

WEEK 32

SUNDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Ez. 2:8 – 3:11, 15 – 21*

Vocation of Ezekiel.

A reading from the prophet Ezekiel.

The word of the Lord was addressed to me as follows: "But you, son of man, hear what I say to you; be not rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth, and eat what I give you." And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and, lo, a written scroll was in it; and he spread it before me; and it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe.

And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. And he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it." Then I ate it; and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey. And he said to me, "Son of man, go, get you to the house of Israel, and speak with my words to them. For you are not sent to a people of foreign speech and a hard language, but to the house of Israel -- not to many peoples of foreign speech and a hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to such, they would listen to you. But the house of Israel will not listen to you; for they are not willing to listen to me; because all the house of Israel are of a hard forehead and of a stubborn heart. Behold, I have made your face hard against their faces, and your forehead hard against their foreheads. Like adamant harder than flint have I made your forehead; fear them not, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house."

Moreover he said to me, "Son of man, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears. And go, get you to the exiles, to your people, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD'; whether they hear or refuse to hear."

And I came to the exiles at Tel-abib, who dwelt by the river Chebar. And I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days.

And at the end of seven days, the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you

hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you will have saved your life.

Again, if a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning; and you will have saved your life."

Responsorial. *Cfr. Ez. 3: 16-17; 2: 6; 3: 8*

R: I have placed you as a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning for me. * Do not be afraid of them, do not fear.

V: Behold, I have made your face hard against their faces, and your forehead hard against their foreheads.

R: Do not be afraid of them, do not fear.

Second Reading. *Disc. 46, 1 – 2*

We are shepherds, but first Christians.

The beginning of the “Discourse on the shepherds” of St. Augustine, bishop.

This is not the first time, my dear people, you have learned that all our hope is in Christ, and that all real and saving glory for us is in him. For you are part of his flock, the guide and shepherd of Israel. But as there are shepherds who desire to be called shepherds, but refuse to fulfil the office of shepherds, let us recall what is said to them through the prophet. For your part, listen with attention; I must listen with fear and trembling.

‘The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy even to the shepherds”’ (Ez. 34: 1-2). We have just heard this lesson as it was being read; hence I have decided to

speak to you, good people. He himself will help me to speak the truth, if I do not speak just what is my own. For if I speak my own opinions, I shall be a shepherd feeding myself not my sheep; but if what I say is his, it is he who feeds you, no matter who is speaking. ‘Thus says the Lord God, Ho, shepherds of Israel, who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?’ (Ez. 34: 2). That is, shepherds feed not themselves but their sheep. This is the first reason why those shepherds are accused, that they feed themselves not the sheep. Who are those who feed themselves? Those of whom the Apostle says: “All seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 2: 21).

The Lord, as he thought fit, and not according to my own merits, appointed me to this position, for which the account to be rendered is fraught with danger; and I exhibit two clearly distinct features: one, that I am a Christian; two, that I am appointed overseer of others. The fact that I am a Christian is for my benefit; that I am appointed an overseer is for yours. My own good is to be considered in my being Christian, in my being an overseer, only yours.

There are many who, as Christians and not leaders, attain to God, travelling maybe an easier road, and the more speedily, perhaps, the lighter the load they carry. But I, besides being a Christian, and for this having to render an account of my life, am a leader also, and for this shall render to God an account of my ministry.

Responsorial. *Ps. 22: 1-2,3*

R: The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. * Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose.

V: He guides me along the right path; he is true to his name.

R: Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *1 Mac. 1:1 – 24 (vulg. 1: 1 – 25)*

Alexander the Macedonian and his descendants.

A reading from the first book of Maccabees.

After Alexander son of Philip, the Macedonian, who came from the land of Kittim, had defeated Darius, king of the Persians and the Medes, he succeeded him as king. (He had previously become king of Greece.) He fought many battles, conquered strongholds, and put to death the kings of the earth. He advanced to the ends of the earth, and plundered many nations. When the earth became quiet before him, he was exalted, and his heart was lifted up. He gathered a very strong army and ruled over countries, nations, and princes, and they became tributary to him. After this he fell sick and perceived that he was dying. So he summoned his most honoured officers, who had been brought up with him from youth, and divided his kingdom among them while he was still alive. And after Alexander had reigned twelve years, he died. Then his officers began to rule, each in his own place. They all put on crowns after his death, and so did their sons after them for many years; and they caused many evils on the earth.

From them came forth a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of Antiochus the king; he had been a hostage in Rome. He began to reign in the one hundred and thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks. In those days lawless men came forth from Israel, and misled many, saying, "Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles round about us, for since we separated from them many evils have come upon us." This proposal pleased them, and some of the people eagerly went to the king. He authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles. So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.

When Antiochus saw that his kingdom was established, he determined to become king of the land of Egypt, that he might reign over both kingdoms. So he invaded Egypt with a strong force, with chariots and elephants and cavalry and with a large fleet. He engaged Ptolemy king of Egypt in battle, and Ptolemy turned and fled before him, and many were wounded and fell. And they captured the fortified cities in the land of Egypt, and he plundered the land of Egypt. After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred and forty-third year. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lamp stand for the light, and all its utensils. He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the

cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures which he found. Taking them all, he departed to his own land. He committed deeds of murder, and spoke with great arrogance.

Responsorial. *Cfr. 2 Macc. 7: 33; Heb. 12: 11*

R: For our punishment and correction the living God for a brief time was angry. * Soon he will be reconciled with us his servants.

V: Every correction, in that moment, seems to cause sadness, but then it brings a fruit of peace and justice.

R: Soon he will be reconciled with us his servants.

Second Reading. *N. 78*

Promote peace.

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

Peace is not merely the absence of war; nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies; nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called an enterprise of justice. Peace results from that order structured into human society by its divine Founder, and actualised by men as they thirst after ever-greater justice. The common good of humanity finds its ultimate meaning in the eternal law. But since the concrete demands of this common good are constantly changing as time goes on, peace is never attained once and for all, but must be built up ceaselessly. Moreover, since the human will is unsteady and wounded by sin, the achievement of peace requires a constant mastering of passions and the vigilance of lawful authority.

But this is not enough. This peace on earth cannot be obtained unless personal well being is safeguarded and men freely and trustingly share with one another the riches of their inner spirits and their talents. A firm determination to respect other men and peoples and their dignity, as well as the studied practice of brotherhood are absolutely necessary for the establishment of peace. Hence peace is likewise the fruit of love, which goes beyond what justice can provide.

That earthly peace which arises from love of neighbour symbolizes and results from the peace of Christ which radiates from God the Father. For by the cross the incarnate Son, the prince of peace reconciled all men with God. By thus restoring all men to the unity of one people and one body, He slew hatred in His own flesh; and, after being lifted on high by His resurrection, He poured forth the spirit of love into the hearts of men.

For this reason, all Christians are urgently summoned to do in love what the truth requires, and to join with all true peacemakers in pleading for peace and bringing it about.

Motivated by this same spirit, we cannot fail to praise those who renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their rights and who resort to methods of defence which are otherwise available to weaker parties too, provided this can be done without injury to the rights and duties of others or of the community itself.

Responsorial. *Cfr. 1 Chr. 29:1; 2 Macc. 1: 24*

R: Yours, Lord, is the power, yours is the Kingdom; you arise as sovereign over everything: * give your peace in our times.

V: God, creator of everything, tremendous and powerful, just and merciful,

R: Give your peace in our times.

YEAR A

Gospel. *Mt. 25: 1 – 13*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the

marriage feast; and the door was shut. Afterward the other maidens came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Third Reading. *Disc. 40: 46*

Let us go to meet Christ the bridegroom with the shining lamps of faith.

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

The stop that you made after baptism in front of the great sanctuary symbolizes the glory of the future life. The singing of the psalms with which you were received is a prelude of that choir. The lamps that you lit are the image of that procession of lights, with which like luminous virgin souls not drowsy because of laziness and indolence, we will go to meet Christ the bridegroom with the shining lamps of faith, so that he whom we await will not present himself without our knowing, and we, without a supply of oil and of good works, may not be excluded from the wedding hall.

I see in fact with the mind the sad and miserable event. He will present himself, when the cry which will makes us move to meet him will resound. Then all the wise souls, with the lit lamps and with an overabundant provision will run to meet him; the others instead will be in great confusion, asking untimely for oil from those who have just sufficient for themselves. He will enter in a hurry and the wise virgins will enter with him; those foolish ones instead, who had waited to prepare the lamps when it was already time to enter, will be left out and they will lament loudly, understanding too late what they have lost because of their negligence and indolence. In fact even if they ask and beg, they will not be granted entrance anymore into the wedding hall, from which they have been left out exactly because of their own fault.

And neither do you want to be similar to those who refused to participate in the wedding prepared by the good father for the excellent bridegroom, either because they had just got married, or for the field just bought, or for the pair of oxen that they had acquired: depriving themselves in this way of the immense goods for things of little value. There will be no place then for the proud and the arrogant, or for the lazy and the indolent; and not even for the one who puts on an indecorous and unworthy wedding

garment, even if in this life he had been esteemed worthy of that honour and he had undeservedly inserted himself amongst the others, deceiving himself with an illusory hope.

And then? When we will have entered, the Bridegroom knows well what he will reveal and how he will live with the souls that have entered with him. I think he will dwell with them, revealing to them the greatest and sacred mysteries. Oh, we will be given, to us who follow and to you who listen, the gift of being made participants, in Christ our Lord, to whom be glory and empire forever and ever. Amen.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Mt. 25: 6-7*

R: Wise virgins, prepare your lamps. * Behold the bridegroom, go out to meet him.

V: Then all those virgins awoke and prepared their lamps.

R: Behold the bridegroom, go out to meet him.

YEAR B

Gospel. *Mk. 12: 38 – 44*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Mark.

And in his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to go about in long robes, and to have salutations in the market places and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretence make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living."

Third Reading. *Lett. 34: 2 – 4*

Let us give to the Lord present in the person of every poor man.
A reading from the “Letters” of St. Paolino from Nola, bishop.

“What could you ever possess – says the Apostle – that you have not received?” (1 Cor. 4: 7). And therefore, dearly beloved, let us not be mean with that which we have as if it was ours, but let us put it to good use as if it had been given to us on loan. We have been entrusted in fact with the administration and the temporal use of the common goods, not the eternal possession of a private thing. If on the earth you consider it yours only temporally, you will be able to enjoy it eternally in heaven. Remember those who, in the gospel, had received the talents from the Lord and what the father of the family, on his return, had given to each one as a reward: then you will realize how much more advantageous it is to put on the table of the Lord the money which you want to bear fruit, rather than to conserve it intact with a sterile faith; and you will know that that money conserved jealously without any interest for the master, was only a great waste, useless to the servant and reason of burden to his punishment.

Let us remember also that widow, who forgetting herself for love of the poor poured out all that she had to live, thinking only of the future, as the judge himself declared. The others in fact – said the Lord – have given of their superfluous; she instead, perhaps more needy than many poor people, so much so that two small coins was all her possessions, but generous of soul more than all the rich because she aspired uniquely for the riches of the eternal reward, and avid only, for herself, for the heavenly treasures, renounced to all the goods which come from the earth and to the earth return.

She offered all that she had in order to possess the invisible goods. She put that which is corruptible in order to gain that which is immortal. That poor woman did not despise the norms established by God with regard to the conquest of the future reward; therefore the legislator himself did not forget her, on the contrary the judge of the world anticipated her sentence and announced in advance in the gospel that she would be crowned on the day of judgement.

Let us therefore make God a debtor with his own gifts. We possess nothing that he has not given us; we would not even exist without a gesture of his will. And above all, how can we think that we have something of our own, we who do not belong to ourselves having a particular obligation

towards God, not only because we have been created by him, but also redeemed by him?

Let us rejoice above all, because we have been bought back at a dear price (cfr. 1 Cor. 6: 20) with the blood of the Lord himself, therefore we have ceased to be vile persons like slaves; in fact to want to be independent from the divine law is a freedom which is the most despicable of slaveries.

One who is free in this manner is a slave of sin and a prisoner of death.

Let us therefore give back to the Lord his gifts: let us give to him, who receives in the person of every poor man; let us give with joy, I repeat, in order to receive from him in exultation, as he himself has said (cfr. Ps. 125: 5).

Responsorial. *Lk. 16: 9; Tob. 4: 10*

R: I tell you: * Get for yourselves friends with the unjust riches, so that when it fails, they will welcome you into the eternal dwellings.

V: Almsgiving frees from death and saves from going into darkness.

R: Get for yourselves friends with the unjust riches, so that when it fails, they will welcome you into the eternal dwellings.

YEAR C

Gospel. *Lk. 20: 27 – 38*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

There came to him some Sadducees, those who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the wife and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and died without children; and the second and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. Afterward the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife." And Jesus said to

them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are accounted worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die any more, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to him."

Third Reading. *Book 4, 5, 1-5, 4*

I am the resurrection and the life.

A reading from the treatise "Against the heresies" of St. Irenaeus, bishop.

The Lord our master answering the Sadducees who denied the resurrection and besides this offended God speaking ill of the law, confirmed the reality of the resurrection and gave witness to God saying: "You deceive yourselves not knowing either the Scriptures or the power of God. With regard then to the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what has been said by God: I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob?" (Mt. 22: 29, 31-32). And he adds: "God is not God of the dead, but of the living, because all live for him" (Lk. 20: 38). With these words he shows that he who had spoken to Moses from the burning bush declaring himself to be the God of the fathers, is the God of the living.

Who is the God of the living, if not the unique God above whom there is no other God? The prophet Daniel announced him when Cyrus king of the Persians said to him: "Why do you not worship Bel?" (Dan. 14: 4); and Daniel: "I worship the Lord my God, because he is the God of the living" (Dan. 14: 23). He who was worshipped by the prophets as living God is the God of the living, and so also is his Word, who spoke to Moses, who reproached the Sadducees, gave the resurrection and manifested to those who were blind two fundamental truths: the resurrection and the life of God. If therefore he is not the God of the dead but of the living, then those fathers of whom he proclaimed himself the Lord certainly live in him and are not dead, "because they are children of the resurrection" (Lk. 20: 36).

The Lord Jesus himself is the resurrection, as he himself affirmed: "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn. 11: 25). And the fathers are his sons,

because the prophet said: “To your fathers will succeed your sons” (Ps. 44: 17). Christ himself therefore, together with the Father, is the God of the living, he spoke to Moses, he manifested himself to the fathers. This he taught to the Jews when he said: “Abraham, your father, rejoiced in the hope of seeing my day: he saw it and was glad” (Jn. 8: 56). How is it possible? Why on earth? “Abraham had faith in God and this was credited to him as justice” (Rm. 4: 3).

He believed that the creator of heaven and earth is the unique God and other than this that he would make his descendants like the stars of heaven; exactly what Paul says: “Like stars in the world” (Phil 2: 15). Paul therefore, having abandoned his land and his people, followed the Word of God wandering and stopping with him: and the other apostles also, descendants of Abraham, abandoning the boat and the father, followed the Word of God.

We also therefore, receiving the same faith professed by Abraham, follow Christ carrying the cross as Isaac carried the wood. In Abraham in fact, man learnt to follow the Word of God. Abraham, obeying to the word of God in accordance with his faith, with a docile heart accepted to offer to him his unique beloved son in sacrifice, so that God would be pleased to offer his beloved only-begotten Son in sacrifice in favour of all his descendants, that is for our salvation. Therefore Abraham, being a prophet, saw in spirit the time of the coming of the Lord and his passion through which he and all the believers would be saved, and for this he rejoiced with immense joy.

Responsorial. *Hos. 6: 2; 2 Cor. 4: 14*

R: The Lord will give us back life after two days and on the third he will make us rise again* and we will live in his presence.

V: Animated by that same spirit of faith, let us believe that he who has resurrected the Lord Jesus, will resurrect us also with Jesus.

R: And we will live in his presence.

MONDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. Ez. 5: 1 – 17

A symbolical action represents the destruction of Jerusalem.

A reading from the prophet Ezekiel.

The word of the Lord was addressed to me as follows: "And you, O son of man, take a sharp sword; use it as a barber's razor and pass it over your head and your beard; then take balances for weighing, and divide the hair.

A third part you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are completed; and a third part you shall take and strike with the sword round about the city; and a third part you shall scatter to the wind, and I will unsheathe the sword after them. And you shall take from these a small number, and bind them in the skirts of your robe. And of these again you shall take some, and cast them into the fire, and burn them in the fire; from there a fire will come forth into all the house of Israel. Thus says the Lord GOD: This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the centre of the nations, with countries round about her.

And she has wickedly rebelled against my ordinances more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries round about her, by rejecting my ordinances and not walking in my statutes. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you are more turbulent than the nations that are round about you, and have not walked in my statutes or kept my ordinances, but have acted according to the ordinances of the nations that are round about you; therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, even I, am against you; and I will execute judgments in the midst of you in the sight of the nations.

And because of all your abominations I will do with you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again. Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in the midst of you, and sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survive I will scatter to all the winds. Wherefore, as I live, says the Lord GOD, surely, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will cut you down; my eye will not spare, and I will have no pity.

A third part of you shall die of pestilence and be consumed with famine in the midst of you; a third part shall fall by the sword round about you; and a third part I will scatter to all the winds and will unsheathe the sword after them. "Thus shall my anger spend itself, and I will vent my fury upon them and satisfy myself; and they shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken in my jealousy, when I spend my fury upon them.

Moreover I will make you a desolation and an object of reproach among the nations round about you and in the sight of all that pass by. You shall be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror, to the nations round about you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and fury, and with furious chastisements -- I, the LORD, have spoken -- when I loose against you my deadly arrows of famine, arrows for destruction, which I will loose to destroy you, and when I bring more and more famine upon you, and break your staff of bread.

I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will rob you of your children; pestilence and blood shall pass through you; and I will bring the sword upon you. I, the LORD, have spoken."

Responsorial. *Lk. 13: 34; Ez. 5: 14*

R: Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets, * how many times I have longed to gather your children, and you did not want!

V: I will make you a desolation and an object of reproach among the nations round about you and in the sight of all that pass by.

R: How many times I have longed to gather your children, and you did not want!

Second Reading. *Disc. 46, 3 – 4*

The shepherds who feed themselves.

A reading from the “Discourse on the shepherds” of St. Augustine, bishop.

So let us see how the Word of God, that flatters no one, addresses the shepherds who are feeding themselves not the sheep. “You take the milk, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed my sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the crippled you have not bound up, the strayed you have not

brought back, the lost you have not sought; any strong one you have killed; and my sheep are scattered because there is no shepherd” (Ez. 34: 3-5).

Against the shepherds who feed themselves and not the sheep, there is stated what they are fond of, what they neglect. What then are they fond of? “You take the milk and clothe yourselves with the wool”. That is the reason why the apostle says: “Who plants a vineyard and does not take from its fruits? Who pastures a flock and does not take some of its milk?” (1 Cor. 9: 7) We find, then, that the milk of the flock is everything contributed by the people of God to their leaders for their temporal livelihood. That was the origin of the apostle’s statement when he said what I have mentioned.

Although the apostle chose to be supported by his own hands, and did not look for milk from his sheep, he nevertheless claimed that he had the right to take the milk, and that the Lord had ordained that those who preach the gospel should live by the gospel (cfr 1 Cor. 9: 14). He says that others, his fellow apostles, had used this right, one given not usurped. He did more in not accepting what was his due. He, then, gave up his due, yet the other did not exact something not his due. Paul did more. Perhaps he was pictured in the Samaritan who, when he took the wounded man to the inn said: “If you require anything more, I will repay you when I return” (Lk. 10: 35).

What more should I say about those who do not need the flock’s milk? They are kinder, or rather they are more generous in fulfilling their duty of kindness. They act up to their capabilities. They should be given praise while the others should not be blamed. The apostle himself did not demand what was his by gift. However, he wanted his sheep to be productive, not sterile and dry.

Responsorial. *Ez. 34: 15-16*

R: I myself will pasture my sheep, I myself will show them where to rest – it is the Lord who speaks. * I shall look for the lost sheep and bring back the stray.

V: I shall make the weak strong and I shall watch over the strong and healthy.

R: I shall look for the lost sheep and bring back the stray.

First Reading. *1 Mac. 1: 41 – 64(vulg. 1: 43 – 67)*
The persecution of Antiochus.

A reading from the first book of Maccabees.

Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that each should give up his customs. All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath.

And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane Sabbaths and feasts, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals, and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they should forget the law and change all the ordinances. "And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die." In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. And he appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the cities of Judah to offer sacrifice, city by city. Many of the people, every one who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land; they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had. Now on the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred and forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege upon the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding cities of Judah, and burned incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. The books of the law which they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. Where the book of the covenant was found in the possession of any one, or if any one adhered to the law, the decree of the king condemned him to death. They kept using violence against Israel, against those found month after month in the cities. And on the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar, which was upon the altar of burnt offering. According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks. But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die. And very great wrath came upon Israel.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Dan. 9: 18; Act. 4: 29*

R: Open your eyes and look at our tribulations: the nations have surrounded us. * Stretch out your arm, come to liberate us.

V: And now turn your gaze on their threats and allow your servants to announce your word with complete frankness.

R: Stretch out your arm, come to liberate us.

Second Reading. *Nm. 82 – 83*

The mind needs to be formed to the new sentiments of peace.

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

In the meantime, efforts which have already been made and are still underway to eliminate the danger of war are not to be underrated. On the contrary, support should be given to the good will of the very many leaders who work hard to do away with war, which they abominate. These men, although burdened by the extremely weighty preoccupations of their high office, are nonetheless moved by the very grave peacemaking task to which they are bound, even if they cannot ignore the complexity of matters as they stand. We should fervently ask God to give these men the strength to go forward perseveringly and to follow through courageously on this work of building peace with vigour. It is a work of supreme love for mankind. Today it certainly demands that they extend their thoughts and their spirit beyond the confines of their own nation, that they put aside national selfishness and ambition to dominate other nations, and that they nourish a profound reverence for the whole of humanity, which is already making its way so laboriously toward greater unity.

The problems of peace and of disarmament have already been the subject of extensive, strenuous and constant examination. Together with international meetings dealing with these problems, such studies should be regarded as the first steps toward solving these serious questions, and should be promoted with even greater urgency by way of yielding concrete results in the future.

Nevertheless, men should take heed not to entrust themselves only to the efforts of some, while not caring about their own attitudes. For government officials who must at one and the same time guarantee the good of their own people and promote the universal good are very greatly dependent on public opinion and feeling. It does them no good to work for peace as long as feelings of hostility, contempt and distrust, as well as racial hatred and unbending ideologies, continue to divide men and place them in opposing camps. Consequently there is above all a pressing need for a renewed education of attitudes and for new inspiration in public opinion. Those who are dedicated to the work of education, particularly of the young, or who mould public opinion, should consider it their most weighty task to instruct all in fresh sentiments of peace. Indeed, we all need a change of heart as we regard the entire world and those tasks which we can perform in unison for the betterment of our race.

But we should not let false hope deceive us. For unless enmities and hatred are put away and firm, honest agreements concerning world peace are reached in the future, humanity, which already is in the middle of a grave crisis, even though it is endowed with remarkable knowledge, will perhaps be brought to that dismal hour in which it will experience no peace other than the dreadful peace of death. But, while we say this, the Church of Christ, present in the midst of the anxiety of this age, does not cease to hope most firmly. She intends to propose to our age over and over again, in season and out of season, this apostolic message: "Behold, now is the acceptable time for a change of heart; behold! now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor. 6: 2)

In order to build up peace above all the causes of discord among men, especially injustice, which foment wars must be rooted out. Not a few of these causes come from excessive economic inequalities and from putting off the steps needed to remedy them. Other causes of discord, however, have their source in the desire to dominate and in contempt for persons. And, if we look for deeper causes, we find them in human envy, distrust, pride, and other egotistical passions. Man cannot bear so many ruptures in the harmony of things. Consequently, the world is constantly beset by strife and violence between men, even when no war is being waged. Besides, since these same evils are present in the relations between various nations as well, in order to overcome or forestall them and to keep violence once unleashed within limits it is absolutely necessary for countries to cooperate

more advantageously and more closely together and to organize together international bodies and to work tirelessly for the creation of organizations which will foster peace.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Sir. 23: 2; Is. 49: 8, 37, 35; Ps. 33: 15*

R: I have placed in your heart the discipline of wisdom, says the Lord; I have listened to you: * I will protect you and I will give you peace for all the days of your life.

V: Stay far away from evil and do good, search for peace and follow it:

R: I will protect you and I will give you peace for all the days of your life.

Gospel. *Lk. 17: 1 – 6*

If seven times a day he says to you: I repent, you will forgive him.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come; but woe to him by whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.

Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

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.

TUESDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Ez. 8: 1 – 6, 16 – 9:11*

Judgement against sinful Jerusalem.

A reading from the prophet Ezekiel.

In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house, with the elders of Judah sitting before me, the hand of the Lord GOD fell there upon me. Then I beheld, and, lo, a form that had the appearance of a man; below what appeared to be his loins it was fire, and above his loins it was like the appearance of brightness, like gleaming bronze.

He put forth the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the gateway of the inner court that faces north, where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy.

And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I saw in the plain. Then he said to me, "Son of man, lift up your eyes now in the direction of the north." So I lifted up my eyes toward the north, and behold, north of the altar gate, in the entrance, was this image of jealousy. And he said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me far from my sanctuary? But you will see still greater abominations."

And he brought me into the inner court of the house of the LORD; and behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs to the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east, worshiping the sun toward the east. Then he said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it too slight a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they commit here, that they should fill the land with violence, and provoke me further to anger? Lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore I will deal in wrath; my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity; and though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them."

Then he cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying, "Draw near, you executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand." And lo, six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, every man with his weapon for slaughter in his hand, and with them was a man clothed in linen, with a writing case at his side. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar. Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherubim on which it rested to the threshold of the house; and he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his side. And the LORD said to him, "Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it." And to the others he said in my hearing, "Pass through the city after him, and smite; your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity; slay old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one upon whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were before the house. Then he said to them, "Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain. Go forth." So they went forth, and smote in the city. And while they were smiting, and I was left alone, I fell upon my face, and cried, "Ah Lord GOD! will you destroy all that remains of Israel in the outpouring of your wrath upon Jerusalem?"

Then he said to me, "The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of blood, and the city full of injustice; for they say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see.' As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity, but I will requite their deeds upon their heads." And lo, the man clothed in linen, with the writing case at his side, brought back word, saying, "I have done as you did command me."

Responsorial. *Cfr. Mt. 24: 15, 21, 22; Ap. 7: 3*

R: When you see the desolation of the holy place, there will be a great tribulation. * No living being will be able to save himself, but because of the elect those days will be cut short.

V: Do not harm the land or the sea, until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.

R: No living being will be able to save himself, but because of the elect those days will be cut short.

Second Reading. *Disc. 46, 4 – 5*

The example of Paul.

A reading from the “Discourse on the shepherds” of St. Augustine, bishop.

Once when Paul was in great need, in prison for professing the truth, he was sent by the brothers the means to meet his needs. He wrote to thank them in these words: “It was kind of you to share my trouble. I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I have learned the secret of facing plenty and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me. Yet you have done well to send help for my needs” (Phil. 4: 10-12).

But to show what he looked for in their benefactions, and to prevent there being among them those who feed themselves not the sheep, he does not so much rejoice that his own needs are provided for, as congratulate them on their generosity. What, then, was he looking for? “Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit” (Phil 4: 17). Not that I should be satiated, but that you should not remain empty.

Those then, who cannot do as Paul did, namely support themselves by their own manual labour, may take part of the sheep’s milk, and supply their own needs, without neglecting the needs of the sheep. They should not just seek their own advantage, seeming to proclaim the gospel in order to meet their own wants, but should provide the light of the word of truth to give light to men. For they are like lights, as is said: “Let your loins be girt and your lamps burning” (Lk. 2: 35); and, “no one after lighting a lamp puts it under a bushel, but on a stand to give light to all who are in the house: let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt. 5: 15-16).

If you had a lamp lit in your house, would you not keep it fed with oil, to stop it going out? Now if the lamp after being filled with the oil did not give light, it would not be fit to be put on the stand, but only to be broken without further ado. So a livelihood must be taken as a gift only from necessity, but offered out of charity. Not as though the gospel were a thing for sale, so that its price was what its preachers take for their living. If they sell it in that way, they are selling cheap a thing of great value. Let them receive the support they need from the people; the reward of their ministry from the Lord: the people cannot recompense those who serve them in the

gospel of love. These look for their reward only from the source whence the people look for salvation.

But why are those shepherds rebuked, what is the reason why they are accused? Because when taking the milk and clothing themselves with the wool, they were fleecing the sheep. So they were seeking only their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

Responsorial. *2 Cor. 12: 14-15; Phil. 2: 17*

R: It is you I want, not your possessions. Children are not expected to make provision for their parents, but parents for children; * I am perfectly willing to spend what I have, and to be expended, in the interests of your souls.

V: If my lifeblood is to crown that sacrifice which is the offering up of your faith, I am glad of it;

R: I am perfectly willing to spend what I have, and to be expended, in the interests of your souls.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *2 Mac. 6:12 – 31*

The martyrdom of Eleazar.

A reading from the second book of Maccabees.

Now I urge those who read this book not to be depressed by such calamities, but to recognize that these punishments were designed not to destroy but to discipline our people. In fact, not to let the impious alone for long, but to punish them immediately, is a sign of great kindness. For in the case of the other nations the Lord waits patiently to punish them until they have reached the full measure of their sins; but he does not deal in this way with us, in order that he may not take vengeance on us afterward when our sins have reached their height. Therefore he never withdraws his mercy from us. Though he disciplines us with calamities, he does not forsake his own people. Let what we have said serve as a reminder; we must go on briefly with the story.

Eleazar, one of the scribes in high position, a man now advanced in age and of noble presence, was being forced to open his mouth to eat swine's flesh. But he, welcoming death with honour rather than life with pollution,

went up to the rack of his own accord, spitting out the flesh, as men ought to do who have the courage to refuse things that it is not right to taste, even for the natural love of life.

Those who were in charge of that unlawful sacrifice took the man aside, because of their long acquaintance with him, and privately urged him to bring meat of his own providing, proper for him to use, and pretend that he was eating the flesh of the sacrificial meal which had been commanded by the king, so that by doing this he might be saved from death, and be treated kindly on account of his old friendship with them.

But making a high resolve, worthy of his years and the dignity of his old age and the grey hairs which he had reached with distinction and his excellent life even from childhood, and moreover according to the holy God-given law, he declared himself quickly, telling them to send him to Hades. "Such pretence is not worthy of our time of life," he said, "lest many of the young should suppose that Eleazar in his ninetieth year has gone over to an alien religion, and through my pretence, for the sake of living a brief moment longer, they should be led astray because of me, while I defile and disgrace my old age.

For even if for the present I should avoid the punishment of men, yet whether I live or die I shall not escape the hands of the Almighty. Therefore, by manfully giving up my life now, I will show myself worthy of my old age and leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws." When he had said this, he went at once to the rack.

And those who a little before had acted toward him with good will now changed to ill will, because the words he had uttered were in their opinion sheer madness. When he was about to die under the blows, he groaned aloud and said: "It is clear to the Lord in his holy knowledge that, though I might have been saved from death, I am enduring terrible sufferings in my body under this beating, but in my soul I am glad to suffer these things because I fear him." So in this way he died, leaving in his death an example of nobility and a memorial of courage, not only to the young but to the great body of his nation.

Responsorial. *Cfr. 2 Macc. 6: 30, 26*

R: Eleazar said amidst groans: Lord, you know well that, being able to flee from death, I suffer atrocious pains in the body. * But in the soul I bear all

this voluntarily for fear of you.

V: In fact even if now I was to avoid the punishment of men, yet whether I live or die I shall not escape the hands of the Almighty.

R: But in the soul I bear all this voluntarily for fear of you.

Second Reading. *Lett. 9, 2 – 5*

Many are the sufferings of the just man.

A reading from the “Letters” of the blessed Ammonio, hermit.

I who am your father, sustain great temptations both open as well as secret, and I show myself strong in hope and in prayer; and my Lord frees me. Now you also, dearest, who have received the benefits of God, accept the temptations also as long as you have not overcome them; then only will you receive the overabundant measure added to your perfection and you will be given that great joy from heaven which now you ignore.

What therefore does it mean to overcome the temptations, and what is their remedy? First of all it is this: do not ever lose heart, but with all your heart implore God with faith and in every thing have patience: then the temptations will go away. Thus in fact was Abraham tempted and he came out like a victorious athlete. For this it was written: “Many are the trials of the just man, but the Lord frees him from them all” (Ps. 33: 20). And James also in his letter, says: “Let whoever among you who is in pain, pray” (Jm. 5: 13). Do you see clearly how all the just men, when they had run into temptations, have cried to God.

It is also written: “God is faithful and will not permit you to be tempted beyond your strength” (1 Cor. 10: 13). And now it is God who acts in you in order to purify your hearts. If he was not to love you he would not send you temptations. In fact it is written: “The Lord corrects the one whom he loves and he whips whomever he recognizes as his son” (Heb. 12: 6). Therefore the faithful need temptations. All those who have not had an experience of temptations are not saints: they may have the appearance, but they do not possess virtue. For this father Antonio said to us: “The man who is without temptations cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven”. And analogously also Peter in his letter wrote: “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have suffered grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire- may be proved genuine” (1 Pet. 1: 6-7).

Know therefore that for this reason the Holy Spirit began by pouring out his joy intervening in the souls of those who have pure hearts. Later on, after having given happiness and sweetness, the Spirit went away from them and he abandoned them. And here is the sign: he behaves in this way with the soul which searches for him and which fears the Lord; he goes away, he retreats and abandons every man as long as it is known whether he searches for God or not. There are in fact those who once abandoned and put aside, remain seated, oppressed by the tediousness and they remain motionless in it. In fact they do not pray to God to free them from that punishment and they do not ask him to give back to them that joy and sweetness that they had experienced before; therefore, because of their own negligent will, they make themselves strangers to the sweetness of God. For this reason they become carnal and possess only the appearance, not the reality of virtue. They have eyes that are blinded and ignore the works of God.

If however they have noticed the punishment as unusual and far away from the joy of before, they will pray to God crying and fasting; then God in his mercy, seeing their sincerity and that they entreat him with all the heart denying totally their own will, gives them a greater joy than before and strengthens them all the more. This is his behaviour with every soul that searches for God.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Gen. 47: 25 Vulg; Ps. 80: 4*

R: In your hand, Lord, is our salvation; your mercy covers us * and we will serve you always full of trust.

V: Raise us up Lord, God of hosts, let your face shine on us and we will be saved.

R: And we will serve you always full of trust.

Gospel. *Lk. 17: 7 – 10*

We are useless servants. We have done what we had to do.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

"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.'"

WEDNESDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Ez. 10:18 – 22; 11: 14 – 25*

The glory of the Lord abandons the wicked city.

A reading from the prophet Ezekiel.

Then the glory of the LORD went forth from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight as they went forth, with the wheels beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the house of the LORD; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. These were the living creatures that I saw underneath the God of Israel by the river Chebar; and I knew that they were cherubim. Each had four faces, and each four wings, and underneath their wings the semblance of human hands. And as for the likeness of their faces, they were the very faces whose appearance I had seen by the river Chebar. They went every one straight forward.

And the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, your brethren, even your brethren, your fellow exiles, the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those of whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, 'They have gone far from the LORD; to us this land is given for a possession.' Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone.' Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: I will gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.' And when they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, I will requite their deeds upon their own heads, says the Lord GOD."

Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. And the glory of the

LORD went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city. And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me in the vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to the exiles. Then the vision that I had seen went up from me. And I told the exiles all the things that the LORD had showed me.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Ez. 10: 4, 18; Mt. 23: 27, 38*

R: The temple was filled by the cloud and the courtyard by the splendour of the glory of the Lord. * The glory of the Lord came out from the threshold of the temple.

V: Jerusalem, how many times I have wanted to gather your children, and you did not want! Behold: your house will be left deserted.

R: The glory of the Lord came out from the threshold of the temple.

Second Reading. *Disc. 46, 6 – 7*

Let everyone seek not what is his own but what is Jesus Christ's.

A reading from the “Discourse on the shepherds” of St. Augustine, bishop.

As I have explained what it means to consume the milk, let us enquire what it means to clothe oneself with the wool. The one who provides milk is providing livelihood; he who provides wool is giving honour. Those are the two things which the men are seeking who feed themselves not the sheep: the benefit of having needs supplied, and the favour of honour and glory.

Clothing is well understood to mean honour, because it covers nakedness. Every man is weak. And what is any man placed over you, except just what you are? He has a body, he is mortal; he eats, sleeps, rises; he is born and he will die. If you should consider what he is in himself, he is a human being. But by giving him extra honour, you as it were make up for his shortcomings.

See what sort of clothing the same Paul had received from the good people of God, when he said: “You received me as an angel of God. I bear you witness, if it were possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me” (Gal. 4: 14, 15). But after so great honour had been shown him, did he, because of the honour shown him, spare those who had gone astray - for fear the honour might be denied, and less praise given him

when he accused them? If he had done so, he would have been among those who feed themselves not the sheep. He could say to himself: "What does it matter to me? Let everyone do as he likes; my livelihood is safe, my honour is safe: milk and wool – I have enough; let everyone make his own way". So: all your goods are safe, are they, if everyone goes his own way? I refuse to make you a leader; I make you just one of the people: "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it" (1 Cor. 12: 26).

When the apostle, then, is recalling how they had behaved towards him, not to seem oblivious of the honour they had paid him, he witnesses that they received him as an angel of God, that if possible they would be willing to pluck out their own eyes and give them to him. Yet all the same he goes to the sickly diseased sheep, to cut out its gangrene, not to spare the putrid flesh. "So", he says, "did I become your enemy by preaching the truth?" (Gal. 4: 16). Notice, he both took some of the sheep's milk, as I mentioned a little earlier, and was clothed with their wool, yet he did not neglect the sheep. He did not seek his own interests but those of Jesus Christ.

Responsorial. *Sir. 32: 1-2; Mk. 9: 34*

R: If they make you master of the feast, do not give yourself airs; * bear yourself as an equal, and make good provision for the guests.

V: Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all:

R: bear yourself as an equal and make good provision for the guests.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *2 Mac. 7: 1 – 19*

The martyrdom of the seven brothers.

A reading from the second book of Maccabees.

It happened also that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips and cords, to partake of unlawful swine's flesh. One of them, acting as their spokesman, said, "What do you intend to ask and learn from us? For we are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our fathers." The king fell into a rage, and

gave orders that pans and caldrons be heated. These were heated immediately, and he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out and that they scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of the brothers and the mother looked on.

When he was utterly helpless, the king ordered them to take him to the fire, still breathing, and to fry him in a pan. The smoke from the pan spread widely, but the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, saying, "The Lord God is watching over us and in truth has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song which bore witness against the people to their faces, when he said, 'And he will have compassion on his servants.'"

After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport. They tore off the skin of his head with the hair, and asked him, "Will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb?" He replied in the language of his fathers, and said to them, "No." Therefore he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done. And when he was at his last breath, he said, "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws."

After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, and said nobly, "I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again." As a result the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man's spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing.

When he too had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way. And when he was near death, he said, "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of men and to cherish the hope that God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!"

Next they brought forward the fifth and maltreated him.

But he looked at the king, and said, "Because you have authority among men, mortal though you are, you do what you please. But do not think that God has forsaken our people. Keep on, and see how his mighty power will torture you and your descendants!"

After him they brought forward the sixth. And when he was about to die, he said, "Do not deceive yourself in vain. For we are suffering these things on our own account, because of our sins against our own God.

Therefore astounding things have happened. But do not think that you will go unpunished for having tried to fight against God!"

Responsorial. *Cfr. Wis. 3: 6, 9*

R: The Lord has tested his elect like gold in the crucible and like a holocaust he has been pleased with them; in his time they will be consoled.

* Because grace and mercy are reserved for God's elect.

V: All those who trust in him will understand the truth; those who are faithful to him will live with him in love.

R: Because grace and mercy are reserved for God's elect.

Second Reading. *Book 4, 7*

Blessed are those who shed their blood for the cause of God.

A reading from the "Books of the Stromata" of Clement of Alexandria.

Those who fulfil the commandments of the Lord, in every action "testify," by doing what He wishes, and consistently naming the Lord's name; and "testifying" by deed to Him in whom they trust, that they are those "who have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts." "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." "He who sows in his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows in the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Gal. 5: 24-25; 6: 8).

But to those miserable men, to witness to the Lord by blood seems a most violent death, not knowing that such a gate of death is the beginning of the true life; and they will understand neither the honours after death, which belong to those who have lived holily, nor the punishments of those who have lived unrighteously and impurely? I do not say only from our Scriptures (for almost all the commandments indicate them); but they will not even hear their own discourses. For the Pythagorean Theano writes, "Life were indeed a feast to the wicked, who, having done evil, then die; were not the soul immortal, death would be a godsend."

"For the rest we know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." (Rm. 8: 28-30).

“But if we also suffer for righteousness’ sake,” says Peter, “blessed are we” (1 Pet. 3: 14). Certainly the wise man will never consider the material life as the end of life, but he will aim rather to be forever the happy, blessed and royal friend of God; and even if someone wanted to brand him with disgrace and to strike him with exile, with the confiscation of the goods and finally with death, he will never be able to take him away from the true freedom and above all from the love of God: “Charity bears everything” (1 Cor. 13: 7), suffers all, because it is convinced that the divine providence governs everything with justice.

We live in the flesh, but we do not fight according to the flesh; in fact the weapons of our battle do not come from the flesh, but from the power of God, who breaks the barrier and destroys every thought and presumptuous design that impedes us from knowing him. Fortified by these weapons the wise man says: O Lord, offer me the occasion and receive my testimony; let any serious and terrible thing happen, I despise every danger because I place all my love in you.

“Therefore as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since, as members of one body, you were called to peace. And be thankful!” (Col. 3: 12, 14-15), you who still live in the body, entering into possession, like the ancient just men, of the peace of the soul and of the immunity of the passions.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Dan. 3: 95*

R: These are the triumphant friends of God, who despising the orders of the princes, have merited the eternal reward: * now they receive the crown and the palm of victory.

V: They handed over their bodies to the torments for the Lord.

R: Now they receive the crown and the palm of victory.

Gospel. *Lk. 17: 11 – 19*

No one except this stranger has returned to give glory to God.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at

a distance and lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan.

Then said Jesus, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

THURSDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. Ez. 12: 1 – 16

The deportation of the people concealed in a symbolical action.

A reading from the prophet Ezekiel.

The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not; for they are a rebellious house.

Therefore, son of man, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight; you shall go like an exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house. You shall bring out your baggage by day in their sight, as baggage for exile; and you shall go forth yourself at evening in their sight, as men do who must go into exile. Dig through the wall in their sight, and go out through it. In their sight you shall lift the baggage upon your shoulder, and carry it out in the dark; you shall cover your face, that you may not see the land; for I have made you a sign for the house of Israel."

And I did as I was commanded. I brought out my baggage by day, as baggage for exile, and in the evening I dug through the wall with my own hands; I went forth in the dark, carrying my outfit upon my shoulder in their sight.

In the morning the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?'

Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: This oracle concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are in it.'

Say, 'I am a sign for you: as I have done, so shall it be done to them; they shall go into exile, into captivity.' And the prince who is among them shall lift his baggage upon his shoulder in the dark, and shall go forth; he shall dig through the wall and go out through it; he shall cover his face, that he may not see the land with his eyes.

And I will spread my net over him, and he shall be taken in my snare; and I will bring him to Babylon in the land of the Chalde'ans, yet he shall not see it; and he shall die there. And I will scatter toward every wind all

who are round about him, his helpers and all his troops; and I will unsheathe the sword after them. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I disperse them among the nations and scatter them through the countries. But I will let a few of them escape from the sword, from famine and pestilence, that they may confess all their abominations among the nations where they go, and may know that I am the LORD."

Responsorial. *Cfr. Ez. 12: 15; Ps. 88: 31, 33*

R: When I have dispersed them among the nations and have scattered them through the countries, * then they will know that I am the Lord.

V: If they abandon my laws and do not follow my decrees, I will punish them for their sins:

R: then they will know that I am the Lord.

Second Reading. *Disc. 46. 9*

Be an example to the faithful.

A reading from the "Discourse on the shepherds" of St. Augustine, bishop.

After the Lord had explained what those shepherds like, he pointed out also what things they neglect. The defects of the sheep are widespread. Few sheep are sound and fat, in other words firm, by feeding on the truth, making good use of their pastures as God gives them. Even such sheep those wicked shepherds do not spare. It is not enough for them to take no care of the sick and the weak, the strays and the lost. As far as they can they also try to kill these strong and sleek ones. These go on living, indeed: by the mercy of God they go on living. Yet as far as concerns the wicked shepherds, they are killing them. "How", you say, "do they kill them?" By evil living, by giving bad example. Was that a pointless statement to the servant of God, one outstanding among the members of the great shepherds: "For all men offering yourself as an example of good works" (cfr. Tit. 2: 7), and, "Be a model for the faithful" (1 Tm. 4: 12)?

Often even a strong sheep, through observing his leader living an evil life, if he should turn his eyes from the laws of the Lord, and look at the man, begins to say in his heart: "If my leader lives like that, who am I not to do as he does?" The leader is killing that strong sheep. If he kills the strong,

what now does he do about the rest? Even what he himself has not strengthened, but found strong or robust, he is killing by his evil life.

I say to you, my dear brethren, I say again, even if the sheep live, and even if they are strong in the word of the Lord, holding fast to what they have heard from their Lord, “Do what they say, but not what they do”(Mt. 23: 3) – nevertheless, the one who lives an evil life in the sight of the people, is killing, so far as he can, the person by whom he is observed. So let him not flatter himself that the person is not dead; he is alive, but the other is a murderer. Just as when a lustful man looks at a woman to desire her, though she is chaste, he has committed adultery. For the Lord’s judgement is clear and true: “Whoever looks at a woman to lust after her, has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt. 5: 28). He has not reached her bedroom, but in the interior bedroom of his heart he is already rolling in lust.

So everyone who lives evilly in the sight of those over whom he is set, as far as in him lies is killing even the strong. The one who imitates him dies; the one who does not imitate him goes on living. Yet as far as he is concerned he is killing both. “You slaughter the fatlings”, the Lord says, “but you do not feed the sheep” (Ez. 34: 3).

Responsorial. *Cfr. Lk. 12: 48; Wis. 6:6*

R: Much will be asked of those to whom much has been given: * more will be expected of them, because they were entrusted with more.

V: Severe judgement will fall on those in high places;

R: more will be expected of them, because they were entrusted with more.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *2 Mac. 7:20 – 41*

The martyrdom of the seven brothers. The mother and the last son.

A reading from the second book of Maccabees.

The mother was especially admirable and worthy of honourable memory. Though she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord. She encouraged each of them in the language of their fathers. Filled with a noble spirit, she

fired her woman's reasoning with a man's courage, and said to them, "I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of man and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws." Antiochus felt that he was being treated with contempt, and he was suspicious of her reproachful tone. The youngest brother being still alive, Antiochus not only appealed to him in words, but promised with oaths that he would make him rich and enviable if he would turn from the ways of his fathers, and that he would take him for his friend and entrust him with public affairs. Since the young man would not listen to him at all, the king called the mother to him and urged her to advise the youth to save himself.

After much urging on his part, she undertook to persuade her son. But, leaning close to him, she spoke in their native tongue as follows, deriding the cruel tyrant: "My son, have pity on me. I carried you nine months in my womb, and nursed you for three years, and have reared you and brought you up to this point in your life, and have taken care of you. I beseech you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. Thus also mankind comes into being.

Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God's mercy I may get you back again with your brothers."

While she was still speaking, the young man said, "What are you waiting for? I will not obey the king's command, but I obey the command of the law that was given to our fathers through Moses. But you, who have contrived all sorts of evil against the Hebrews, will certainly not escape the hands of God. For we are suffering because of our own sins. And if our living Lord is angry for a little while, to rebuke and discipline us, he will again be reconciled with his own servants.

But you, unholy wretch, you most defiled of all men, do not be elated in vain and puffed up by uncertain hopes, when you raise your hand against the children of heaven. You have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty, all-seeing God. For our brothers after enduring a brief suffering have drunk of overflowing life under God's covenant; but you, by the judgment of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance.

I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our fathers, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation and by afflictions and plagues to make you confess that he alone is God, and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty which has justly fallen on our whole nation."

The king fell into a rage, and handled him worse than the others, being exasperated at his scorn. So he died in his integrity, putting his whole trust in the Lord. Last of all, the mother died, after her sons.

Responsorial. Ps. 132: 1

R: For the covenant of the Lord and the laws of the fathers the saints of God remained firm in love. * Because they always had only one spirit and only one faith.

V: Look how good it is and how sweet that the brothers live together.

R: Because they always had only one spirit and only one faith.

Second Reading. Disc. 2, 4 – 5

Christ is the witness of the future resurrection, and with him the apostles, the martyrs, and the mother of the Maccabees.

A reading from the discourse “On the consolation of death” of St. John Chrysostom, bishop.

I ask you only this, if Christ has promised the resurrection and when from many witnesses you will have heard of the existence of this promise, then, sure because of the guarantee of Christ the Lord himself and confirmed in your faith, stop fearing death. Only he who does not believe is still afraid: he commits an unforgivable sin, since with his disbelief he dares to affirm either that God is without power or that he is a liar. The holy apostles and the martyrs themselves did not think like this. The apostles, exactly in order to preach the resurrection preached the risen Christ and in him they announced the resurrection of the dead, not refusing to bear for this either death, or torture, or the death of the cross itself. Now if “every thing is resolved on the testimony of two or three witnesses” (Mt. 18: 16), how can the resurrection of the dead, for which there exists such numerous and great witnesses who proclaim it with their blood, still be put in doubt? And what have the martyrs said? Were they sure of the resurrection or not?

If they were not to have had the certainty, they would not have welcomed as the greatest gain a death so burdened with torture and suffering: they did not look at the torments of the present moment, but at the reward that would have followed it. They knew in fact that “the visible things are temporary, the invisible are eternal” (2 Cor. 4: 18).

Listen again, brothers, to this example of virtue. The mother exhorted her seven sons and did not cry, on the contrary she rejoiced; she saw her sons who had their nails torn out, who were struck with the sword, roasted on the grill and did not shed tears, she did not shout, but full of solicitude she exhorted them to bear everything patiently. That mother was certainly not cruel, but faithful; she loved her sons, not with weakness, but with strength. She exhorted her sons to the sacrifice and how she rejoiced when she herself had to affront it! She was in fact certain of her resurrection and of theirs.

What can be added to so many men, women, boys and young girls? Almost as if they were playing with a similar death, they passed with extreme rapidity into the heavenly hosts.

They would have certainly been able to continue to live if they had wanted, since it was up to them to decide whether to live denying Christ or to die confessing him: but they preferred to despise this mortal life in order to rise to the eternal life, to be excluded from the earth in order to become citizens of heaven.

Is there still place for some doubt, brothers? On what could the fear of death still base itself? If we are the children of martyrs, if we want to show ourselves to be their companions, let us not be saddened by death, let us not cry for our dear ones who have preceded us near the Lord; otherwise it will be the same martyrs who will deride us saying: Oh, how you have faith! How much you desire the kingdom of God! You cry with such pain for your dear ones who die delicately on their beds of feathers; if you had seen them tortured and killed by the pagans for the name of the Lord, what would you have done?

Responsorial. *Is. 25: 8; 1 Cor. 15: 24, 26*

R: God will eliminate death forever. * The Lord will wipe away the tears from every face.

V: Christ will reduce to nothing every principality and every power and potency; the last enemy to be destroyed will be death.

R: The Lord will wipe away the tears from every face.

Gospel. *Lk. 17: 20 – 25*

If they know so much as to scrutinize the universe,

How is it they were not able to find the Creator.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

And he said to the disciples, "The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, 'Lo, there!' or 'Lo, here!' Do not go, do not follow them. For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of man be in his day. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

FRIDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Ez. 13: 1 – 16*

Oracle against the false prophets.

A reading from the prophet Ezekiel.

The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel, prophesy and say to those who prophesy out of their own minds: 'Hear the word of the LORD!' Thus says the Lord GOD, Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! Your prophets have been like foxes among ruins, O Israel. You have not gone up into the breaches, or built up a wall for the house of Israel, that it might stand in battle in the day of the LORD. They have spoken falsehood and divined a lie; they say, 'Says the LORD,' when the LORD has not sent them, and yet they expect him to fulfil their word. Have you not seen a delusive vision, and uttered a lying divination, whenever you have said, 'says the LORD,' although I have not spoken?" Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Because you have uttered delusions and seen lies, therefore behold, I am against you, says the Lord GOD.

My hand will be against the prophets who see delusive visions and who give lying divinations; they shall not be in the council of my people, nor be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel; and you shall know that I am the Lord GOD. Because, yes, because they have misled my people, saying, 'Peace,' when there is no peace; and because, when the people build a wall, these prophets daub it with whitewash; say to those who daub it with whitewash that it shall fall! There will be a deluge of rain, great hailstones will fall, and a stormy wind break out; and when the wall falls, will it not be said to you, 'Where is the daubing with which you daubed it?' Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: I will make a stormy wind break out in my wrath; and there shall be a deluge of rain in my anger, and great hailstones in wrath to destroy it. And I will break down the wall that you have daubed with whitewash, and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation will be laid bare; when it falls, you shall perish in the midst of it; and you shall know that I am the LORD.

Thus will I spend my wrath upon the wall, and upon those who have daubed it with whitewash; and I will say to you, The wall is no more, nor those who daubed it, the prophets of Israel who prophesied concerning Jerusalem and saw visions of peace for her, when there was no peace, says the Lord GOD.

Responsorial. *Mt. 7: 15; 24: 11*

R: Beware of false prophets who will come to you in sheep's clothing, * but inside they are ravenous wolves.

V: Many false prophets will arise and will deceive many.

R: But inside they are ravenous wolves

Second Reading. *Disc. 46, 10 – 11*

Prepare your heart for the temptation.

A reading from the “Discourse on the shepherds” of St. Augustine, bishop.

You have already heard what the wicked shepherds like. See what they neglect. “The weak you have not strengthened: the sick you have not healed; the crippled you have not bound up; the stray you have not brought back; the lost you have not sought; and what was strong you have destroyed” (Ez. 34: 4). A sheep is weak, that is, it lacks courage, with the result that it may give way to temptations if they come upon the sheep when incautious and unprepared.

The negligent shepherd does not say to a believer of that sort: “My son, when you come to serve God, take your stand in righteousness and fear, and make ready your soul for temptation”. (cfr. Sir. 2: 1). One who speaks thus, strengthens the weak and makes him strong instead of weak, so that when he has found faith he will not hope for this world's prosperity. For if he has been taught to hope for this world's prosperity, he will be corrupted by the prosperity itself: when adversities arrive, he is wounded, or perhaps utterly crushed.

One who so builds is not building him on rock, but setting him on sand. “The rock was Christ” (cfr. 1 Cor. 10: 4). Christians must imitate the sufferings of Christ, not seek for pleasure. A weak man is strengthened when he is told: “Expect the temptations of this world; but the Lord will deliver you from them all if your heart has not retreated from him. For it

was to strengthen your heart that he came to suffer, he came to die, to be spattered with spittle, to be crowned with thorns, to listen to insults, finally to be fixed to the wood of the cross. He suffered all these things for you; you have suffered nothing. They were not for his benefit but for yours”.

What kind of men are they who, fearing to hurt those they speak to, not only do not prepare them for imminent temptations, but even promise the happiness of this world, which God did not promise to the world itself? He foretells toil upon toil, that will come upon the world right to the end; and do you wish the Christians to be exempt from these labours? Because he is a Christian, he is likely to suffer more rather than less in this world.

For the apostle says: “All who wish to live piously in Christ will suffer persecution” (2 Tm. 3: 12). Now, if you will, you shepherd seeking your own advantage not that of Jesus Christ, let Paul say: “All who wish to live piously in Christ will suffer persecution”; and do you say: “If you have lived piously in Christ, all good things will be yours in abundance. And if you have no children, you will take up and nurture all men, and not one will die on your account”. Is this your way of building? Notice what you are doing, where you are placing a man. He is on sand, this man you are setting up. The rain will fall, the floods come, the wind will blow; they will beat upon that house of yours and it will fall, and great will be the fall thereof.

Raise him up from the sand, set him upon a rock; let him whom you wish to be a Christian live in Christ. Let him note the indignities and sufferings of Christ; let him observe the sinless Christ paying for what he had not stolen; let him attend to the words of scripture, telling him: “The Lord chastises every son whom he accepts” (Heb. 12: 6). Let him prepare himself for chastisement, or else not seek to be accepted.

Responsorial. *Cfr. 1 Thes. 2: 4,3*

R: God has approved us as fit to be entrusted with the gospel, and on those terms we speak. * We do not curry favour with men; we seek only the favour of God.

V: The appeal we make never springs from error or base motive; there is no attempt to deceive.

R: We do not curry favour with men, we seek only the favour of God.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *1 Mac. 2:1, 15 – 28, 42 – 50, 65 – 70*

The revolt of Mattathias and his death.

A reading from the first book of Maccabees.

In those days Mattathias the son of John, son of Simeon, a priest of the sons of Joarib, moved from Jerusalem and settled in Modein.

Then the king's officers who were enforcing the apostasy came to the city of Modein to make them offer sacrifice. Many from Israel came to them; and Mattathias and his sons were assembled. Then the king's officers spoke to Mattathias as follows: "You are a leader, honoured and great in this city, and supported by sons and brothers. Now be the first to come and do what the king commands, as all the Gentiles and the men of Judah and those that are left in Jerusalem have done. Then you and your sons will be numbered among the friends of the king, and you and your sons will be honoured with silver and gold and many gifts."

But Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice: "Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him, and have chosen to do his commandments, departing each one from the religion of his fathers, yet I and my sons and my brothers will live by the covenant of our fathers. Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances. We will not obey the king's words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left." When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice upon the altar in Modein, according to the king's command. When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him upon the altar. At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. Thus he burned with zeal for the law, as Phinehas did against Zimri the son of Salu. Then Mattathias cried out in the city with a loud voice, saying: "Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!" And he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the city.

Then there united with them a company of Hasideans, mighty warriors of Israel, every one who offered himself willingly for the law. And all who

became fugitives to escape their troubles joined them and reinforced them. They organized an army, and struck down sinners in their anger and lawless men in their wrath; the survivors fled to the Gentiles for safety. And Mattathias and his friends went about and tore down the altars; they forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised boys that they found within the borders of Israel. They hunted down the arrogant men, and the work prospered in their hands. They rescued the law out of the hands of the Gentiles and kings, and they never let the sinner gain the upper hand.

Now the days drew near for Mattathias to die, and he said to his sons: "Arrogance and reproach have now become strong; it is a time of ruin and furious anger. Now, my children, show zeal for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of our fathers.

"Now behold, I know that Simeon your brother is wise in counsel; always listen to him; he shall be your father. Judas Maccabeus has been a mighty warrior from his youth; he shall command the army for you and fight the battle against the peoples. You shall rally about you all who observe the law, and avenge the wrong done to your people. Pay back the Gentiles in full, and heed what the law commands." Then he blessed them, and was gathered to his fathers. He died in the one hundred and forty-sixth year and was buried in the tomb of his fathers at Modein. And all Israel mourned for him with great lamentation.

Responsorial. *1 Macc. 2: 51, 64*

R: Remember the gestures accomplished by our fathers in their times, * and you will draw remarkable glory and eternal name from them.

V: Sons, be valiant and strong in the law, because in this you will be glorified,

R: and you will draw remarkable glory and eternal name from them.

Second Reading. *Nm. 88 – 90*

The work of the Christians in the edification of peace.

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

Christians should cooperate willingly and wholeheartedly in establishing an international order that includes a genuine respect for all freedoms and amicable brotherhood between all. This is all the more

pressing since the greater part of the world is still suffering from so much poverty that it is as if Christ Himself were crying out in these poor to beg the charity of the disciples. Do not let men, then, be scandalized because some countries with a majority of citizens who are counted as Christians have an abundance of wealth, whereas others are deprived of the necessities of life and are tormented with hunger, disease, and every kind of misery. The spirit of poverty and charity are the glory and witness of the Church of Christ.

Those Christians are to be praised and supported, therefore, who volunteer their services to help other men and nations. Indeed, it is the duty of the whole People of God, following the word and example of the bishops, to alleviate as far as they are able the sufferings of the modern age. They should do this too, as was the ancient custom in the Church, out of the substance of their goods, and not only out of what is superfluous.

The procedure of collecting and distributing aids, without being inflexible and completely uniform, should nevertheless be carried on in an orderly fashion in dioceses, nations, and throughout the entire world. Wherever it seems convenient, this activity of Catholics should be carried on in unison with other Christian brothers. For the spirit of charity does not forbid, but on the contrary commands that charitable activity be carried out in a careful and orderly manner. Therefore, it is essential for those who intend to dedicate themselves to the services of the developing nations to be properly trained in appropriate institutes,

Since, in virtue of her mission received from God, the Church preaches the Gospel to all men and dispenses the treasures of grace, she contributes to the ensuring of peace everywhere on earth and to the placing of the fraternal exchange between men on solid ground by imparting knowledge of the divine and natural law. Therefore, to encourage and stimulate cooperation among men, the Church must be clearly present in the midst of the community of nations both through her official channels and through the full and sincere collaboration of all Christians-a collaboration motivated solely by the desire to be of service to all.

This will come about more effectively if the faithful themselves, conscious of their responsibility as men and as Christians will exert their influence in their own milieu to arouse a ready willingness to cooperate with the international community. Special care must be given, in both religious and civil education, to the formation of youth in this regard.

An outstanding form of international activity on the part of Christians is found in the joint efforts which, both as individuals and in groups, they contribute to institutes already established or to be established for the encouragement of cooperation among nations. There are also various Catholic associations on an international level which can contribute in many ways to the building up of a peaceful and fraternal community of nations. These should be strengthened by augmenting in them the number of well qualified collaborators, by increasing needed resources, and by advantageously fortifying the coordination of their energies. For today both effective action and the need for dialogue demand joint projects. Moreover, such associations contribute much to the development of a universal outlook-something certainly appropriate for Catholics. They also help to form an awareness of genuine universal solidarity and responsibility. Finally, it is very much to be desired that Catholics, in order to fulfil their role properly in the international community, will seek to cooperate actively and in a positive manner both with their separated brothers who together with them profess the Gospel of charity and with all men thirsting for true peace.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Hab. 3: 3; Lev. 26: 1, 6, 9*

R: Behold, I come, says the Almighty. * I, the Lord your God, will establish peace.

V: I will turn to you, to make you fruitful and to multiply you; I will confirm my covenant with you.

R: I, the Lord your God, will establish peace.

Gospel. *Lk. 17: 26 – 37*

The day will come when the Son of man will reveal Himself.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

Likewise as it was in the days of Lot -- they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built, but on the day when Lot went

out from Sodom fire and sulphur rained from heaven and destroyed them all -- so will it be on the day when the Son of man is revealed.

On that day, let him who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away; and likewise let him who is in the field not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it.

I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together; one will be taken and the other left." And they said to him, "Where, Lord?" He said to them, "Where the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together."

SATURDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Ez. 14:12 – 23*

Salvation of the just and ruin of the sinners.

A reading from the prophet Ezekiel.

And the word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it, and break its staff of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it man and beast, even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, says the Lord GOD. If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they ravage it, and it be made desolate, so that no man may pass through because of the beasts; even if these three men were in it, as I live, says the Lord GOD, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters; they alone would be delivered, but the land would be desolate. Or if I bring a sword upon that land, and say, Let a sword go through the land; and I cut off from it man and beast; though these three men were in it, as I live, says the Lord GOD, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they alone would be delivered. Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my wrath upon it with blood, to cut off from it man and beast; even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, says the Lord GOD, they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness. "For thus says the Lord GOD: How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four sore acts of judgment, sword, famine, evil beasts, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast! Yet, if there should be left in it any survivors to lead out sons and daughters, when they come forth to you, and you see their ways and their doings, you will be consoled for the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, for all that I have brought upon it. They will console you, when you see their ways and their doings; and you shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, says the Lord GOD."

Responsorial. *Gal. 6: 4-5; Ez. 18: 20*

R: Let each one examine his own conduct and then only in himself and not in the others will he find reason to boast. * Each one in fact will carry his

own burden.

V: He who has sinned and not others must die: the son will not pay for the iniquity of the father, or the father the iniquity of the son.

R: Each one in fact will carry his own burden.

Second Reading. *Disc. 46, 11 – 12*

Offer the bandage of consolation.

A reading from the “Discourse on the shepherds” of St. Augustine, bishop.

“The Lord chastises”, scripture says, “every son whom he accepts” (Heb. 12: 6). And do you say, “Perhaps you will be exempt”? If exempt from suffering chastisement, then exempt from the number of his sons. “But”, you will say, “does he chastise every son”? Without doubt he does chastise every son as he chastised even his only Son. The only Son, born of the Father’s substance, equal to the Father in the form of God, the Word by whom all things were made, could not possibly be chastised. For this purpose he clothed himself in flesh, so that he might not escape chastisement. Will he who chastises his sinless only Son leave alone his sinful adopted son? The apostle declares that we are all called to adoption. We have received the adoption of sons, so as to be co-heirs with the only Son, and be also his inheritance. “Ask of me and I will give you the gentiles as your inheritance” (Ps. 2: 8). He has put before us an example in his sufferings.

But obviously the weak man must neither be deceived by false hopes nor shattered by fear, lest he fail at the prospect of temptations to come. Say to him: “Prepare your soul for temptations” (Sir. 2: 1). He begins, perhaps, to tremble, to falter, to refuse to approach. You have that other saying: “God is faithful, who does not allow you to be tried beyond what you can bear” (1 Cor. 10: 13). To hold out this promise while you preach sufferings to come is to strengthen the weak. When you promise God’s mercy to an excessively fearful and terrified man – not that temptation will not come, but because God does not allow one to be tried beyond what one can bear – this is binding up the broken.

There are some people who, hearing of future tribulations, arm themselves the more strongly, and as it were thirst for their drink. What is a healing remedy for the faithful, they reckon of little importance for

themselves, and seek even the glory of martyrdom. There are others who hear of inevitable trials to come (which must naturally come to a Christian, and which no one else experiences but the one who wishes truly to be a Christian) and when such trials are upon them, they are broken and lamed.

Offer the bandage of consolation, bind up what is broken. Say, “Do not be afraid: he in whom you have believed will not desert you in your trials”. God is faithful, who does not allow you to be tried beyond what you can bear. You are hearing this not just from me: it is the apostle speaking, and he also says, “Do you wish to have a proof of Christ who speaks in me?” (cfr. 2 Cor. 13. 3) So when you hear this, you hear it from Christ himself, from that shepherd who feeds Israel. For to him was said, “You give us for our drink tears, in measure” (cfr: Ps. 79: 6 Vulg.). What the apostle says, “He does not allow you to be tried beyond what you can bear”, this the prophet expresses by “in measure”. Do not cast aside the one who both corrects and encourages you, terrifies and consoles you, strikes you and heals you.

Responsorial. *Ps. 43: 23; Rm. 8: 37; Ps. 43: 12*

R: It is for you we face death all day long and are counted as sheep for the slaughter; * these are the trials through which we triumph, by the power of him who loved us.

V: You make us like sheep for the slaughter and scatter us among the nations:

R: these are the trials through which we triumph, by the power of him who loved us.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *1 Mac. 3:1 – 26*

Judas Maccabee.

A reading from the first book of Maccabees.

Then Judas his son, who was called Maccabeus, took command in his place. All his brothers and all who had joined his father helped him; they gladly fought for Israel. He extended the glory of his people. Like a giant he put on his breastplate; he girded on his armour of war and waged battles,

protecting the host by his sword. He was like a lion in his deeds, like a lion's cub roaring for prey. He searched out and pursued the lawless; he burned those who troubled his people. Lawless men shrank back for fear of him; all the evildoers were confounded; and deliverance prospered by his hand. He embittered many kings, but he made Jacob glad by his deeds, and his memory is blessed forever. He went through the cities of Judah; he destroyed the ungodly out of the land; thus he turned away wrath from Israel. He was renowned to the ends of the earth; he gathered in those who were perishing. But Apollonius gathered together Gentiles and a large force from Samaria to fight against Israel. When Judas learned of it, he went out to meet him, and he defeated and killed him. Many were wounded and fell, and the rest fled. Then they seized their spoils; and Judas took the sword of Apollonius, and used it in battle the rest of his life. Now when Seron, the commander of the Syrian army, heard that Judas had gathered a large company, including a body of faithful men who stayed with him and went out to battle, he said, "I will make a name for myself and win honour in the kingdom. I will make war on Judas and his companions, who scorn the king's command." And again a strong army of ungodly men went up with him to help him, to take vengeance on the sons of Israel. When he approached the ascent of Beth-horon, Judas went out to meet him with a small company. But when they saw the army coming to meet them, they said to Judas, "How can we, few as we are, fight against so great and strong a multitude? And we are faint, for we have eaten nothing today." Judas replied, "It is easy for many to be hemmed in by few, for in the sight of Heaven there is no difference between saving by many or by few. It is not on the size of the army that victory in battle depends, but strength comes from Heaven.

They come against us in great pride and lawlessness to destroy us and our wives and our children, and to despoil us; but we fight for our lives and our laws. He himself will crush them before us; as for you, do not be afraid of them." When he finished speaking, he rushed suddenly against Seron and his army, and they were crushed before him. They pursued them down the descent of Beth-horon to the plain; eight hundred of them fell, and the rest fled into the land of the Philistines. Then Judas and his brothers began to be feared, and terror fell upon the Gentiles round about them. His fame reached the king, and the Gentiles talked of the battles of Judas.

Responsorial. *Cfr. 1 Macc. 3: 20, 22, 19, 21*

R: They come against us in great pride and lawlessness, but you do not fear them: it is not on the size of the army that victory in battle depends, * but our help comes from heaven.

V: We fight for our lives and for our laws. He himself will crush them before us:

R: but our help comes from heaven.

Second Reading. *Cat. 5, 10 – 11*

The virtue of faith operates beyond the human strength.

A reading from the “Catechesis” of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, bishop.

For the name of Faith is one in the form of speech, but has two distinct senses. For there is one kind of faith, the dogmatic, involving an assent of the soul on some particular point: and it is profitable to the soul, as the Lord says: “He who hears My words, and believes Him who sent Me, has everlasting life, and will not be condemned” (Jn. 5: 24), and again, “He who believes in the Son is not judged, but has passed from death unto life” (cfr: Jn. 5: 24).

Oh the great loving-kindness of God! For the righteous were many years in pleasing Him: but what they succeeded in gaining by many years of well-pleasing, this Jesus now bestows on you in a single hour. For if you shall believe that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved, and shall be transported into Paradise by Him who brought inside the robber. And doubt not whether it is possible; for He who on this sacred Golgotha saved the robber after one single hour of belief, will save you also if you believe.

But there is a second kind of faith, which is bestowed by Christ as a gift of grace. “For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit: to another faith, by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing” (1 Cor. 12: 8-9). This faith then which is given of grace from the Spirit is not merely doctrinal, but also works things above man’s power. For whosoever has this faith, shall say to this mountain, “Move from here to there, and it will move” (Mt. 17: 20). For whenever any one shall say this in faith, believing

that it will come to pass, and shall not doubt in his heart, then he will receive grace.

And of this faith it is said, "If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed" (Mt. 17: 20). For just as the grain of mustard seed is small in size, but fiery in its operation, and though sown in a small space has a circle of great branches, and when grown up is able even to shelter the fowls; so, likewise, faith in the swiftest moment works the greatest effects in the soul.

For, when enlightened by faith, the soul has visions of God, and as far as is possible beholds God, and ranges round the bounds of the universe, and before the end of this world already beholds the Judgment, and the payment of the promised rewards. Have you therefore that faith in Him which comes from your own self, that you may also receive from Him that faith which works things above man.

Responsorial. *Gal. 2: 16; Rm. 3: 25*

R: Man is not justified by the works of the law, but only through faith. * We also have believed, in order to be justified by the faith in Christ.

V: God has pre-established him as the instrument of expiation through faith, in his blood.

R: We also have believed, in order to be justified by the faith in Christ.

Gospel. *Lk. 18: 1 – 8*

God will make justice for his elected who cry out to Him.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

And he told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man; and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Vindicate me against my adversary.' For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?"