the face of all peoples, and has shown forth for the glory of us who are the new Israel; and we have been freed at once from that mysterious and ancient sin just as Simeon was released from the bonds of this present life when he had seen Christ.

We have embraced Christ in faith as he came to us from Bethlehem, and have been made the people of God instead of Gentiles, for he is the salvation given us by our God and Father. We have seen God made flesh with our very eyes and we are called the New Israel now that we have seen the visible presence of God and have cradled him in our minds. That presence we celebrate with a yearly festival: we shall never forget it.

Responsorial. *Ez. 43: 4-5; cf. Lk. 2: 22*

R: The glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east, * and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

V: Mary and Joseph brought the child Jesus into the temple,

R: and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

Gospel. *Lk. 2: 22-40*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for

revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." And his father and his mother marvelled at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phan'u-el, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

Third Reading.

Mary shines because of the singular privilege of a glorious martyrdom.

A reading from the "Treatise on the words of the Apostle: The word of God is alive and efficacious" of Baldwin of Canterbury, bishop.

Often a mother pained, by the suffering of the son, suffers more than the son himself. This is the effect of love: of assuming in oneself the pain of the others and doing so in a way that, with the increase of pain, she suffers more than the one for whom she is sorry, to the point that often she alone desires to suffer, so that the other does not suffer. In the suffering of compassion, the soul of the one who participates is divided in some way from itself and in itself. Since when a beloved person suffers, in order to associate itself to her pain, the soul gives itself and comes out of itself pushed by compassion, in order to unite itself to her and to suffer in her place. And, in a certain way it shows itself as belonging to the one with whom it has identified itself through the sentiment of compassion, as if it was living in the one who feels the torment. For this the old Simeon, prophesying about Christ, said: "He is here for the ruin and the resurrection of many in Israel, sign of contradiction"; and immediately addressing himself to the Blessed Virgin, he added: "And a sword will pierce your own

soul too” (Lk. 2: 34-35); that is: your soul, as if it is almost his, will be pierced by a sword.

It can also be understood like this: your soul itself, that is your own soul will be pierced by a sword. In fact the Mother of God, who knew how to love more than the others, as she was also loved more than all the others, suffered with the dying Son as if she herself was suffering. Her pain was proportionate to her love. Loving the Son more than herself, she carried in her heart with an intimate pain all the wounds that were inflicted to the body of the Son. Her martyrdom was the passion of Christ.

The flesh of Christ was in a certain sense her flesh, that is flesh of her flesh, and after the Christ had assumed it from her, she loved it in Christ, more than her own in herself. The more she loved, the more she suffered. She suffered in her heart more than a martyr suffers in the body, for this she shines because of the singular privilege of the glorious martyrdom. The other martyrs have reached perfection with the martyrdom of their own death; she offered at the passion the flesh of her flesh for the salvation of the world, and in the passion and through the passion of Christ her soul was in such a way invaded by the violence of the pain that, as consumed in the same martyrdom with the Christ, it can be believed that she has received the highest glory of the martyrs, after Christ.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Jn. 19: 17, 18, 25; Lk. 2: 35*

R: Then they reached the place called the Skull, where they crucified him. *
Near the cross of Jesus was his mother.

V: Then her soul was pierced by a sword.

R: Near the cross of Jesus was his mother.

3 February

SAINT BLAISE, Bishop and Martyr.

Optional Memoria.

He was Bishop of Sivas in Armenia in the fourth century. In the Middle Ages veneration of him spread throughout the Church.

From the Common of Martyrs: for one Martyr or of Pastors.

Second Reading. Sermon 32

Suffer for my sheep.

A reading from a sermon “On the ordination of a bishop” of St. Augustine, bishop.

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt. 20: 28). This is the manner of Christ’s own service and this is the sort of servants he taught us to be. “He gave his life as a ransom for many”. He redeemed us.

Which of us, though, is capable of redeeming anyone? By his blood and his death we were freed from death, and by his humility we who were prostrate were enabled to stand erect. But we must at least offer the little we have to his members, because we have been made his members: he is the head, we are the body.

In his epistle, the apostle John urges us to follow the example of the Lord, who has said, “Whoever among you would be the greatest must be your servant, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (cfr. Mt. 20, 27-28). Saint John exhorts us to imitate Christ in the following words; “Christ laid down his life for us; so we too ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 Jn. 3: 16).

After his resurrection the Lord himself said, “Peter, do you love me?” (cfr. Jn. 21: 16) Peter replied, “I do”. Three times the Lord asked, three times Peter made the same reply and each of the three times, the Lord said, “Feed my sheep”.

How else can you show your love for me except by feeding my sheep? What can you offer me by loving me, seeing that you look to me for all things? You know then what you must do in loving me: “Feed my sheep”.

Three times there came the question, “Do you love me?” three times the reply, “I do”, and three times the command, “Feed my sheep” (Jn. 21: 16). Three times Peter had denied the Lord in fear, three times he confessed him in love.

Then the Lord commended to him his sheep three times, when he replied and confessed his love and so condemned and wiped out his fear. Immediately the Lord went on to say: “When you were young, you girded

yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and bring you where you do not wish to go". This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God (Jn. 21: 18-19). He foretold for Peter his own cross, he prophesied his own passion for Peter. That was the intention of Jesus' words: "Feed my sheep". It means: "Suffer for my sheep".

Responsorial. *cfr. Phil 1: 20; 1 Jn. 3: 16*

R: May I never have to admit defeat, * may I have the courage for Christ to be glorified in my body, whether by my life or by my death.

V: Christ has given his life for us, we too should give the life for the brothers,

R: may I have the courage for Christ to be glorified in my body, whether by my life or by my death.

3 February also
SAINT ANSGAR, Bishop
Optional Memoria.

Born in France at the beginning of the ninth century. He was educated in the monastery at Corbie and then in the year 826 he set out to preach the Gospel in Denmark. Meeting with little success he then went to Sweden. He was chosen to be bishop of Hamburg and was confirmed in this position by Gregory IV who made him his legate for Denmark and Sweden. He endured many difficulties in his work of evangelisation but his spirit never failed. He died in the year 865.

From the Common of Pastors.

Second Reading. *Lett. 15, 7*

The testimony of life gives credit to the preaching.

A reading from the "Letters" of Saint Boniface IV, pope.

The assuming of the sacerdotal ministry- if we examine it carefully- is more a burden than an honour, since it is not enough for the priest to occupy himself with his own interests but he must attend to the good of the others. The pastors of the sheep voluntarily bear the sun and the cold, day and night keeping vigil over their flock, and with their eyes always attentive they look around, so that not even one of their sheep losing himself perishes or is abducted and torn to pieces by the teeth of the beasts. With what greater commitment and solicitude should we who are called to be the pastors of

the souls therefore keep vigil? Let us therefore be attentive and let us not cease to fulfil the duties that we have assumed of guarding the sheep of the Lord, so that exactly from that which now makes us appear superior to the others with respect to our position, may not come the imputation of negligence in front of the Supreme Shepherd because of our laziness. We must be so solicitous, as to impede the access of the astute and ancient enemy of the human race and to resist with all our strength against his voracity, so that because of our eventual laziness he may not devour- may it never happen- any soul with his jaws, and its loss not without reason be attributed to our fault, given that we have neglected to guard with solicitous precaution that which was entrusted to us.

Let us therefore demonstrate to be such as when we were called and let us try, for as much as it is possible, to be useful to those to whom according to the divine counsel we have been chosen to be the head, so that, when the creditor will come to make the accounts with us, he will find that we have earned and he will gladden us with his reward, as he has promised. Since it is written: “Purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the Lord” (Is. 52: 11).

Those who assume the job of leading into the eternal sanctuaries the souls of the brothers with the example of their lives carry the vessels of the Lord. Let him who carries in the area of his own life the living vessels, to the temple of eternity look therefore at what there is to purify in himself. For this the divine voice commanded that on the breast of Aaron be tied strongly the bag of judgement, “the rational” so that the heart of the priest would never be occupied by fluctuating thoughts, but that it be held firm by the only reason: he who is constituted as an example to the others, must not think anything that is useless or indiscreet but must demonstrate always with seriousness all that is reasonable which he keeps in his heart.

Consider this with all your strength, dearest brother, and know that you have received the post that you occupy not in order to rest but in order to work. With exhortations fortify the hearts of the faithful and convert those of the unbelievers. And in order to obtain them more easily, enhance your preaching with the life.

May this be their instruction, this their guide. May they aspire to the eternal life because of your teaching and may they reach it living according to your example, you in fact by the divine grace have been called to such heights of honour because your doctrine, which first was useful to you only

remaining hidden from the others, now placed on high does good to many and diffuses its rays of divine wisdom. For this we give great thanks to the Almighty God, who with his paternal providence induces to the attention of the pastoral care those for whom the episcopate is not a honour but a burden, so that, all the more elevated the position, all the more humbly they live, exercising themselves here in the toil, in order to attain elsewhere an eternal honour.

Responsorial. *1 Tm. 4: 12, 15, 16, 13*

R: Be an example to the faithful, so that all may see your progress: * doing this you will save yourself and those who listen to you.

V: Dedicate yourself to reading, to exhortation and to teaching:

R: doing this you will save yourself and those who listen to you.

5 February

SAINT AGATHA, Virgin and Martyr

Memoria.

She suffered martyrdom at Catania in Sicily, probably in the persecution of Decius. She was venerated throughout the Church from the earliest times and her name was inserted into the Roman Canon.

From the Common of Martyrs: for One Martyr, or of Virgins.

Second Reading. *Ana Boll. 68: 76-78*

Given by God, the very fount of goodness.

A reading from a sermon of St. Methodius of Sicily.

We have come together here, as you know, my dear listeners, to celebrate the anniversary of a holy martyr. She is a martyr of ancient times, distinguished for the famous battle she waged. But she is also a martyr of recent times in that she still seems to be fighting and conquering by divine miracles with which she is daily crowned and beautifully adorned.

She is a virgin because she was born of the Word of the immortal God (who also tasted death in his own flesh for my sake), born of the undivided Son of God. In the words of the theologian Saint John: “To all who received him, he gave power to become children of God” (Jn. 1: 12).

This virgin wife, then, who has invited you to our feast of devotion, is that 'wife betrothed to one, her husband, Christ', to use the metaphor drawn by the apostle Paul from the marriage union.

With full awareness this virgin empurpled her lips and cheeks and tongue by dabbing them with the light and colour of the blood of the true heavenly Lamb, and made herself beautiful. She kept continually in the thoughts of her mind the death of her eager lover and bore it in her heart, as if he had only just been drenched in his own blood. So the robe of her martyrdom did not only carry the indelible mark of Christ's scarlet blood stained deep in its fabric; it also offered to succeeding generations the treasures of her virgin's eloquence, a fine brilliance of speech of the same sort along with an unending source of words.

And so she is truly a good woman, coming forth from God in whose goodness she shares. She is good to her Spouse, and good also to us through sharing with us her goodness. 'Good' is the force and meaning of her name, Agatha in Greek, for she has been granted us, given as a gift, by God himself, the very fount of goodness.

What could be a more lavish gift, than the highest good? And what could anyone find more worthy of celebration with hymns of praise than Agatha? Agatha, her goodness fits both her name and her reality. Agatha, who has won her good name by her noble deeds, and in that very name proves that her deeds were noble. Agatha, who even by her name so draws men, that all come eagerly to meet her – and who teaches them, too, by her example, to strive with her without delay towards the true Good, who is God alone.

Responsorial.

R: The Lord has saved me and strengthened me; * with his help I will profess my loyalty to him to the end.

V: In his loving –kindness the sinless Lord has consecrated to himself a spotless handmaid;

R: with his help I will profess my loyalty to him to the end.

6 February
SAINT PAUL MIKI
And
HIS COMPANIONS, Martyrs.
Memoria.

Born in Japan between the years 1564 and 1566. He entered the Society of Jesus and preached the Gospel with success, but when a persecution of Catholics arose he and twenty-five others were seized and subjected to terrible tortures, and finally were crucified at Nagasaki in the year 1597 on 5 February.

From the Common of Martyrs: For Several Martyrs.

Second Reading. *Ch. 14: Acta Sanct, Feb 1, 769*

You will be my witnesses.

A reading from the account of the martyrdom of St. Paul Miki and his companions, written by a contemporary author.

When the crosses had been erected, it was wonderful to see how steadfast all were in response to the encouragement given by Father Pasius and Father Rodriguez. Father Commissarius remained almost immobile, his eyes fixed on heaven. brother Martin continually gave thanks to God, singing psalms with the versicle, 'Into your hands, O Lord'. Brother Francis Blanco also gave thanks to God in a loud voice, while Father Gonsalvez, raising his voice a little, recited the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary.

Our brother, Paul Miki, seeing that he was standing in the most honoured pulpit of any he had ever been in, first of all declared to the onlookers that he was both a Japanese and a Jesuit. He told them that he was dying because he had preached the Gospel, and that he gave thanks to God for such a singular privilege. Then he added the following words, 'Since I have now come to this moment, I do not think there is anyone among you who would believe that I would willingly tell a lie. I tell you openly, then, that there is no other way of salvation than that of the Christians. Since that way teaches me to forgive my enemies and all who have done me violence, I willingly forgive the king and those who have a

hand in my death, and I entreat them to seek the initiation of Christian baptism’.

Then, looking at his companions, he began to encourage them in this last agony. On the face of each of them there appeared a great joy, and this was especially true of Louis. When one of the other Christians cried out that soon he would be in Paradise, he responded with such a joyful movement of his hands and his whole body that he attracted the attention of all the onlookers.

Anthony who was besides Louis, with his eyes fixed on heaven, called on the most holy names of Jesus and Mary, and then sang the psalm, *Laudate, pueri, Dominum*. He had learned this at the catechetical school in Nagasaki, for among the tasks given to the children there had been included the learning of some psalms such as these.

The others kept repeating, ‘Jesus, Mary’, and then their faces showed no signs of distress. Some of them, indeed were encouraging the bystanders to lead good Christian lives. By these actions and by others like them, they gave ample proof of their willingness to die.

Then the four executioners began to take their spears out of the sheaths that the Japanese use. When they saw those terrible spears, all the faithful cried out, ‘Jesus, Mary’. What is more a sad lamentation assailed heaven itself. The executioners despatched each of them in a very short time with one or two thrusts.

Responsorial. *cf. Gal. 6: 14; Phil. 1: 29*

R: We ought to boast about the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we have our salvation, life and resurrection, * through whom we have been redeemed and saved.

V: It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,

R: through whom we have been redeemed and saved.

8 February
SAINT JEROME EMILIAN

Optional Memoria.

Born at Venice in the year 1486, at first he was a soldier but later left this life so as to consecrate himself to helping the poor; and he gave them all his worldly goods. He founded the Order of Clerks Regular called the Somaschi for the purpose of helping orphan children and the poor. He died at Somascha near Bergamo in 1537.

From the Common of Men Saints: Educators.

Second Reading. *Venice, 21 June 1535*

We must trust in the Lord alone.

A reading from a letter of St. Jerome Emilian to his fellow religious.

My dearly beloved brothers in Christ and sons of the Society of the Servants of the Poor,

Your lowly father greets you and urges you to persevere in the love of Christ and the faithful observance of his law, even as I myself showed you both in word and in deed when I was with you. So may the Lord be glorified through me among you.

God, the source of all good, is our end. As we say in our prayers, in him alone should we trust and not in others. For, in his generosity, our Master wishes both to increase your faith (without which, as the evangelist says, Christ is unable to perform many signs) and to listen to your prayers. So he has decreed that he will call you as men who are poor, in trouble and distress, and utterly wearied; as men who are despised by all, and deprived, if not of the spirit of your poor and most dearly beloved father, then at least of his bodily presence.

Why he would have you so, he alone knows. But there are three reasons we can take into account. First of all, our blessed Master has said that he wishes to number you among his beloved sons as long as you continue to walk in his ways. That is how he treats his friends and makes them holy.

The second reason is that he strives to help you to trust more and more in him alone and not in others. For God, as I have said, does not work in those who refuse to place all their trust and expectations in him alone. On the other hand he lavishes the fullness of his love on those who are remarkable for their faith and hope, and does great works for them. Therefore, if you are well armed with faith and hope, he will achieve great

things for you, exalting those of lowly degree. So, in taking me from among you and whomsoever else you have come to rely on, he has confronted you with a choice. Either you abandon your faith and return to the world, or you remain strong in the faith and in this be tested by him.

Here, then is the third reason. God wishes to test you like gold in the furnace. For the dross is consumed by the fire, but the genuine gold remains and becomes even more precious. God acts in the same way with the faithful servant who has hope and remains constant in him in time of tribulation. God will raise him up, and for those things which he left for love of him, God will reward him with a hundredfold in this life and with eternal life in the next.

This is the way he has treated all the saints. He acted in the same way with the people of Israel after all they had suffered in Egypt. Not only did he lead them out with so many signs, and feed them with manna in the desert, but he also gave them the Promised Land. So, too, if you are constant in your faith in the face of temptations, the Lord will give you peace and repose for a time in this life, and for all eternity in the next.

Responsorial. *1 Pet. 3: 8, 9; Rom. 12: 10-11*

R: Be one in thought and feeling; love the brothers, be compassionate and self-effacing: * this is what you have been called to do, so that you may inherit a blessing.

V: Love each other as much as brothers should, and have a profound respect for each other. Work for the Lord with untiring effort and with great earnestness of spirit:

R: this is what you have been called to do, so that you may inherit a blessing.

10 February
SAINT SCHOLASTICA, Virgin
Memoria.

The sister of Saint Benedict, born at Norcia in Umbria about the year 480. Together with her brother she consecrated herself to God, and she followed Benedict to Monte Cassino, where she died about the year 547.

First Reading. *Sg. of Sgs. 2: 8-14, 16*

Love is strong as death.

A reading from the Song of Songs.

The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle, or a young stag. Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is comely. My beloved is mine and I am his, he pastures his flock among the lilies.

Responsorial. *Sg. of Sgs. 2: 11. 13, 14; Mt. 25: 6*

R: Behold, the winter is past, and the rain is over and gone: arise my love, my beloved, and come away! * O my dove, show me your face, let me hear your voice.

V: At midnight a cry was heard: Behold the bridegroom, go out to meet him!

R: O my dove, show me your face, let me hear your voice.

Second Reading. *Book 2: 33, 34*

She who loved more could do more.

A reading from the dialogues of St. Gregory the Great, pope.

Saint Benedict's sister, Scholastica, who had been consecrated to Almighty God in early childhood, used to visit her brother once a year. On these occasions he would go down to meet her in a house belonging to the monastery, a short distance from the entrance.

For this particular visit he joined her there with a few of his disciples and they spent the whole day singing God's praises and conversing about the spiritual life. When darkness was setting in, they took their meal together and continued their conversation at table until it was quite late. Then the holy nun said to him, 'Please do not leave me tonight; let us keep on talking about the joys of heaven till morning'.

‘What are you saying sister?’ he replied, ‘You know I cannot stay away from the monastery’.

At her brother’s refusal, Scholastica folded her hands on the table and rested her head upon them in earnest prayer. When she looked up again, there was a sudden burst of lightening and thunder, accompanied by such a downpour that Benedict and his companions were unable to set foot outside the door.

Realizing that he could not return to the monastery in this terrible storm, Benedict complained bitterly. ‘God forgive you, sister’, he said. ‘What have you done?’

Scholastica simply answered, ‘When I appealed to you, you would not listen to me. So I turned to my God and he heard my prayer. Leave now if you can. Leave me here and go back to your monastery’.

This, of course, he could not do. He had no choice now but to stay, in spite of his unwillingness. They spent the entire night together and both of them derived great profit from the holy converse they had about the interior life.

We need not be surprised that in this instance the woman proved mightier than her brother. Do we not read in Saint John that God is love? Surely it is more than right that her influence was greater than his, since hers was the greater love.

Three days later as he stood in his room looking up towards the sky, the man of God beheld his sister’s soul leaving her body and entering the court of heaven in the form of a dove.

Overjoyed at her eternal glory, he gave thanks to Almighty God in hymns of praise. Then, he sent some of his brothers to bring her body to the monastery, and bury it in the tomb he had prepared for himself. The bodies of these two were now to share a common resting place just as in life their souls had always been one in God.

Responsorial. *cf. Ps. 132:1*

R: The holy virgin Scholastica prayed to God that her brother would not leave her; * she was able to obtain more than he did from the Lord of her heart, because her love was greater.

V: How good and how pleasant it is when brother and sister live in unity;

R: she was able to obtain more than he did from the Lord of her heart, because her love was greater.

Or.

Second Reading.

*She believed that she would be heard for the purity of heart
and for the abundance of tears.*

A reading from the ancient “Rules of the monks”

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me” (Ap. 3: 20). When we take part in the service of the divine mercy, we must dispose both the body as well as the soul in order to welcome in the enclosure of our hearts he who knocks. Our mind then, enflamed by the Holy Spirit, must think of that which can induce the mercy of the Creator to come to our dinner, in order to lead us in our turn to the dinner and to the divine mercy itself. Those in fact who reach it, satisfy themselves with the abundance of his house and quench their thirst at the torrent of his delights because in Christ is the source of life, in his light we see the light. He grants his grace to the one who knows him, his justice to the upright of heart (cfr. Ps. 35: 9-11).

The tongue therefore always proclaims that which on the mouth of his servant can be pleasing to the Creator, according to the saying of the psalmist: “Serve God with fear and exult with trembling” (Ps. 2: 11). The Creator is served with fear when to the voice of praise is added the good works, that which in another place the psalmist calls the “to sing hymns with art” (Ps. 46: 8).

Therefore whoever sings hymns with art does not contradict his voice of praise with wicked works, and with every effort tries to serve the divine power as it is suitable, with solicit and attentive devotion.

Our mind should be so intent on singing psalms and so disposed in praying that no temporal desire should place any obstacle, no fleeting

interest should obscure it; but always attracted and elevated towards the heavenly things, adorned with humility, purity and most ardent devotion, it tends towards the eternal rewards. In this way filled with compunction, it solicits the mercy of the Creator to benevolence; let it not believe however that it will be heard because of its many words, but rather for the purity of the heart and the abundance of tears, since more than the long prayers it is the intentions of a sincere heart that provoke the mercy of the kind judge.

It is necessary therefore to pray always to him, so that he may grant forgiveness to the sinners. Pray to him who, for the eternal salvation of men, with the passion on the cross has administered the remedy to the sick world: Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Responsorial. *Jn. 4: 23-24*

R: The true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, * because the Father looks for such worshippers.

V: God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth,

R: because the Father looks for such worshippers.

Or.

Second Reading. *Disc. 11*

*You can become my sister,
if you accept the will of my soul.*

A reading from the “Discourses on the Song of Songs” of St. Gregory of Nyssa, bishop.

That which is found, is seen with always more freshness and wonder than that which has already been comprehended and is already evident; therefore he who contemplates that divine and invisible beauty, continues to desire to see it, because whatever he sees, is much more divine and magnificent than what he expected. Therefore the bride also, though admiring amazed that which she knows and notwithstanding the things that are known, her desire of contemplation never ceases. Whence she hears the Word before he is about to hit the door and she rises at this touch. Then, after an instant of pause and of silence in order to listen, hears the voice of

the Word which resounds. “Open to me, my sister, my friend, my dove, my perfect one” (Sg. of Sgs. 5: 2). The sense of these words can be understood only in the contemplation.

God began to manifest himself to the great Moses in the light, then he spoke with him in the cloud. And finally, when Moses was already more elevated and perfect, he saw God in the darkness. From this we learn that the first distancing from the false and erroneous opinions on God is the passage from darkness to light. In order to consider the mysteries from near, the soul is taken through that which is seen to the realities which do not fall anymore under the visible aspect: this consideration is like a cloud which covers with its shadow that which one looks at, guiding and accustoming the soul to see that which is hidden.

The soul in fact, which in this way aims at the supreme things, after having abandoned all that it can reach with the human nature, goes around into the depths of the knowledge of God, surprised by the divine darkness on all sides; having left outside all that it could see or understand, to the soul remains only to contemplate that which is invisible and incomprehensible, there where God is, as the Scripture says with regard to the legislator: “Moses went towards the dark cloud, in which God was” (Ex. 20: 21).

Which is the way of access to this mystery through which the soul is introduced in this night? The Word touches the door. For door we mean the reflections on the mysteries, through which the one who searches enters. Since the truth is beyond our nature, and is known partly, as the Apostle says, the Word knocks on the door of our minds with allegories and enigmas, saying: “Open to me”. And with the exhortation he suggests in what way the door must be opened, almost offering the keys, that is the sweet expressions with which he opens that which is closed. The keys in fact are the meanings of these expressions which open the mysteries, that is: sister, friend, dove and perfect.

If you want in fact, he says, that the door be opened and the frontals of your souls are raised up so that the king of glory can enter, it is necessary that you become my sister, accepting the will of my soul, as he says in the gospel: He who lives according to my will is my brother and my sister (cfr. Mt. 12: 50). It is necessary that you draw near to the truth and that you remain so close to it so as not to be separated by any intermediary. It is necessary that you have in your nature the perfection of the dove: that is

that you are not unfaithful in anything and that you are full of every innocence and purity.

Responsorial. *Sg. of Sgs. 8: 1, 2; Philemon 7*

R: Oh if you were my brother! * Finding you outside, I could introduce you into the house of my mother; there you could teach me.

V: Your charity has been for me a reason of great joy and consolation, brother.

R: Finding you outside, I could introduce you into the house of my mother; there you could teach me.

Gospel. Luke 10: 38-42

Third Reading. *Disc. 103: 2-5, 6*

Blessed are those who were worthy to welcome Christ into their house.

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

Martha and Mary were two sisters, sisters not only according to the flesh, but also in the religion. Both of them had adhered to the Lord, both of them by mutual consent had served him while he was present in his humanity. Martha had welcomed him as one is used to welcoming pilgrims. All the same, servant welcomes the Lord, sick the Saviour, creature the Creator. She who had to be restored in the spirit welcomed the Lord in order to restore him in the body. I do not say however to someone of you: Blessed are those who were worthy of welcoming Christ in their own house! Do not be sad, do not grumble because you have been born in an age in which you cannot see the Lord anymore in the flesh: he has not deprived you of this honour.

In fact he says: “Every time that you have done these things to one of these my little brothers, you have done it to me” (Mt. 25: 40).

Martha, disposed and ready to restore the Lord, is worried a lot about the service. Mary, her sister, has preferred to let herself be restored by the Lord. She has in a certain sense abandoned her sister who was tiring herself a lot in the service and, placing herself at the feet of the Lord, was listening attentively to his word.

The most faithful ear had heard: “Stop and know that I am God” (Ps. 45: 11). That one was troubled, this one rejoiced, that one put in order many

things, this one looked only at one thing. Martha questions the guest, and as to the judge she brings an action against her sister because she has abandoned her and does not care to help her in the fatigue of the service. While Mary though present does not answer anything, the Lord pronounces the sentence. And what does he say? “Martha, Martha!” The repetition of the name is the sign of the deferment, or perhaps it is an invitation to pay attention. In fact in order to listen with more attention she is called twice “Martha, Martha”, listen: “You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed”, that is necessary. Not unique as if it was the only one, but urgent, suitable, necessary is that unique thing that Mary has chosen, “Mary has chosen what is better” (Lk. 10: 41-42). It is not that you have chosen a thing that is evil, but that which Mary has chosen is better. “And it will not be taken away from her”.

Behold what Mary has chosen: there we do not restore, but we are restored. There what Mary had chosen will be full and perfect. On the earth, from that rich table of the word of God, she gathered the crumbs. Do you want to know what you will be up there? The Lord said of his servants: “In truth, in truth, I say to you, I will make them sit down at table and I will pass to serve them” (Lk. 12: 37). What does that I will pass to serve them mean?

He first passes and then he serves. But where? In that supreme banquet of which he says: In truth I tell you: “They will come from the east and from the west and they will sit at the table in the kingdom of God with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Lk. 13: 29, 28).

There the Lord restores, but first he passes here, since as you know, Passover means passage. The Lord has come: he accomplishes divine things and suffers the human ones. He passed. The gospel too speaks in this sense, when he celebrated the Passover with his disciples. What does the gospel say? “His hour had arrived to pass from this world to the Father” (Jn. 13: 1) he therefore passed in order to restore: let us follow him in order to be restored.

Responsorial. *Ps. 35: 9-10; Ps. 64: 5*

R: They are satisfied with the abundance of your house, Lord, and they quench their thirst at the torrents of your delights; * in you is the spring of life, in your light we see the light.

V: We will be satisfied with the goods of your house:

R: in you is the spring of life, in your light we see the light.

11 February
OUR LADY OF LOURDES
Optional Memoria

In the year 1858 the Immaculate Virgin Mary appeared to Bernadette Soubirous near Lourdes in France, in the grotto of Massabielle. Through the poor little child, Mary called sinners to penance, and thereby there arose in the Church a marvellous spirit of prayer and charity, especially in helping the poor and the sick.

From the Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Second Reading. *Letter to P. Gondrand, 1861*
The Lord has spoken to me.

A reading from a letter of St. Mary Bernadette Soubirous.

One day, when I had gone with the two girls to collect wood by the bank of the river Gave, I heard a sound. I turned toward the meadow and saw that the trees were not moving at all. I looked up and saw a grotto. And I saw a Lady wearing a white dress with a blue sash. On each foot she had a yellow rose, her rosary was the same colour.

When I saw her, I rubbed my eyes, I thought I must be mistaken. I put my hands in my pocket, where I kept my rosary. I wanted to make the sign of the cross, but I could not lift my hand to my forehead; it fell back. Then the Lady crossed herself. I again tried, and although my hand was trembling, I was eventually able to make the sign of the cross. I began to say my rosary. The Lady slipped the beads of her rosary through her fingers, but she did not move her lips. When I finished the rosary, she immediately disappeared.

I asked the two girls if they had seen anything. They said, 'No', and asked what I had to tell them. I told them that I had seen a Lady wearing a white dress but that I did not know who she was. But I warned them to keep silent about it. Then they urged me not to go back there, but I refused. I went back on Sunday, feeling drawn by an inner force.

The Lady spoke to me a third time and asked me if I was willing to come to her over a period of a fortnight. I replied that I was. She added that I must tell the priests to have a chapel built there. Then she told me to drink

at the spring. Not seeing any spring I was going to drink from the Gave. She told me that she did not mean that, and pointed with her finger to the spring. When I went there I saw only a little dirty water. I put my hand in it, but I could not get hold of any. I scratched, and at last a little water came for drinking. Three times I threw it away, the fourth time I was able to drink it. Then the vision disappeared and I went away.

I went back there for fifteen days, and each day the Lady appeared to me, with the exception of a Monday and a Friday. She reminded me again to tell the priests to build the chapel, asked me to wash in the spring, and to pray for the conversion of sinners. I asked her several times who she was, but she gently smiled at me. Finally, she held her arms outstretched and raised her eyes to heaven and told me that she was the Immaculate Conception.

During that fortnight she also revealed three secrets to me, and forbade me to disclose them to anyone. I have kept them faithfully to this day.

Responsorial. *Lk. 1: 46, 49, 48*

R: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, for the Almighty has done great things for me. * Holy is his name.

V: Henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

R: Holy is his name.

14 February
**SAINT CYRIL, Monk, and
SAINT METHODIUS, Bishop**
Memoria.

Cyril was born in Salonika and was educated at Constantinople. With his brother Methodius he went to Moravia to preach the faith. They both translated the liturgical books into the Slavonic language using the Cyrillic alphabet which they invented. They were called to Rome and here Cyril died on 14 February in the year 869. Methodius was made a bishop and went to Pannonia (Hungary) where he laboured ceaselessly in preaching the gospel, while enduring many hardships as a result of jealousy, though he had the support of the Holy See. He died on 6 April in the year 885 at Velehrad in Czechoslovakia.

From the Common of Pastors.

Second Reading. *Ch. 18*

Make your Church grow, and gather all in unity.

A reading from the Slavonic “Life” of Constantine.

Worn out by his many labours, Constantine Cyril fell ill. After many days of sickness he had a kind of divine vision and began to chant this phrase: ‘My spirit was glad and my heart rejoiced when I heard them say, “We will go into the house of the Lord” (Ps. 121: 1)’.

After he had put on his sacred vestments he remained that entire day saying with great joy: ‘From now on I am no longer a servant of the emperor or of any man on earth but only of God almighty. Once I was not; I came to be, and I shall live forever. Amen.’ The following day he put on the monk’s habit and took the religious name, Cyril – adding glory to glory. He continued to wear this habit for fifty days.

When the time had come for him to take his rest and to leave this world for his heavenly home, he raised his hands to God and prayed with tears: ‘O Lord, my God, you have created all the angelic ranks and spiritual powers. You have spread out the heavens and made firm the earth, bringing into existence from nothing all that exists. You always hear the prayers of those who do your will, who revere you and keep your commandments. Hear my prayer and keep safe your faithful flock over which you set me, your foolish and unworthy servant.

‘Free your people from the impious malice of those unbelievers who blaspheme against you. Make your Church grow in number, and gather all its members into unity. Make them a chosen people, of one mind in your true faith and in orthodox profession of it; breathe the word of your teaching into their hearts. For it is a gracious favour from you that you have accepted us to preach the gospel of your Christ by encouraging people to do good works and by doing what pleases you.

‘I return to you as your own those whom you gave me. Rule them with your right hand; keep them under the shadow of your wings, that they may all praise and glorify your name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen’.

Then he kissed them all with a holy kiss and said: ‘Blessed be God who has not given us over as a prey to the fangs of our invisible enemies; he has broken their nets and freed us from destruction at their hands’. And so he fell asleep in the Lord at the age of forty-two.

The Pope ordered that all the Greeks present in Rome and the Romans should gather, carrying candles, to chant over his body; his funeral was to

be conducted in every respect as though he had been the Pope himself, and this they did.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Ps. 88: 20, 21-22; Jer. 3: 15*

R: To your friends the prophets you said, I have exalted one chosen from the people, I have found David, my servant; * with my holy oil I have anointed him, and my hand shall always be with him.

V: I will give you shepherds after my own heart, and these shall feed you on knowledge and discretion;

R: with my holy oil I have anointed him, and my hand shall always be with him.

17 February

**THE SEVEN HOLY FOUNDERS
OF THE SERVITE ORDER**

Optional Memoria

These seven men were born at Florence and led lives as hermits on Monte Senario, especially venerating the Blessed Virgin Mary. They then preached through the length and breadth of Tuscany, and founded the Order of Servites which in 1304 received the approval of the Holy See. They are venerated on this day which is said to be the day on which Saint Alexis Falconieri, one of the seven died, in the year 1310.

From the Common of men Saints: Religious.

Second Reading. *Mon. Ord. Serv. BMV, pp 71ff*

Let us praise men of renown

A reading from the Documents on the origin of the Order of the Servants of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Venerable men, worthy of all praise, were the seven whom our Lady brought together when she founded her own Order, the Order of her Servants. She united them in their spiritual life and then in the outward form of a community. They were like seven stars brought together to form a constellation.

When I entered the Order they had all gone to their reward except one, Brother Alexis, whom our Lady preserved in this life until our own day so that we might know from him how our Order was founded. Here was a man, as I learned by experience and saw with my own eyes, who helped all

who knew him by his example. He was himself a living proof of the perfection of the seven companions and of the piety of their lives. But their state of life before they came together was fourfold.

First, as far as it concerns the Church. Some were married, some had already resolved to serve God in a life of perpetual chastity, some were widowers and so released from marriage.

Second, as far as it concerns their service of the city of Florence. They were all of the merchant class, engaged in buying and selling the goods of this world. But when they found the pearl of great price, our Order, they not only gave their goods to the poor, but with great joy gave themselves also freely to the service of God and our Lady.

Third, as far as it concerns the honour and reverence due to our Lady. In Florence there was a long established society dedicated to honour the Virgin Mary. By reason of its antiquity and number and holiness of both the men and women belonging to it, it obtained the title of 'greater' above the others. Hence it had the special name of The Major Society of our Lady. The seven we have mentioned belonged to this society as men who had a special love for our Lady.

Fourth, as far as it concerns their life of Christian perfection. They loved God above all, ordered their whole lives in his service, honouring him in all their thoughts, words and deeds.

Their firm decision that they wanted to join together in one body was confirmed by divine inspiration, and our Lady guided them in this matter in a special way. They then disposed of their own houses and families, making suitable provisions for the latter, and distributing what remained of their possessions to the poor. Finally, they earnestly sought the advice of men of good judgement to whom they explained their ideas. After that, they climbed Monte Senario, built a suitable little house on its summit and took themselves off to live there together.

In course of time it came into their minds that they were called not only to attain to holiness themselves, but also to receive others into their community and so propagate the new Order founded by our Lady through them. They set about adding new members to their numbers. Some they accepted and so our Order grew up. But it was built in the beginning by our Lady, founded on the humility of our brothers, with their union of mind and heart as its fabric, and with poverty as its safeguard.

Responsorial. *Acts 4: 32, 46b-47a*

R: They were all united heart and soul; * no one claimed for his own use anything that he had, as everything they owned was held in common.

V: They ate their food with glad and humble hearts, praising God and enjoying the good will of the people;

R: no one claimed for his own use anything that he had, as everything they owned was held in common.

21 February

SAINT PETER DAMIAN

Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Optional Memoria

Born at Ravenna in the year 1007. After completing his studies he taught for a short while but then gave it up and became a hermit at Fonte Avellana. He was elected Prior of the community and strenuously promoted religious observances both there and in other parts of Italy. In the difficult times in which he lived he helped the Roman Pontiffs by his writings and acted as legate to reform the Church. He was created a Cardinal and Bishop of Ostia by Stephen IX. On his death in the year 1072 he was immediately venerated as a saint.

From the Common of Pastors, or of Doctors of the Church.

Second Reading. *Bk. 8: 6*

Wait gladly for the joy that follows sadness.

A reading from the Letters of St. Peter Damian.

My dear friend, you begged me to write you a letter to comfort you and by kindly encouragement to sweeten the bitterness of your soul in the many trials that you are enduring.

But, if your faculty of prudence is not asleep you must know that consolation is at hand. The words of Scripture itself clearly show that God is educating you, like a son, to take possession of the inheritance. What could be more evident than these words, "Son, when you come into God's service, stand in justice and fear, and prepare your soul for temptation"? (Cfr. Sir. 2: 1-2)

Where there is fear and justice, the trial of any hardship is not a torment that enslaves but rather the instruction of a father. That is what Job meant when, in the midst of his sufferings, he said, “That it would please God to crush me, that he would let loose his hand and cut me off” (Cfr. Jb. 6:9 Vulg.), and he immediately added, “This would be my consolation, that he who afflicts me should not spare the pain” (Cfr. Jb. 6: 10).

It is a great consolation to his chosen ones when God strikes them. For, by means of the passing blows that they endure, they are strengthened to walk firm in hope to take possession of the glory of heavenly happiness.

The craftsman beats gold with his hammer to get rid of the dross. He assiduously scrapes away with his file so that the vein of glittering metal may gleam more brightly. “Just as the potter’s jar is tried in the furnace, so are just men tried by temptation” (Cfr. Sir. 27: 5 Vulg.). That is why St. James says, “Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials” (Jm. 1:2).

They who suffer here and now on account of their evil deeds rightly rejoice when there is an eternal reward for their good deeds laid up for them.

For this reason, my dearest brother, when you feel the lash, when you are chastised by the rod of heavenly discipline, do not let despair crush your spirit. Do not break into grumbling complaints or brood in gloom and sadness. Nor must you lose heart and give way to impatience. Let your expression be calm, your disposition be cheerful, and your speech be full of thanksgiving.

God’s way of working is admirable. He chastises his own in this world to save them from eternal punishment. He lays low in order to raise up. He cuts in order to heal. He casts down in order to exalt.

So dear friend, strengthen your spirit to be patient by means of these and other assurances from Scripture. Wait gladly for the joy that follows sadness.

I pray that hope may raise you up to that joy, and love enkindle your enthusiasm. In your ecstasy may you forget your physical suffering and go steadily towards what you contemplate in spirit.

Responsorial. *Sir. 31: 8, 11, 10*

R: Blessed is the man who is found blameless, and who does not go after gold nor place his trust in hoards of money. * His fortune will be firmly

based on the Lord.

V: He had the power to sin and has not sinned, to wrong another and has not done it.

R: His fortune will be firmly based on the Lord.

22 February

THE SEE OF SAINT PETER THE APOSTLE

Feast.

The feast of the See of Saint Peter has been kept at Rome on this day from the fourth century as a symbol of the unity of the Church founded on the Apostle Saint Peter.

From the Common of the Apostles.

First Reading. *Acts 11: 1-18*

Peter tells of the conversion of the Gentiles.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Now the apostles and the brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" But Peter began and explained to them in order: "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, something descending, like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came down to me. Looking at it closely I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' But I said, 'No, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.' This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. At that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. And the Spirit told me to go with them,

making no distinction. These six brethren also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. And he told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon called Peter; he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and your entire household.' As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"

When they heard this they were silenced. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life."

Responsorial. *Cfr. Lk. 22: 32; Mt. 16: 17b*

R: I have prayed for you Peter, that your faith may not fail; * when you turn back to me, you must strengthen your brothers.

V: The truth concerning me did not come to you from any human being, but was given to you directly by my Father in heaven;

R: when you turn back to me, you must strengthen your brothers.

Second Reading. *Sermon 4 de Natali.*

The Church of Christ grows in the strength of Peter's faith.

A reading from a sermon of St. Leo the Great, pope.

One man, Peter, was chosen out from the whole world to preside over the calling of all the nations, over all the apostles and all the fathers of the Church. So, although in the people of God there are many priests and many pastors, Peter was to rule by his own authority over all, and over them also Christ is the principal ruler. Brethren, by this appointment, God conferred on this man a great and wonderful share in his power, and where he willed that the rest of the leaders of the Church should have a gift like Peter's, it was only through Peter that he gave whatever he did not refuse to others.

The Lord once asked all the apostles what men thought about him. So long as they were describing the uncertainties of ignorant men about him, they all said the same.

But when he asked what the disciples themselves thought of him, it was the man who held first rank among the apostles who was the first to confess the Lord. And when Peter had said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the

living God”, Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Mt. 16: 16-17). This means, you are blessed because my Father taught you this. You were not deceived by the opinion of the world, but instructed by inspiration from heaven; it was not flesh and blood, but he whose Son I am who has revealed me to you.

Jesus went on, “And I tell you”, meaning, that as my Father has revealed to you my divinity, so I make known to you your own high position: “that you are Peter”. That means, I am the secure rock, the cornerstone which makes both one (Ep. 2: 20. 14), that foundation other than which no man can lay. You, however, are also a rock because by my strength you are made firm, so that you and I may share together those things which are my special prerogatives by right.

“And on this rock I shall build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mt. 16: 18). On this strong foundation, he says, I will build an everlasting temple and my Church will rise high to heaven upon the strengths of this faith.

The gates of hell will not imprison this confession, nor the chains of death bind it. Your voice is the voice of life; as it lifts up to heaven those who confess it, so it plunges into hell those who deny it.

That is why Jesus said to most blessed Peter: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatever you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall also be loosed in heaven” (Mt. 16: 19).

The right to this power was handed on to the other apostles and the provisions of this decree have been passed on to all the leaders of the Church. But it was not an idle gesture to put into one man’s keeping what was to be communicated to all. This commission was given to Peter in particular, because the example of Peter is put before all the leaders of the Church.

Responsorial. *Cf. Mt. 16: 19*

R: Before I called you away from your boat, Simon Peter, I knew you for my own; I have appointed you leader of my people. * I have delivered to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

V: Whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.

R: I have delivered to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Gospel. *Mt. 16: 13-19*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Eli'jah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Third Reading. *Disc. 2, 6*

*Since you have shown with a sincere faith the conversion,
you have received this name.*

A reading from the "Discourses on the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles" of St. John Chrysostom, bishop.

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13: 35). Look the disciples are not recognized by miracles, but by the life.

"Simon of John, do you love me more than these others? Feed my lambs" (Jn. 21: 15, 16). Look another sign, and this also taken from the life.

And the third: "Do not rejoice however because the demons submit to you: rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven" (Lk. 10: 20). This also is based on the upright way of living.

You still want to know a fourth demonstration? "Let your light, he says, shine out before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 5: 16). Here also the works are needed.

And when he again says: “And everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or fields for my name’s sake, will receive hundredfold and will inherit eternal life” (Mt. 19: 29), he praises the habits and the perfect life.

You see that the disciples were recognized by the fact that they loved one another; and he who loved Christ more than the other apostles was recognized by the fact that he was the shepherd of the brothers.

You see that they have been destined to enjoy not because they had cast out demons, but because their names were written in heaven; and those who had been chosen to glorify God, were chosen for the splendour of their works; those then who have been rewarded attaining life and receiving the hundredfold, were rewarded because they had despised all the present things. You could imitate all these if you live a pure and perfect life; and thus you could be numbered among the disciples and friends of God, and obtain eternal life with all its goods, even without accomplishing miracles.

Peter himself had not received this name for the miracles, but for the zeal and sincere love.

It is not because he had resurrected the dead or had made the cripple walk was he called this, but because with a sincere confession he had shown his faith: “You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church” (Mt. 16: 18). Why? Not for the miracles, but because he professed: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16: 16).

It is an honourable prerogative for our city, that we have received from the beginning as a doctor the prince of the apostles. It was just that the city which has been adorned first with the name of “Christians” in front of the whole world, should receive as a shepherd the first of the apostles. However, though having welcomed him as a doctor, we have not kept him with us forever, but we have given him up to the royal city of Rome. In fact, even if we do not have the body of Peter, we conserve with Peter his faith, retaining the faith of Peter we have Peter himself.

So also when we see his successor, it seems to us that we see Peter himself. As when Christ called John with the name of Elijah, not because Elijah was John, but because he had come in the spirit and power of Elijah.

As therefore John, having come in the spirit and power of Elijah is called Elijah, so also he who comes in the confession and in the faith of Peter will receive his same name. In fact the conformity of life generates also the community of the name.

Responsorial. *Mt. 16: 13, 16, 17, 18*

R: Jesus asked his disciples: “Who do the people say the Son of man is?”

Simon Peter answered: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. *

And I tell you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church.

V: Blessed are you, Simon son of John, because it was neither flesh, nor blood which has revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

R: And I tell you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church.

Or.

Third Reading. *Disc. 1*

The strength that Christ gives to Peter,

Peter confers to the other apostles.

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

The most blessed Peter, prince of the apostolic college having become the first witness of the Lord, has been constituted as the rock of the Church and custodian of the keys of the kingdom. This name was given to him for his act of faith, while the title has been imposed on him thanks to the power that he merited from the Lord when he said: “And I tell you...” That is, as the Father has manifested my dignity to you, so I make known to you your excellence because “you are Peter” (Mt. 16: 18); though being I the inviolable, cornerstone, who makes of the two only one thing, the foundation other than which no one can put another, yet you also are a rock, since you are strengthened by my power, so that that which is characteristic to my power, to you may be common with me through participation. “On this rock I will build my Church and the gates of the underworld will not prevail against it” (Mt. 16: 18). Above this rock I will construct an eternal temple and from that firm faith there will arise towards heaven the sublimity of my Church.

The proclamation of this testimony cannot be contained by the gates of the underworld and the chains of death cannot bind it: this voice is the voice

of life and, as it raises up its witnesses to heaven, in the same way it emerges the renegades into hell. For this it is said to the most blessed Peter: “To you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and everything that you will bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and everything that you will loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Mt. 16: 19).

O inestimable and immense goodness! That man placed on earth dominates the heaven! Behold now, at a sign from Peter, the gates of the divine kingdom are opened. He in fact has received the keys of the kingdom of heaven from Christ so that, untying the believers from the chains of sins, he opens the heavens to them. How close and how profound is this remedy! The world finds the kingdom of God near itself, if it turns to Peter. Christ, to take his place, has put Peter in the world as the custodian of the keys of the heavenly kingdom, so that no one will find the climb to heaven difficult.

The right to exercise this power has passed also to the other apostles and the institution of this decree to all the heads of the Church; and yet, not without reason what is ordained to all is entrusted to only one person. To Peter in fact it is entrusted singularly because the example of Peter may be placed in front of all the other shepherds of the Church.

The Lord, in the imminence of the passion, knowing that the courage of the disciples would be shaken, said to Peter: “Simon, behold Satan demanded to have you that he might sift you like wheat: but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and you, when you have returned to me, strengthen your brothers” (Lk. 22: 31-32).

All the apostles had in common the danger of being tempted by fear and equally had need of the help of the divine protection, yet the Lord has a special care for Peter and prays precisely for his faith, as if the condition of the others would remain more secure if the soul of the prince of the apostles was not overcome.

In Peter therefore, the courage of all is fortified and he is given the help of the divine grace, so that the firmness that Christ gives to Peter, through Peter is communicated to the apostles.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Mt. 16: 18-19*

R: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church and the powers of hell will not overcome it: * to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

V: Everything that you will bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and everything that you will loose on earth will be loosed in heaven:

R: to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Or.

Third Reading. *Tratt. 123, 5*

The strength of love overcomes the horror of death.

A reading from the “Treatise on John” of St. Augustine, bishop.

First the Lord asks, and not once, but two and three times, what he already knew, if Peter loved him; and for three times he heard repeated by Peter that he loved him; and for three times he made the same recommendation to Peter, to feed his sheep. Thus to the triple denial that Peter pronounced once, he makes him reply now with the triple declaration of his love, in a way that the tongue may not serve love less than it served fear and it may not seem that the feared death would not have made it say more words than the present Life. Let it be therefore the commitment of love to feed the flock of the Lord, if the denial of the Shepherd has been the indication of fear.

Those who pasture the sheep of Christ with the intention of conditioning them to themselves and without considering them as belonging to Christ, show that they do not love Christ, but themselves, pushed as they are by the greed of glory or of power or of gain, not by the love of obeying, of helping, of pleasing God. These, whom the Apostle rebukes of searching for their own interests and not those of Christ's, must be put on guard by the words which Christ repeats with insistence: Do you love me? Feed my sheep (cfr. Jn. 21: 17), which signifies: If you love me, do not think of feeding yourself, but feed my sheep, and feed them as mine, not as yours; search in them my glory, not your own, my dominion, not your own, my gain, not your own, if you do not want to be numbered among those who belong to the “difficult times”, of those that is who love themselves with everything that is derived from this love of oneself, source of every evil.

Those, therefore, who feed the sheep of Christ, must not love themselves, in order not to feed them as their own but as belonging to Christ. The evil which more than all other which those who feed the sheep of Christ should avoid, is that of searching for their own interests instead of

those of Jesus Christ, enslaving to their lust those for whom his blood was poured out.

He who feeds the sheep of Christ, must grow in love of him to the point that the ardour of the spirit overcomes also that natural fear of death, for which we do not want to die even when we want to live with Christ. But as great as the horror of death may be, he has to make the strength of love overcome it, for the one who, being our life, wanted to bear also death for us.

For the rest if the death implied little or no suffering, it would not have been great as the glory of the martyrs. If the good Shepherd who gave his life for his sheep provokes in them so many martyrs, how much more should they fight for the truth against sin to the point of death, up to the blood, those to whom he entrusted his own sheep to feed that is to form and to guide. In front of the example of the passion of Christ it is not that he who does not see that the shepherds must press all the more closely to the Shepherd imitating him, precisely because already many sheep follow his example: behind him, unique Shepherd, the shepherds also are sheep in one unique flock. He has made every one his sheep, he who accepted to suffer for all, and, so as to suffer for everyone, he made himself lamb.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Sir. 45: 3; Ps. 77: 70, 71*

R: The Lord made him glorious in front of the powerful, he gave him authority over his people, * and he revealed to him his glory.

V: He chose him as his servant, in order to guide his people who were dear to him,

R: and he revealed to him his glory.

Oration. Almighty God, grant that in the midst of the turmoil of the world the Church, which has its foundation on the rock with the profession of faith of the apostle Peter may not be troubled. Through Christ our Lord.

23 February
SAINT POLYCARP
Bishop and Martyr
As a Commemoration

Polycarp was a disciple of the apostles and bishop of Smyrna, as well as a friend of St. Ignatius of Antioch. He went to Rome to confer with Pope Saint Anicetus about the celebration of Passover. He suffered martyrdom about the year 155 by being burnt to death in the city stadium.

Second Reading. 13, 2-15,3

A sacrifice made ready for God.

A reading from the Letter of the Church at Smyrna on the martyrdom of St. Polycarp.

When the pyre was ready, Polycarp removed his outer clothes and loosened his girdle. He even tried to take off his shoes, a thing which he never did before because the faithful used constantly to vie with one another to see who could touch his flesh first. Such was the honour in which he was held, even before his martyrdom, for the saintliness of his life. Immediately the irons with which the pyre was equipped were fastened round him, but when they tried to nail him as well, he said, 'Let me be. He who gives me strength to endure the fire will also grant me to stay on the pyre unflinching even without your making sure of it with nails'. So they did not nail him, but only tied him up.

And so he was bound, putting his arms behind his back, like a noble ram taken from a large flock for a sacrifice, a burnt offering acceptable to and made ready for God. Then he gazed up to heaven and said: 'O Lord God Almighty, Father of your beloved and blessed child Jesus Christ, through whom we have received knowledge of you, God of the angels and the powers and of all creation, God of the whole race of the righteous who live in your sight; I bless you, for you have thought me worthy of this day and hour to share the cup of your Christ, as one of your martyrs, to rise again to eternal life in body and soul in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. May I be taken up today into your presence among the martyrs, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, in the manner you have prepared and have revealed, and have now brought to fulfilment, for you are the God of truth, and in you is no deceit. And so also I praise you for all things; I bless you and glorify you through our eternal high priest in heaven, your beloved child, Jesus Christ, through whom be glory to you and to him and to the Holy Spirit, now and for the ages to come. Amen.

When he had uttered the Amen, and completed his prayer, the men in charge of the fire set light to it.

When a great flame blazed up, we saw a miracle, that is those of us to whom it had been granted to see it and who have been spared to tell the others what happened. For the fire took on the shape of a room, like the sail of a ship filled with the wind, and it made a wall round the body of the martyr. The body in the middle did not appear like burning flesh, but rather it was like bread being baked, or like gold and silver being refined in a furnace. And we perceived a fragrant smell, as though it were the odour of frankincense, or some other precious spices.

Responsorial. *Rev. 2: 8-9, 10*

R: To the angel of the Church at Smyrna write, These are the words of the First and the Last, who was dead and came to life again: I know how hard-pressed you are, and poor- and yet you are rich; * only be faithful till death and I will give you the crown of life.

V: Do not be afraid of the suffering to come. The devil will throw some of you in prison, to put you to the test;

R: only be faithful till death and I will give you the crown of life.