

## WEEK 12

### SUNDAY

#### CYCLE 1

**First Reading.** *Jdg. 13: 1- 25*

*Announcement of the birth of Samson.*

**A reading from the book of Judges.**

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years. And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Mano'ah; and his wife was barren and had no children. And the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold, you are barren and have no children; but you shall conceive and bear a son. Therefore beware, and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for lo, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from birth; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines." Then the woman came and told her husband, "A man of God came to me, and his countenance was like the countenance of the angel of God, very terrible; I did not ask him whence he was, and he did not tell me his name; but he said to me, `Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son; so then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from birth to the day of his death.'"

Then Mano'ah entreated the LORD, and said, "O, LORD, I pray you, let the man of God whom you did send come again to us, and teach us what we are to do with the boy that will be born." And God listened to the voice of Mano'ah, and the angel of God came again to the woman as she sat in the field; but Mano'ah her husband was not with her. And the woman ran in haste and told her husband, "Behold, the man who came to me the other day has appeared to me." And Mano'ah arose and went after his wife, and came to the man and said to him, "Are you the man who spoke to this woman?" And he said, "I am." And Mano'ah said, "Now when your words come true, what is to be the boy's manner of life, and what is he to do?" And the angel of the LORD said to Mano'ah, "Of all that I said to the woman let her beware. She may not eat of anything that comes from the vine, neither let

her drink wine or strong drink, or eat any unclean thing; all that I commanded her let her observe." Mano'ah said to the angel of the LORD, "Pray, let us detain you, and prepare a kid for you." And the angel of the LORD said to Mano'ah, "If you detain me, I will not eat of your food; but if you make ready a burnt offering, then offer it to the LORD." For Mano'ah did not know that he was the angel of the LORD. And Mano'ah said to the angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that, when your words come true, we may honour you?"

And the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?" So Mano'ah took the kid with the cereal offering, and offered it upon the rock to the LORD, to him who works wonders. And when the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar while Mano'ah and his wife looked on; and they fell on their faces to the ground. The angel of the LORD appeared no more to Mano'ah and to his wife. Then Mano'ah knew that he was the angel of the LORD. And Mano'ah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God." But his wife said to him, "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a cereal offering at our hands, or shown us all these things, or now announced to us such things as these."

And the woman bore a son, and called his name Samson; and the boy grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Ma'haneh-dan, between Zorah and Esh'ta-ol.

**Responsorial.** *Cfr. Lk. 1: 13, 15; Jdg. 13: 7, 3, 5*

**R:** The angel said to Zechariah: Your wife will give you a son, whom you will call John; he will not drink wine or other fermented drink, he will be full of the Holy Spirit even from the womb of his mother; \* he will be consecrated to God.

**V:** The angel of the Lord appeared to the wife of Manoah and said to her: you will conceive and give birth to a son, on whose head no razor shall pass:

**R:** he will be consecrated to God.

**Second Reading.** *Nm. 17 – 18*

*Thus when we pray we ask for the salvation of everyone.*

**A reading from the treatise “On the Our Father” of St. Cyprian, bishop and martyr.**

“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6: 10). And it may be thus understood, beloved brethren, that since the Lord commands and admonishes us even to love our enemies, and to pray even for those who persecute us, we should ask, moreover, for those who are still earth, and have not yet begun to be heavenly, that even in respect of these God’s will should be done, that will which Christ accomplished in saving and renewing humanity.

For since the disciples are not now called by Him earth, but the salt of the earth, and the apostle designates the first man as being from the dust of the earth, but the second from heaven, we reasonably, who are called to be like God our Father, who makes His sun to rise upon the good and bad, and sends rain upon the just and the unjust, following the teaching of Christ, we ask and we pray for the salvation of everyone, that as in heaven — that is, in us by our faith — the will of God has been done, so that we might be of heaven; so also in earth — that is, in those who believe not — God’s will may be done, that they who as yet are by their first birth of earth, may, being born of water and of the Spirit, begin to be of heaven.

As the prayer goes forward, we ask and say, “Give us this day our daily bread.” And this may be understood both spiritually and materially because either way of understanding it is rich in divine usefulness to our salvation. For Christ is the bread of life; and this bread does not belong to all men, but it is ours. And according as we say, “Our Father,” because He is the Father of those who understand and believe; so also we call it “our bread,” because Christ is the bread of those who are in union with His body.

And we ask that this bread should be given to us daily, so that it may not happen that we who live in Christ, and daily receive the Eucharist as the food of salvation, may have to abstain from the heavenly bread because of some grievous sin, and thus, deprived of the communion, we become separated from the body of Christ, as He Himself predicts, and warns, “I am the bread of life which came down from heaven. If any man eat of my bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world.” (Jn. 6: 48, 51).

When, therefore, He says, that whoever shall eat of His bread shall live for ever; as it is manifest that those who partake of His body and receive the

Eucharist by the right of communion are living, so, on the other hand, we must fear and pray lest any one who, being withheld from communion, is separate from Christ's body should remain at a distance from salvation; as He Himself threatens, and says, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you shall have no life in you." (Jn. 6: 53). And therefore we ask that our bread — that is, Christ — may be given to us daily, that we who abide and live in Christ may not depart from His sanctification and body.

**Responsorial.** *Ps. 36: 4, 3*

**R:** Search for the joy in the Lord, \* he will grant the desires of your heart.

**V:** Trust in the Lord and do good, dwell in the land and live with faith.

**R:** He will grant the desires of your heart.

## CYCLE 2

**First Reading.** *Zec. 3:1- 4: 14*

*Promise to prince Zorobabel and to Joshua high priest.*

**A reading from the prophet Zechariah.**

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebukes you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebukes you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?" Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with rich apparel." And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments; and the angel of the LORD was standing by. And the angel of the LORD enjoined Joshua, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here. Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men of good omen: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch. For

behold, upon the stone which I have set before Joshua, upon a single stone with seven facets, I will engrave its inscription, says the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day. In that day, says the LORD of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbour under his vine and under his fig tree."

And the angel who talked with me came again, and waked me, like a man that is wakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lamp stand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps which are on the top of it. And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." And I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" Then the angel who talked with me answered me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerub'babel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerub'babel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'"

Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "The hands of Zerub'babel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerub'babel. "These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth." Then I said to him, "What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lamp stand?" And a second time I said to him, "What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the oil is poured out?" He said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." Then he said, "These are the two anointed who stand by the Lord of the whole earth."

**Responsorial.** *cfr. Ap. 11: 4, 3*

**R:** These are the two olive trees and the two lamp stands \* who stand before the Lord of the earth.

**V:** The Lord will give the power to prophesy to his two witnesses,

**R:** who stand before the Lord of the earth.

**Second Reading.** *Ans. 63 (C. 7)*

*Light that enlightens every man.*

**A reading from the “Answer to Thalassius” of St Maximus the Confessor, abbot.**

The lamp that is set on the lamp-stand is the true light from the Father, the light that enlightens every man coming into the world, namely our Lord Jesus Christ (cfr. Jn. 1: 9). By becoming one of us and assuming our human nature he became and was called the lamp. This means that he is by nature the wisdom and word of God the Father, which is faithfully and loyally preached in God’s Church and which is raised up as a shining and resplendent light among the nations by a life of virtue led in accordance with the commandments, giving light to all those who are in the house (by that I mean in this world). So the divine Word says somewhere: “Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house” (Mt. 5: 15). Clearly he is calling himself a lamp, for while he was God by nature he became a man according to God’s plan of salvation.

I think that in his wisdom the great David understood this when he called the Lord a lamp: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 118: 105). For that is the sort of Saviour my Lord and God is, delivering men from the darkness of ignorance and sin, which is also why scripture calls him a lamp.

Like a lamp he has dispelled the gloom of ignorance and the darkness of sin, and in this way he alone has become the path to salvation for all men. By virtue and knowledge he brings to the Father all those who are resolved to follow him, who is the way of righteousness, by keeping the divine commandments. The Holy Church he calls the lamp-stand, for through its preaching the word of God shines out on it and enlightens all that live in this world, as in a house, with the brightness of truth, filling the minds of all men with the knowledge of God.

The word will not suffer being kept under a bushel: it needs to be set on that great and beautiful lamp-stand that is the Church. For if the word is restricted by the letter of the law, like a light hidden under a bushel, it deprives all men of eternal light. It offers no spiritual vision to men striving to free themselves from the senses. For they recognize that these are misleading, capable only of error and able to grasp only what is of their own nature, that is to say subject to decay. But once the word is placed on

the lamp-stand, that is the Church, where God receives true worship in spirit, then it will give light to all men.

If the letter is not understood according to the spirit, then it can only be grasped with the senses, which means that what it has to say is restricted and the force of what is written is not allowed to sink into the mind.

Therefore, let us not put the lamp (that is the enlightening word of knowledge) that we have lit by spiritual contemplation and action under a bushel. Let us not be guilty of restricting the incomprehensible force of wisdom by the letter. Let us put it on the lamp-stand (by that I mean the Church), where on the heights of true contemplation it may hold out the light of divine teaching to all men.

**Responsorial.** *Jn. 12: 35, 36; 9: 39*

**R:** Walk while you have the light, or darkness will overtake you. \* While you still have the light, trust to the light and you will become sons of light.

**V:** I have come into this world to give sight to the blind.

**R:** While you still have the light, trust to the light and you will become sons of light.

YEAR A

**Gospel.** *Mt. 10: 26 – 33*

**A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.**

"So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

**Third Reading.** *Nm. 29 – 30*

*From the Saviour comes the resurrection and Christ lives: in fact he is the life.*

**A reading from the “Discourse on the Incarnation of the Word” of St. Athanasius, bishop.**

If with the banner of the cross and the faith in Christ death is trodden underfoot, it is necessary to conclude with absolute certainty that there is no one else other than Christ, who has brought back the palm and the triumph over death and who has reduced it to impotence in this way. If death, which before dominated and was therefore the cause of terror, after the coming and the death and resurrection of the Saviour has become despised, it is evident that it was destroyed and overcome by Christ himself when he climbed on to the cross. After the night the sun rises and illuminates the earth with its rays, and no one can doubt that it is the sun, diffusing everywhere its light, which casts out the darkness and which illuminates all things. Thus, since death began to be despised and trodden underfoot when the Saviour, having come in the midst of us in order to save us, died on the cross, from this it is evident that the Saviour himself, appearing in the body, has destroyed death and every day triumphs over it through his disciples.

Men who are by nature cowardly have been seen to hurry courageously towards death without fearing corruption, not fleeing the descent into the underworld, but on the contrary facing it with a ready soul, not fearing the torments but rather, for love of Christ, preferring death to the present life. Can he who has been able to see men, women and young children hurry towards death, pushed by the love for Christ, be so stupid, unbelieving and blind of mind that he does not comprehend and reflect that it is Christ, of whom those men are witnesses, who grants to each one of them the victory over death? He destroyed death in all those who have faith in him and who are signed with the sign of the cross. That which we have said proves evidently that Christ has overcome death and that the cross of the Lord has been placed as the banner of victory over death. That then the resurrection of the mortal body has been accomplished by Christ, saviour of all and true life, is more evident from the facts rather than from the words to those whose interior ears are healthy. If in fact death has been destroyed and all have the power of overcoming it through Christ, all the more he himself has overcome and destroyed it first of all in his own body. He having abolished death, what else still remained if not that the body should rise, becoming a



banner against death? How would it have been possible to see that death was destroyed, if the body of the Lord had not been resurrected?

If then to someone all this is not enough to prove his resurrection, let him at least believe because of those things that can be perceived with the eyes.

He who has died in fact, cannot do absolutely anything, and the memory of him remains alive only up to the sepulchre and then disappears; only the living can act and they only have influence over men. Let the one who desires it therefore observe, and judging by himself let him recognize the truth from what he has seen: if the Saviour accomplished so many and such great things in the midst of men and everywhere silently persuades every day Greeks and barbarians to embrace his faith and to obey his laws, can there still be doubts about his resurrection and that the Christ is alive, in fact that he is life itself?

**Responsorial.** *2 Cor. 4: 11; Ps. 43: 23*

**R:** We face death because of Jesus \* so that also the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

**V:** For you we are put to death every day, we are considered as sheep for the slaughter.

**R:** So that also the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

YEAR B

**Gospel.** *Mk. 4: 35 – 41*

**A reading from the Gospel of St. Mark.**

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great storm of wind arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" And he awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" And they were filled with awe, and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?"

**Third Reading. Disc. 43: 1- 3**

*Through a command of Christ tranquillity comes.*

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

I will speak to you, with the help of God, of the reading of the holy gospel that has just ended, in order to exhort you so that the faith may not fall asleep in your hearts at the raging of the tempests and the breakers of this world. It did not seem to be certain that the Lord had death and sleep in his power, if sleep had taken possession of the Almighty while he was in the boat on the high seas. If you believe this, faith sleeps in you: but if in you Christ keeps vigil, your faith is awake. The Apostle says: “May Christ dwell through faith in your hearts” (Ep. 3: 17). Therefore the sleep of Christ is also a sign of a mystery. The sailors are the souls, which pass in this life as on a boat. That ship also represents the Church. All certainly are the temple of God: each one then navigates in his heart, and is not shipwrecked if he thinks of good things.

An insult has reached your ears: it is the wind; you are angry, it is a breaker. When the wind blows and the waves are agitated the ship is in danger; your heart is in danger and it drifts. You desire to avenge for yourself the insult that you have heard: and behold you take revenge and, giving in to other people’s evil, you have become shipwrecked. How come? Because Christ sleeps in you. And why does he sleep in you? You have forgotten him. Therefore awake Christ, remember Christ, let Christ keep vigil in you; think of him. What did you want? To be avenged. This has happened to you, while he when he was being crucified said: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing” (Lk. 23: 34).

He who did not want to be avenged slept in your heart. Awaken him, remember him. Let his remembrance be his word: let his remembrance be his commandment. And if in you Christ keeps vigil, say to yourself: what man am I that I want to be avenged? Who am I that I can permit myself to threaten another? Perhaps I will die before I avenge myself. But when with difficult breathing, burning with anger, and thirsty for revenge, I will go out from the body, he who did not want to avenge himself will not receive me: he who said: “Give and it will be given to you, forgive and you will be forgiven” (Lk. 6: 38-39) will not receive me. Therefore, I will check my

anger and I will return to the peace of my heart. Christ commanded the sea and tranquillity came.

Take as a norm, in your temptations, that which I have said of wrathfulness. Temptation has arisen: it is the wind; you have been disturbed, it is the breaker. Awaken Christ, he speaks to you: "Who is this to whom the winds and the sea also obey?" (Mk. 4: 41). Who is he to whom the sea obeys? "His is the sea, he has made it" (Ps. 94: 5). Everything has been made by him. Imitate rather the winds and the sea: submit yourself to the Creator. The sea listened to the command of Christ and you are deaf? The sea obeyed and the wind ceased; and you, you swell up?... I say, I do, I plan: what is this also if not to blow and to refuse to become calm at the word of Christ?

In the agitation of your hearts do not let yourselves be overcome by the waves. But rather, given that we are men, if the wind had moved the passions of our souls, let us not despair: let us awaken Christ in order to be able to navigate in tranquillity, and reach the homeland.

**Responsorial.** *Ps. 68: 2, 18, 16*

**R:** Save me, O God, the waters reach my throat. \* Do not hide your face from your servant, I am in danger; quickly, answer me.

**V:** Let not the waves of water submerge me and the whirlpools sweep me away.

**R:** Do not hide your face from your servant, I am in danger: quickly, answer me.

YEAR C

**Gospel.** *Lk. 9: 18 – 24*

**A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.**

Now it happened that as he was praying alone the disciples were with him; and he asked them, "Who do the people say that I am?" And they answered, "John the Baptist; but others say, Elijah; and others, that one of the old prophets has risen." And he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God." But he charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, "The Son of man must suffer

many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." And he said to all, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it.

**Third Reading. Hom. 49**

*Peter makes a clear profession of faith in Christ.*

**A reading from the "Homilies on Luke" of St. Cyril of Alexandria, bishop.**

"One day, while Jesus was in a secluded place praying and his disciples were with him, he put this question to them: Who do the people say I am?" (Lk. 9: 18). Therefore the Saviour and Lord of all showed himself to the disciples as a model of holy life when he prayed alone with them only. But perhaps there was something that disturbed the disciples and provoked in them thoughts that were not right. They saw him who the previous day had accomplished prodigies in a divine manner in fact praying like all the other men. It would not have been unreasonable to murmur: what a strange thing! We must consider him to be God or man? In order to calm therefore the tumult of such thoughts and in order to tranquillize their faith which was almost shaken, Jesus asks this question knowing well what those who were not Jews and also the Israelites themselves were saying about him. He wanted in this way to dissuade them from the opinion of the many and establish in them a sure faith. "Who do the people say I am?" (Lk. 9: 18).

Yet again Peter intervenes first, making himself the spokesman of the whole group. And pronounces words full of love of God with a clear and perfect profession of faith in him, saying: "The Christ of God" (Lk. 9: 21).

The disciple is the attentive and very prudent announcer of the sacred truth. In fact he does not simply say that he is a christ of God, but the Christ; many, as consecrated by God, with different significances are called christs; some are anointed as kings, others as prophets, others still, and that is us, having obtained salvation through Christ the universal Saviour and being anointed by the Holy Spirit, have received the name of Christ. As a consequence many are the christs, but this is a name that designates a condition, while one only is the Christ of God the Father.

After the disciple had pronounced the profession of faith, “he ordered them severely not to tell this to anyone” adding that “the Son of man had to suffer a lot, and to be condemned and to be put to death and to rise again on the third day” (Lk. 9: 21-22). But why did he not want the disciples to preach about him everywhere?

Was this perhaps not the work of those who had been consecrated by him for the apostolate? But as the Scripture says: “everything will be recognized as good in its time” (Sir. 39: 34), it was convenient that they announced him after all the events that had not yet been accomplished had been fulfilled: the passion, the crucifixion, the death on the cross, the resurrection from the dead; this great and glorious miracle would have confirmed that the Emmanuel is truly God and natural son of God the Father. In fact to destroy death and corruption, to deprive the underworld demolishing the tyranny of the devil, to take away the sin of the world and to open to men the doors of paradise joining earth and heaven, all this demonstrates that the Emmanuel is true God. For this he commanded that the mystery be adored for sometime in silence until the entire process of the divine economy reached its conclusion. For this after he was resurrected from the dead, he commanded them to reveal the mystery to the whole world, offering to all the justification through faith and purification with the holy baptism. In fact he said: “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and teach all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. Behold, I am with you all the days, until the end of the world” (Mt. 28: 18-20).

The Christ therefore is with us and dwells in our souls through the Holy Spirit. To him and with him be praise and power to God the Father with the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

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

**R:** I have prayed for you Peter, that your faith will not fail. \* And you, once you have converted, confirm your brothers.

**V:** Neither flesh or blood has revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

**R:** And you, once you have converted, confirm your brothers.



# MONDAY

## CYCLE 1

**First Reading.** *Jdg. 16: 4-6, 16-31*

*Perfidy of Delilah and death of Samson.*

**A reading from the book of Judges.**

After this he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Deli'lah. And the lords of the Philistines came to her and said to her, "Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to subdue him; and we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver." And Deli'lah said to Samson, "Please tell me wherein your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you."

And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death. And he told her all his mind, and said to her, "A razor has never come upon my head; for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I be shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man." When Deli'lah saw that he had told her all his mind, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up this once, for he has told me all his mind." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her, and brought the money in their hands. She made him sleep upon her knees; and she called a man, and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him. And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as at other times, and shake myself free." And he did not know that the LORD had left him. And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with bronze fetters; and he ground at the mill in the prison.

But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. Now the lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice; for they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand." And when the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said, "Our god has given our enemy into our hand, the ravager of our country, who has slain many of us."

And when their hearts were merry, they said, "Call Samson, that he may make sport for us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he made sport before them. They made him stand between the pillars; and Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them." Now the house was full of men and women; all the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about three thousand men and women, who looked on while Samson made sport. Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray you, and strengthen me, I pray you, only this once, O God, that I may be avenged upon the Philistines for one of my two eyes." And Samson grasped the two middle pillars upon which the house rested, and he leaned his weight upon them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." Then he bowed with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people that were in it. So the dead whom he slew at his death were more than those whom he had slain during his life. Then his brothers and all his family came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Esh'ta-ol in the tomb of Mano'ah his father. He had judged Israel twenty years.

**Responsorial.** *Ps. 42: 1; 30: 4; Jdg. 16: 28*

**R:** Make justice for me, O God, defend my cause against ruthless men. \*  
You are my rock and my bulwark.

**V:** Remember me, Lord, give me strength.

**R:** You are my rock and my bulwark.

**Second Reading.** *Nm. 19 – 20*

*Do not worry about tomorrow.*

**A reading from the treatise “On the Our Father” of St. Cyprian, bishop and martyr.**

“Give us this day our daily bread” (Mt. 6: 11) But it may also be thus understood, that we who have renounced the world, and have cast away its riches and pomp in the faith of spiritual grace, should only ask for ourselves food and support, since the Lord instructs us, and says, “Whosoever does not renounce to all his possessions, cannot be my disciple.” (Lk. 14: 33).



But he who has begun to be Christ's disciple, renouncing all things according to the word of his Master, ought to ask for his daily food, and not to extend the desires of his petition to a long period, as the Lord again proclaims, and says, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have its own worries. Each day has troubles of its own" (Mt. 6: 34)

With reason, then, does Christ's disciple ask food for himself for the day, knowing that he cannot make projects for the morrow; because it becomes a contradiction and a repugnant thing for us to seek to live long in this world, since we ask that the kingdom of God should come quickly.

The Lord teaches us that riches are not only despicable, but that they are also full of peril; because in them is the root of all seduction to evil, and they produce in this way the blindness of the mind which remains exposed to every error. For this also God rebukes the rich fool, who thinks of his earthly wealth, and boasts himself in the abundance of his overflowing harvests, saying, "You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you; then whose shall those things be which you have provided?" (Lk. 12: 20). The fool who was to die that very night was rejoicing in his stores, and he to whom life already was failing, was thinking of the abundance of his food.

But, on the other hand, the Lord tells us that he who sells all his goods and distributes them to the poor becomes perfect and complete, and so lays up for himself treasure in heaven. He says that that man is able to follow Him, and to imitate the glory of the Lord's passion, who, free from hindrance, and with his loins girded, is involved in no entanglements of worldly estate, but, at large and free himself, accompanies his possessions, which before have been sent to God. For which result, that every one of us may be able to prepare himself, let him thus learn to pray, and know, from the character of the prayer, what he ought to be.

**Responsorial.** *Cfr. Mt. 6: 31-34*

**R:** Do not worry about tomorrow, saying: what are we to eat or what are we to drink or how are we to clothe ourselves. \* Your heavenly Father knows what you need.

**V:** Search first for the kingdom of God and his justice, and all other things will be given to you as well.

**R:** Your heavenly Father knows what you need.

**First Reading.** *Zec. 8: 1 –17, 20 – 23*

*The universal salvation in the New Jerusalem.*

**A reading from the prophet Zechariah.**

And the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath.

Thus says the LORD: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain. Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. Thus says the LORD of hosts: If it is marvellous in the sight of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in my sight, says the LORD of hosts?

Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country; and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness."

Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Let your hands be strong, you who in these days have been hearing these words from the mouth of the prophets, since the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built.

For before those days there was no wage for man or any wage for beast, neither was there any safety from the foe for him who went out or came in; for I set every man against his fellow. But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, says the LORD of hosts. For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, and the ground shall give its increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.

And as you have been a byword of cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you and you shall be a blessing. Fear not, but let your hands be strong." For thus says the LORD of hosts: "As I purposed to do evil to you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the LORD of hosts, so again have I purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear not.

These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, says the LORD."

"Thus says the LORD of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities; the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, 'Let us go at once to entreat the favour of the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts; I am going.' Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favour of the LORD.

Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"

**Responsorial.** *Cfr. Zec. 8: 7, 9; Act. 3: 25*

**R:** Behold, from the land of the east and from the land of the west I will save my people. \* Let your hands regain their strength, you who have been listening to the words of the prophets.

**V:** You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God has established with your fathers.

**R:** Let your hands regain their strength, you who have been listening to the words of the prophets

**Second Reading.** *Treatise 26: 4 – 6*

*Behold I will save my people.*

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

“No one can come to me, unless he is drawn by the Father” (Jn. 6: 44). Do not think of being drawn against your will: the soul is attracted also by love. Nor must we fear of being criticized for these evangelical words of the Sacred Scriptures by those who are weighing the words, but who are completely incapable of understanding the divine reality. They could object to us: How can I admit that my faith is a free act, if I am dragged? I answer: There is no wonder that we feel a force of attraction on the will. The pleasure too has such a force of attraction.

What does it mean to be attracted by pleasure? “Search for joy in the Lord, he will grant the desires of your heart” (Ps. 36: 4). There exists therefore a certain delight of the heart, through which it enjoys that heavenly bread. The poet Virgil could affirm: Each one is attracted by his own pleasure. Not therefore by necessity, but by pleasure, not by constriction, but by delight. All the more we cannot say that the man who finds his delight in the truth, in the beatitude, in justice, in the eternal life is attracted to Christ, from the moment that Christ is exactly all this.

Or perhaps the senses of the body have their pleasures and the soul must not have them? If the soul does not have its delights, how is it that the psalm says: “ In the shadow of your wings men take refuge, they satisfy themselves of the abundance of your house, and they drink from the torrents of your delights. In you is the spring of life and in your light we see the light” (Ps. 35: 8-10).

Give me one who loves, and he will understand what I am saying. Give me one who burns with desire, one who is hungry, who feels himself a pilgrim and thirsty in this desert, one who yearns for the fountain of the eternal homeland, give me one who experiences inside himself all this and he will understand my affirmation. If instead I spoke to a cold and insensible heart, it would not be able to understand what I say.

You show a sheep a green twig and you will draw it behind you. Show nuts to a boy, and he is attracted and he runs where he feels drawn; he is drawn by love, he is drawn without undergoing physical constriction; he is drawn by the bonds that bind the heart. If, therefore, these delights and earthly pleasures, presented to their lovers, exercise over them a strong attraction – because it is always true that each one is attracted by his own pleasure – how will Christ, who is revealed to us by the Father, not be able to attract us? What else does the soul desire so ardently, if not the truth? Of what should man be eager for, to what end should he desire that his internal palate is healthy in judging the truth, if not to satisfy himself of wisdom, of justice, of the truth, of immortal life?

The Lord therefore says: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice” down here, “for they will be satisfied”, up there (Mt. 5: 6). I grant him that which he loves, I give him that which he hopes for. He will see that which now through faith he accepts without seeing. He will feed of that of which he now hungers, his thirst will be quenched with that of which he

now thirsts. But where and when? In the resurrection of the dead, because: "I will raise him up on the last day" (Jn. 6: 54).

**Responsorial.** *Jn. 6: 44-45*

**R:** No one can come to me, unless he is drawn by the Father who has sent me. \* Whoever has heard the Father and has been taught by him, comes to me.

**V:** It is written in the prophets: Everyone will be taught by God.

**R:** Whoever has heard the Father and has been taught by him, comes to me

**Gospel.** *Mt. 7: 1 –5*

*First remove the log from your eye.*

**A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.**

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

## TUESDAY

### CYCLE 1

**First Reading.** *1 Sam. 1:1 –19*

*The sterility of Hannah and her prayer.*

**A reading from the first book of Samuel.**

There was a certain man of Ramatha'im-zo'phim of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elka'nah the son of Jero'ham, son of Eli'hu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an E'phraimite. He had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Penin'nah. And Penin'nah had children, but Hannah had no children.

Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phin'ehas, were priests of the LORD. On the day when Elka'nah sacrificed, he would give portions to Penin'nah his wife and to all her sons and daughters; and, although he loved Hannah, he would give Hannah only one portion, because the LORD had closed her womb. And her rival used to provoke her sorely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. And Elka'nah, her husband, said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?"

After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your maidservant, and remember me, and not forget your maidservant, but will give to your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head."

As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard; therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman. And Eli said to her, "How long will you be drunken? Put away your wine from you." But

Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman sorely troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. Do not regard your maidservant as a base woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation." Then Eli answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have made to him."

And she said, "Let your maidservant find favour in your eyes." Then the woman went her way and ate, and her countenance was no longer sad. They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elka'nah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her;

**Responsorial.** *1 Sam. 1: 11; Ps. 112: 9*

**R:** O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your maid servant, and remember me, and not forget your maid servant, but you will give to your maid servant a son; \* I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life.

**V:** To the childless wife he gives a home and gladdens her heart with children.

**R:** I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life

**Second Reading.** *Nm. 22 – 23*

*After food the forgiveness of sins is asked.*

**A reading from the treatise “On the Our Father” of St. Cyprian, bishop and martyr.**

After this we also entreat for our sins, saying, “And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.” After the supply of food, pardon of sin is also asked for, that he who is fed by God may live in God, and that not only the present and temporal life may be provided for, but the eternal also, to which we may come if our sins are forgiven; and these the Lord calls debts, as He says in His Gospel, “I forgave you all that debt, because you begged me.” (Mt. 18: 32).

And how necessarily, how providently and salutarily, are we admonished that we are sinners, since we are compelled to entreat for our sins, and while pardon is asked for from God, the soul recalls its own consciousness of sin!

Lest any one should flatter himself that he is innocent, and by exalting himself should more deeply perish, he is instructed and taught that he sins daily, in that he is bidden to entreat daily for his sins.

Thus, moreover, John also in his epistle warns us, and says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; but if we confess our sins, the Lord is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." (1 Jn. 1: 8-9).

In his epistle he has combined both, that we should entreat for our sins, and that we should obtain pardon when we ask. Therefore he said that the Lord was faithful to forgive sins, keeping the faith of His promise; because He who taught us to pray for our debts and sins, has promised that His fatherly mercy and pardon shall follow.

Christ has clearly joined herewith and added the law, and has bound us by a certain condition and engagement, that we should ask that our debts be forgiven us in such a manner as we ourselves forgive our debtors, knowing that that which we seek for our sins cannot be obtained unless we ourselves have acted in a similar way in respect of our debtors. Therefore also He says in another place, "With the measure with which you measure out, it shall be measured to you again." ( Mt. 7: 2). And the servant who, after having had all his debt forgiven him by his master, would not forgive his fellow-servant, is cast back into prison; because he would not forgive his fellow-servant, he lost the indulgence that had been shown to him by his Lord.

And these things Christ still more urgently sets forth in His precepts with yet greater power of His rebuke. "When you stand praying," says He, "forgive if you have something against someone, that your Father who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive you your trespasses." (Mk. 11: 25). There remains no ground of excuse in the Day of Judgment, when you will be judged according to your own sentence; and whatever you have done, that you also will suffer. For God commands us to be peacemakers, (cfr. Mt. 5: 9) and in agreement, and of one mind in His house; and such as He makes us by a second birth, such He wishes us when new-born to



continue, that we who have begun to be sons of God may abide in God's peace, and that, having one spirit, we should also have one heart and one mind. Thus God does not receive the sacrifice of a person who is in disagreement, but commands him to go back from the altar and first be reconciled to his brother, that so God also may be appeased by the prayers of a peacemaker. Our peace and brotherly agreement is the greater sacrifice to God, — and a people united in one in the unity of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**Responsorial.** *Ps. 30: 2, 4; 24: 18*

**R:** In you, Lord I have taken refuge, I will never be deluded. You are my rock and my stronghold: \* by your name direct my steps.

**V:** See my misery and my sufferings, forgive all my sins;

**R:** by your name direct my steps.

## CYCLE 2

**First Reading.** *Ezra 6: 1 – 5, 14 – 22*

*Construction of the Temple and celebration of Passover.*

**A reading from the book of Ezra.**

Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in Babylonia, in the house of the archives where the documents were stored. And in Ecbat'ana, the capital which is in the province of Media, a scroll was found on which this was written: "A record.

In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king issued a decree: Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be rebuilt, the place where sacrifices are offered and burnt offerings are brought; its height shall be sixty cubits and its breadth sixty cubits, with three courses of great stones and one course of timber; let the cost be paid from the royal treasury.

And also let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the temple which is in Jerusalem, each to its place; you shall put them in the house of God." And the elders of the Jews built and prospered, through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They finished their building by

command of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia; and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. They offered at the dedication of this house of God one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve he-goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

And they set the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God at Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses. On the fourteenth day of the first month the returned exiles kept the Passover. For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were clean. So they killed the Passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for their fellow priests, and for themselves; it was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile, and also by every one who had joined them and separated himself from the pollutions of the peoples of the land to worship the LORD, the God of Israel.

And they kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy; for the LORD had made them joyful, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

**Responsorial.** *Cfr. Hag. 2: 6, 7, 9 (Vulg. 2: 7, 8, 10)*

**R:** I will shake the heavens and the earth: \* and the One who is desired by all the nations will come.

**V:** The joy of this house will be great, and in this place I will give peace.

**R:** And the One who is desired by all the nations will come.

**Second Reading.** *Nm. 1 – 4*

*We are the temple of the living God.*

**A reading from the treatise “On the fast of Lent” of St. Leo the Great, pope.**

Dearly beloved, the teaching of the apostles admonishes us so that, having put aside the old man with his actions, every day we renew ourselves with a style of life that is holy (cfr. Col. 3: 9-10). If in fact we are the temple of God and the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts as the Apostle says: “We are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor. 6: 16), we must be very careful that the dwelling of our hearts should not be unworthy of such a guest.

And as in the human dwellings care is taken with praiseworthy diligence to repair in good time the damages due to the infiltration of the rains, to the fury of the bad weather or to the age itself, with equal solicitude we must worry ourselves so that in our hearts there should be nothing that is untidy, nothing impure. Though in fact our building does not exist without the work of its builder, and our fabrication cannot be unscathed without the anticipated protection of the constructor, yet, since we are rational stones and the living material, the hand of our author has structured us in such a way that he who undergoes repairs also works with the one who does the repairs.

The human subjection therefore does not withdraw itself from the divine grace, nor does it draw away from that Good without which the goods do not exist. And if in putting into practise the commandments we find something which is personally impossible for us or difficult to carry out, let us not remain in ourselves, but let us turn to him who imposes it on us; he in fact gives us the precept exactly in order to rouse our desire and to offer us his help, as the prophet says: “Throw your worries on the Lord, and he will sustain you” (Ps. 54: 23).

Or perhaps there is someone who is so insolent and proud, who considers himself so intact and pure that he has no need of any renewal? Similar persuasions are very misleading, and whoever amidst the temptations of this life believes himself to be immune to all wounds, grows old in a great foolishness.

It is true that in every part of the world and in every age the hearts of the faithful have never had doubts about the divine providence, nor have they held that the fulfilling of the human events are connected with the power of the stars, nothing in reality, knowing that every thing is arranged according to the infinitely just and good will of the supreme king, since it is written: “All the paths of the Lord are truth and grace” (Ps. 24: 10). When

however certain things do not happen according to our desires and because of the error of human judgement the cause of the iniquitous has greater fortune than that of the just man, it is very easy and probable that these facts disorientate even the strong spirits, pushing them to lament a little about the unjust direction of the things, so much so even the holy prophet David confessed himself troubled in a dangerous way by these inconsistencies (cfr. Ps. 72). Therefore great strength belongs to a few; and since not only the adversity but also the prosperity corrupts many faithful, it is necessary to have diligent care in healing the wounds of which the human weakness is wounded.

**Responsorial.** *1 Cor. 6: 19-20; cfr. Lev. 11: 43-44*

**R:** Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you and whom you have received from God, and that you do not belong to yourselves? In fact you were bought at a price. \* Therefore honour God with your body.

**V:** Do not make yourselves impure, be holy because I am holy.

**R:** Therefore honour God with your body.

**Gospel.** *Mt. 7: 6, 12 – 14*

*All that you want men to do to you, you also do to them.*

**A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.**

"Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you. So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.



## WEDNESDAY

### CYCLE 1

**First Reading.** *1 Sam. 1: 20 – 28; 2: 11 – 21*

*Birth and consecration of Samuel.*

**A reading from the first book of Samuel.**

And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the LORD." And the man Elka'nah and all his house went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice, and to pay his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the LORD, and abide there for ever." Elka'nah her husband said to her, "Do what seems best to you, wait until you have weaned him; only, may the LORD establish his word." So the woman remained and nursed her son, until she weaned him. And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine; and she brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh; and the child was young. Then they slew the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the LORD. For this child I prayed; and the LORD has granted me my petition which I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD." And they worshiped the LORD there.

Then Elka'nah went home to Ramah. And the boy ministered to the LORD, in the presence of Eli the priest.

Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they had no regard for the LORD. The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand, and he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. So they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give meat for the priest to roast; for he will not accept boiled meat from you, but raw." And if the man said

to him, "Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish," he would say, "No, you must give it now; and if not, I will take it by force."

Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD; for the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt. Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy girded with a linen ephod. And his mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. Then Eli would bless Elka'nah and his wife, and say, "The LORD give you children by this woman for the loan which she lent to the LORD"; so then they would return to their home. And the LORD visited Hannah, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew in the presence of the LORD.

**Responsorial.** *1 Sam. 2: 1, 2; Lk. 1: 46*

**R:** My heart exults in the Lord, since I rejoice in the benefits that he has granted me. \* No one is holy like the Lord, there is no rock like our God.

**V:** My soul praises the Lord and my spirit exults in God, my saviour.

**R:** No one is holy like the Lord, there is no rock like our God.

**Second Reading.** *Nm. 24 – 25*

*We who are the children of God, remain in the peace of God.*

**A reading from the treatise “On the Our Father” of St. Cyprian, bishop and martyr.**

For even in the sacrifices which Abel and Cain first offered, God looked not at their gifts, but at their hearts, so that he was acceptable in his gift who was acceptable in his heart. Abel, peaceable and righteous in sacrificing in innocence to God, taught others also, when they bring their gift to the altar, thus to come with the fear of God, with a simple heart, with the law of righteousness, with the peace of concord. With reason did Abel, who was such in respect of God's sacrifice, become subsequently himself a sacrifice to God; so that he who first set forth martyrdom, and initiated the Lord's passion by the glory of his blood, had both the Lord's righteousness and His peace. Finally, such are crowned by the Lord, such will be avenged with the Lord in the day of judgment; but the quarrelsome and disunited, and he who has not peace with his brethren, in accordance with what the blessed apostle and the Holy Scripture testifies, even if he have been slain

for the name of Christ, shall not be able to escape the crime of fraternal dissension, because, as it is written, “He who hates his brother is a murderer” (1 Jn. 3: 15) and no murderer attains to the kingdom of heaven, nor does he live with God. He cannot be with Christ, who had rather be an imitator of Judas than of Christ. How great is the sin that cannot even be washed away by a baptism of blood — how heinous the crime that cannot be expiated by martyrdom!

Moreover, the Lord of necessity admonishes us to say in prayer, “And suffer us not to be led into temptation.” (Mt. 6: 19). In which words it is shown that the adversary can do nothing against us except that which God shall have previously permitted; so that all our fear, and devotion, and obedience may be turned towards God, since in our temptations nothing is permitted to evil unless power is given from Him.

**Responsorial.** *Rm. 14: 19; Sir. 17: 12*

**R:** Let us give ourselves to the works of peace \* to the edification of one another.

**V:** God gave to each one precepts towards the neighbour.

**R:** To the edification of one another

## CYCLE 2

**First Reading.** *Ezra 7: 6 – 28*

*Mission of the priest Ezra.*

**A reading from the book of Ezra.**

Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the LORD the God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was upon him. And there went up also to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Ar-ta-xerx'es the king, some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites, the singers and gatekeepers, and the temple servants. And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king; for on the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylonia, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, for the good hand of his God



was upon him. For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel.

This is a copy of the letter which King Ar-ta-xerx'es gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, learned in matters of the commandments of the LORD and his statutes for Israel: "Ar-ta-xerx'es, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven. And now I make a decree that any one of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom, who freely offers to go to Jerusalem, may go with you. For you are sent by the king and his seven counsellors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God, which is in your hand, and also to convey the silver and gold which the king and his counsellors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, with all the silver and gold which you shall find in the whole province of Babylonia, and with the freewill offerings of the people and the priests, vowed willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem.

With this money, then, you shall with all diligence buy bulls, rams, and lambs, with their cereal offerings and their drink offerings, and you shall offer them upon the altar of the house of your God that is in Jerusalem. Whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do, according to the will of your God. The vessels that have been given you for the service of the house of your God, you shall deliver before the God of Jerusalem. And whatever else is required for the house of your God, which you have occasion to provide, you may provide it out of the king's treasury. "And I, Ar-ta-xerx'es the king, make a decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: Whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, requires of you, be it done with all diligence, up to a hundred talents of silver, a hundred cors of wheat, a hundred baths of wine, a hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done in full for the house of the God of heaven, lest his wrath be against the realm of the king and his sons. We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll upon any one of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or other servants of this house of God.

"And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God which is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and

those who do not know them, you shall teach. Whoever will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed upon him, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of his goods or for imprisonment."

Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty officers. I took courage, for the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.

**Responsorial.** *Dan. 3: 52, 53*

**R:** Blessed are you, Lord, God of our Fathers, \* worthy of praise and glory forever and ever.

**V:** Blessed are you in your glorious holy temple,

**R:** worthy of praise and glory forever and ever.

**Second Reading.** *C. 24*

*You who have been crucified with Christ, offer yourself to God as a pure priest.*

**A reading from the letter "On Virginity" of St. Gregory of Nyssa, bishop.**

Look on him who is perfect, and boldly launch upon the voyage with confidence that it will be prosperous, and sail on under the breeze of the Holy Spirit with Christ your pilot on the boat of temperance.

If one single approach to sin is such an awful thing that you deem it safer not to take in hand at all this loftier aim, how much more awful a thing it is to make sin the occupation of the entire existence, and to remain thereby absolutely ignorant to the ideal of a pure life. How can you in your full life obey the Crucified? How can you, hale in sin, obey Him Who died to sin? How can you, who are not crucified to the world, and will not accept the mortification of the flesh, obey Him Who bids you follow after Him, and Who bore the Cross in His own body, as a trophy from the foe? (cfr. Gal. 6: 14). How can you obey Paul when he exhorts you "to present your body as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God," (Rm. 12: 1), when you are "conformed to this world," and not transformed by the renewing of

your mind, when you are not “walking” in this “newness of life,” (cfr: Rm. 6: 4) but still pursuing the routine of “the old man”?

How can you be a priest unto God, anointed though you are for this very office, to offer a gift to God; a gift in no way another's, no counterfeited gift from sources outside yourself, but a gift that is really your own, namely, “the inner man,” who must be perfect and blameless, as it is required of a lamb to be without spot or blemish? (cfr. 1 Pet. 1: 18-19). How can you offer this to God, when you do not listen to the law forbidding the unclean to offer sacrifices? If you long for God to manifest Himself to you, why do you not hear Moses, when he commands the people to be pure from the carnal relationships, that they may take in the vision of God? If this all seems little in your eyes, to be crucified with Christ, to present yourself a sacrifice to God, to become a priest unto the most high God, to make yourself worthy of the vision of the Almighty, what higher blessings than these can we imagine for you, if indeed you make light of the consequences of these as well? And the consequence of being crucified with Christ is that we shall live with Him, and be glorified with Him, and reign with Him; and the consequence of presenting ourselves to God is that we shall be changed from the rank of human nature and human dignity to that of Angels.

He too who has taken his share in the true priesthood and placed himself beside the Great High Priest remains altogether himself a priest for ever, prevented for eternity from remaining any more in death. To say, again, that one makes oneself worthy to see God, produces no less a result than this; that one is made worthy to see God. Indeed, the crown of every hope, and of every desire, of every blessing, and of every promise of God, and of all those unspeakable delights which we believe to exist beyond our perception and our knowledge, — the crowning result of them all, I say, is this. Moses longed earnestly to see it, and many prophets and kings have desired to see the same (Lk. 10: 24): but the only class deemed worthy of it are the pure in heart, those who are, and are named “blessed,” for this very reason, that “they shall see God.” (cfr: Mt. 5: 8). Wherefore we would that you too should become crucified with Christ, a holy priest standing before God, a pure offering in all chastity, preparing yourself by your own holiness for God's coming; that you also may have a pure heart in which to see God, according to the promise of God, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

**Responsorial.** *Lk. 26: 11, 12; 2 Cor. 6: 16*

**R:** I will establish my dwelling in the midst of you and I will not reject you:

\* I will walk in the midst of you, I will be your God and you will be my people.

**V:** We are in fact the temple of the living God, as God himself has said:

**R:** I will walk in the midst of you, I will be your God and you will be my people.

**Gospel.** *Mt. 7: 15 – 20*

*From their fruits you will recognize them.*

**A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.**

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

# THURSDAY

## CYCLE 1

**First Reading.** *1 Sam. 2:22 – 36*

*Condemnation of the family of Eli.*

**A reading from the first book of Samuel.**

Now Eli was very old, and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting. And he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad. If a man sins against a man, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father; for it was the will of the LORD to slay them. Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favour with the LORD and with men.

And there came a man of God to Eli, and said to him, "Thus the LORD has said, 'I revealed myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt subject to the house of Pharaoh. And I chose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me; and I gave to the house of your father all my offerings by fire from the people of Israel. Why then look with greedy eye at my sacrifices and my offerings which I commanded, and honour your sons above me by fattening yourselves upon the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?' Therefore the LORD the God of Israel declares: 'I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before me for ever'; but now the LORD declares: 'Far be it from me; for those who honour me I will honour, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

Behold, the days are coming, when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house. Then in distress you will look with envious eye on all the prosperity that shall be bestowed upon Israel; and there shall not be an old man in your house forever.

The man of you whom I shall not cut off from my altar shall be spared to weep out his eyes and grieve his heart; and all the increase of your house shall die by the sword of men. And this that shall befall your two sons, Hophni and Phin'ehas, shall be the sign to you: both of them shall die on the same day. And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind; and I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed for ever.

And every one who is left in your house shall come to implore him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread, and shall say, "Put me, I pray you, in one of the priest's places, that I may eat a morsel of bread."

**Responsorial.** *Job. 5: 17, 18; Heb. 12: 5*

**R:** Happy the man who is corrected by God: therefore do not disdain the correction of the Almighty. \* He makes the wound and binds it up, he wounds and his hand heals again.

**V:** Do not despise the correction of the Lord and do not lose heart when he rebukes you.

**R:** He makes the wound and binds it up, he wounds and his hand heals again.

**Second Reading.** *Nm. 26 – 27*

*Pray and keep vigil.*

**A reading from the treatise “On the Our Father” of St. Cyprian, bishop and martyr.**

Now power is given to the devil against us in two modes: either for punishment when we sin, or for glory when we overcome the trial, as we see was done with respect to Job; as God Himself sets forth, saying, “Behold, all that he has I give into your hands; but be careful not to touch him.” (Jb. 1: 12). And the Lord in His Gospel says, in the time of His passion, “You could have no power against me unless it were given you from above.” (Jn. 19: 11).

But when we ask that we may not come into temptation, we are reminded of our infirmity and weakness in that we thus ask, lest any should insolently vaunt himself, lest any should proudly and arrogantly assume anything to himself, lest any should take to himself the glory either of confession or of suffering as his own, when the Lord Himself, teaching

humility, said, "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak;" (Mt. 26: 41) so that while a humble and submissive confession comes first, and all is attributed to God, whatever is sought for suppliantly with fear and honour of God, may be granted by His own loving-kindness.

After all these things, in the conclusion of the prayer comes a brief clause, which shortly and comprehensively sums up all our petitions and our prayers. For we conclude by saying, "But deliver us from evil," (Mt. 6: 13) comprehending all adverse things which the enemy attempts against us in this life, from which there may be a faithful and sure protection if God delivers us, if He afford His help to us who pray for and implore it. And when we say, Deliver us from evil, there remains nothing further which ought to be asked. When we have once asked for God's protection against evil, and have obtained it, then against everything that the devil and the world work against us we stand secure and safe. For what fear is there in this life, to the man whose guardian in this life is God?

**Responsorial.** *Ep. 6: 10-11; cfr. Jb. 7: 1*

**R:** Draw strength from the Lord and the vigour of his power. \* Clothe yourselves with the armour of God, in order to resist the snares of the devil.

**V:** The life of man on earth is a battle.

**R:** Clothe yourselves with the armour of God, in order to resist the snares of the devil.

## CYCLE 2

**First Reading.** *Ezra 9: 1 – 9, 15 – 10: 5*

*Dissolving of the marriages prohibited by the law.*

**A reading from the book of Ezra.**

After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Per'izzites, the Jeb'usites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons; so that the

holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost." When I heard this, I rent my garments and my mantle, and pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat appalled. Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered round me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice. And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garments and my mantle rent, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God, saying: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt; and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and to utter shame, as at this day.

But now for a brief moment favour has been shown by the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant, and to give us a secure hold within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage. For we are bondmen; yet our God has not forsaken us in our bondage, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem.

O LORD the God of Israel, you are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as at this day. Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this."

While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children, gathered to him out of Israel; for the people wept bitterly. And Shecani'ah the son of Jehi'el, of the sons of Elam, addressed Ezra: "We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. Therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.

Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it." Then Ezra arose and made the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take oath that they would do as had been said. So they took the oath.



**Responsorial.** *Ezra 9: 6, 10; Ps. 129: 3*

**R:** Our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens; \* since we have abandoned your commandments.

**V:** If you O Lord, should consider our guilt, Lord who would survive?

**R:** Since we have abandoned your commandments.

**Second Reading.** *Hom. 6: 1 – 3*

*The foundation of the oration.*

**A reading from an ancient homily.**

Those who draw near to the Lord, must pray a lot, with relaxation, peace and tranquillity, addressing themselves to him not with confused and inopportune cries, but with the intention of the heart and sober thoughts.

It is not suitable for the servant of God to live in a state of agitation, but with complete tranquillity and wisdom, as the prophet says: “On whom shall I turn my gaze? On the humble and on the one who is contrite of heart, on the one who fears my word” (Is. 66: 2).

We find that at the time of Moses and of Elijah, in the apparitions that they had, though the majesty of the Lord had been preceded by many mysteries and prodigies in favour of the people, notwithstanding all this, the advent of the Lord took place in peace, tranquillity and quiet.

It is written in fact: “After the fire there was the murmuring sound of a gentle breeze” (1 Kgs. 19: 12): the Lord was there. It is clear therefore that the rest of God is in peace and tranquillity.

The foundation that man places, and the way in which he begins he will continue until the end. If he begins to pray with a voice that is too loud and complaining, he will maintain the same habit until the end. And since the Lord is full of goodness, he will come to his help also. These people therefore, encouraged by grace, maintain the same habits until the end, although we see that this way of praying belongs to the ignorant because, other than causing a nuisance to the others, it disturbs they themselves while they are praying.

The true foundation of prayer is this: to dominate your own thoughts and to pray with a lot of tranquillity and peace, so that the others may not be disturbed in any way. He then who having obtained the grace of God and

perfection, will have continued to pray in tranquillity, will be a great edification for many, "Because God is not a God of disorder, but of peace" (1 Cor. 14: 33).

Those who are used to making a din are similar to the charlatans and cannot pray everywhere as it is pleasing to them, neither in the churches, nor on the road, but only in solitude. Those instead who pray in tranquillity, edify everyone in whatever place. It is necessary in fact that all the strength of man commits itself in meditating, cutting off the wicked thoughts so as to turn oneself completely to God; without abandoning oneself to the whims of distracting thoughts, but on the contrary gathering them and separating the good from the wicked. A great attention and diligence of the spirit is therefore necessary in order to know how to distinguish the external suggestions that are born from the adverse power.

**Responsorial.** *Jn. 4: 23, 24*

**R:** The true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, \* for they are the kind of worshippers that the Father seeks.

**V:** God is Spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and truth,

**R:** for they are the kind of worshippers that the Father seeks.

**Gospel.** *Mt. 7: 21 – 29*

*The house constructed on the rock and the house constructed on sand.*

**A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.**

"Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'

"Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the

winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it."

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

# FRIDAY

## CYCLE 1

**First Reading.** *1 Sam. 3:1 – 21*

*Vocation of Samuel.*

**A reading from the first book of Samuel.**

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim, so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down within the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. And the LORD called again, "Samuel!" And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the LORD came and stood forth, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears."

Then the LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel, at which the two ears of every one that hears it will tingle. On that day I will fulfil against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. And I tell him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering for ever." Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." And Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so

to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD; let him do what seems good to him."

And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the LORD. And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

**Responsorial.** *Sir. 46: 13, 15; Is. 42: 1*

**R:** Samuel, loved by the Lord of whom he was prophet, instituted the monarchy and consecrated the princes of his people. \* Through his faithfulness he showed himself a prophet, with words he was recognised as a true seer.

**V:** Behold my servant whom I uphold, my elect in whom I am well pleased.

**R:** Through his faithfulness he showed himself a prophet, with words he was recognised as a true seer.

**Second Reading.** *Nm. 28 – 29*

*There is need to pray not only with words, but also with facts.*

**A reading from the treatise “On the Our Father” of St. Cyprian, bishop and martyr.**

What wonder is it, beloved brethren, if such is the prayer which God taught, seeing that He condensed in His teaching all our prayer in one saving sentence? This had already been before foretold by Isaiah the prophet, when, being filled with the Holy Spirit, he spoke of the majesty and loving-kindness of God, and of his word which contains everything and summarizes everything in a key of salvation; it is written in fact: “With fullness and rapidity the Lord will accomplish his word over the earth” (Rm. 9. 28). For when the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, came unto all, and gathering alike the learned and unlearned, published to every sex and every age the precepts of salvation He made a large compendium of His precepts, that the memory of the disciples might not be burdened in the celestial doctrine, but might quickly learn what was necessary to a simple faith. Thus, when He taught what is eternal life, He embraced the sacrament of life in a large and divine brevity, saying, “And this is eternal life, that

they might know You, the only and true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.” (Jn. 17: 3).

Nor was it only in words, but in deeds also, that the Lord taught us to pray, Himself praying frequently and beseeching, and thus showing us, by the testimony of His example, what we must do, as it is written, “But Jesus departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.” (Lk. 5: 16). And again: “He went up a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.” (Lk. 6: 12). But if He prayed who was without sin, how much more ought sinners to pray; and if He prayed continually, watching through the whole night in uninterrupted petitions, how much more ought we to watch nightly in constantly repeated prayer!

**Responsorial.** *Ps. 24: 1-2, 5*

**R:** To you, Lord I lift up my soul. \* My God in you I trust: I will not be confused!

**V:** Guide me in your truth and instruct me, because you are the God of my salvation, in you have I always hoped.

**R:** My God in you I trust: I will not be confused!

## CYCLE 2

**First Reading.** *Neh. 1:1 – 2: 8*

*Nehemiah is sent by the king in Judea.*

**A reading from the book of Nehemiah.**

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacali'ah. Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the capital, that Hana'ni, one of my brethren, came with certain men out of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that survived, who had escaped exile, and concerning Jerusalem.

And they said to me, "The survivors there in the province who escaped exile are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire." When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days; and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love

him and keep his commandments; let your ear be attentive, and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant which I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Yes, I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances which you did command your servant Moses. Remember the word which you did command your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your dispersed be under the farthest skies, I will gather them thence and bring them to the place which I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.'

They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name; and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

Now I was cupbearer to the king.

In the month of Nissan, in the twentieth year of King Ar-ta-xerx'es, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. And the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing else but sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid. I said to the king, "Let the king live for ever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lies waste, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" Then the king said to me, "For what do you make request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favour in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may rebuild it." And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), "How long will you be gone, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah; and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house which I

shall occupy." And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

**Responsorial.** *Neh. 1: 5, 6, 11*

**R:** Lord, God of heaven, great and tremendous God, may your ears be attentive \* to hear the prayer of your servant.

**V:** Lord, may your ears be attentive,

**R:** to hear the prayer of your servant.

**Second Reading.** *Disc. 5 on the Ascension.*

*We await the heavenly consolation.*

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

It is truly with praiseworthy strength of soul that the little flock, deprived of the comfort of the shepherd, but in no way doubting that he would take care of him with paternal solicitude, knocked on heaven with devout entreaties, in the certainty that the prayers of the just can penetrate it and that the Lord does not disappoint the prayer of the poor, which does not return without abundant blessings. And they insisted with patient perseverance, according to the saying of the prophet: “If he delays wait for him. Because he will certainly come and he will not delay” (Hab. 2: 3).

Justly therefore the ear of God listened to the disposition of their hearts, nor did he render vain the expectation of those who were strong, generous, meek. These virtues are a certain testimony of faith, hope and charity. It is evident that hope generates patience and charity generates union. But is it also true that faith makes strong? On the contrary, it alone. Everything is imagined without faith, it is not solid greatness of soul but inflation of air, vain presumptions. Do you want to hear the words of a generous man? Here they are: “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Phil 4: 13).

Let us prepare ourselves, brothers, with this triple exercise, if we desire to obtain the Spirit in an overabundant measure. To all in fact, with the exception of Christ, the Spirit is conferred in proportion; but the overabundant fullness seems in some way to have surpassed the measure.

The strength of soul in our conversion was evident; there was also the generosity in the continuing, the union in living together. The heavenly Jerusalem desires such persons, to whom the strength of faith in assuming



the yoke of Christ is not lacking, nor the forbearing hope in persevering, or the union of love, which is the bond of perfection.

**Responsorial.** *Mic. 7: 7; Jn. 49: 18*

**R:** I turn my gaze to the Lord, \* I hope in the God of my salvation.

**V:** I hope in your salvation, Lord!

**R:** I hope in the God of my salvation.

**Gospel.** *Mt. 8. 1 – 4*

*If you want you can heal me.*

**A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.**

When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; and behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." And he stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to any one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to the people."

# SATURDAY

## CYCLE 1

**First Reading.** *1 Sam. 4:1 – 18*

*Capture of the Ark of God and the death of Eli.*

**A reading from the first book of Samuel.**

And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines; they encamped at Ebene'zer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who slew about four thousand men on the field of battle.

And when the troops came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD put us to rout today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, that he may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies." So the people sent to Shiloh, and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phin'ehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. When the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" And when they learned that the ark of the LORD had come to the camp, the Philistines were afraid; for they said, "A god has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who smote the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness. Take courage, and acquit yourselves like men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; acquit yourselves like men and fight." So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home; and there was a very great slaughter, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. And the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phin'ehas, were slain.

A man of Benjamin ran from the battle line, and came to Shiloh the same day, with his clothes rent and with earth upon his head. When he

arrived, Eli was sitting upon his seat by the road watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told the news, all the city cried out. When Eli heard the sound of the outcry, he said, "What is this uproar?" Then the man hastened and came and told Eli. Now Eli was ninety-eight years old and his eyes were set, so that he could not see. And the man said to Eli, "I am he who has come from the battle; I fled from the battle today." And he said, "How did it go, my son?" He who brought the tidings answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great slaughter among the people; your two sons also, Hophni and Phin'ehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured."

When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man, and heavy. He had judged Israel forty years.

**Responsorial.** *Ps. 105, 40, 45, 2*

**R:** The anger of the Lord was kindled against his people, and he handed them over to the mercy of the nations, their adversaries dominated them. \* He remembered his covenant with them, he was moved with pity because of his great love.

**V:** Who can narrate the prodigies of the Lord, who can make all his praise resound?

**R:** He remembered his covenant with them, he was moved with pity because of his great love

**Second Reading.** *Nm. 30 – 31*

*The Lord prayed for our sins.*

**A reading from the treatise “On the Our Father” of St. Cyprian, bishop and martyr.**

But the Lord prayed and besought not for Himself — for why should He who was guiltless pray on His own behalf? — but for our sins, as He Himself declared, when He said to Peter, “Behold, Satan has desired that he might sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not.”

(Lk. 22: 31- 32). And subsequently He beseeches the Father for all, saying, “I do not pray only for these, but for them also who will believe in me through their word; that they all may be one; as You, Father, are in me, and I in You, that they also may be one in us.” (Jn. 17: 20-21).

The Lord’s loving-kindness, no less than His mercy, is great in respect of our salvation, in that, not content to redeem us with His blood, He in addition also prayed for us. Behold now what was the desire of His petition, that like as the Father and Son are one, so also we should abide in absolute unity; so that from this it may be understood how greatly he sins who divides unity and peace, since for this same thing even the Lord besought, desirous doubtless that His people should thus be saved and live in peace, since He knew that discord cannot come into the kingdom of God.

Moreover, when we stand praying, beloved brethren, we ought to be watchful and earnest with our whole heart, intent on our prayers. Let all carnal and worldly thoughts pass away, nor let the soul at that time think on anything but the object only of its prayer. For this reason also the priest, by way of preface before the Our Father, prepares the minds of the brethren by saying, “Lift up your hearts,” that so upon the people’s response, “We lift them up unto the Lord,” he may be reminded that he himself ought to think of nothing but the Lord.

Let the breast be closed against the adversary, and be open to God alone; nor let it suffer God’s enemy to approach it at the time of prayer. For frequently he steals upon us, and penetrates within, and by crafty deceit calls away our prayers from God, that we may have one thing in our heart and another in our voice, when not the sound of the voice, but the soul and mind, ought to be praying to the Lord with a simple intention. But what carelessness it is, to be distracted and carried away by foolish and profane thoughts when you are praying to the Lord, as if there were anything which you should rather be thinking of than that you are speaking with God! How can you ask to be heard by God, when you yourself do not hear yourself? Do you wish that God should remember you when you ask, if you yourself do not remember yourself? This is absolutely to take no precaution against the enemy; this is, when you pray to God, to offend the majesty of God by the carelessness of your prayer; this is to be watchful with your eyes, and to be asleep with your heart, while the Christian, even though he is asleep with his eyes, ought to be awake with his heart.

**Responsorial.** *Jer. 29: 12, 13; Lk. 11: 9*

**R:** You will invoke me and I will hear you; you will search for me and you will find me, \* since you will search for me with all your heart.

**V:** Ask and it will be given to you; search and you will find:

**R:** since you will search for me with all your heart.

## CYCLE 2

**First Reading.** *Neh. 2: 9 – 20*

*Nehemiah prepares the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem.*

**A reading from the book of Nehemiah.**

Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. But when Sanbal'lat the Hor'onite and Tobi'ah the servant, the Ammonite, heard this, it displeased them greatly that some one had come to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.

So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; and I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no beast with me but the beast on which I rode. I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Jackal's Well and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates which had been destroyed by fire. Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool; but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall; and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned.

And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing; and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest that were to do the work. Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer disgrace." And I told them of the hand of my God which had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

But when Sanbal'lat the Hor'onite and Tobi'ah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they derided us and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build; but you have no portion or right or memorial in Jerusalem."

**Responsorial.** *Neh. 2: 17, 20*

**R:** Jerusalem is in ruin and its gates are consumed by fire. \* Come, let us rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and we will not be insulted anymore.

**V:** The God of heaven will give us success; we are his servants.

**R:** Come, let us rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and we will not be insulted anymore.

**Second Reading.** *C. 3:35 – 36, 37. 40 – 41*

*The heavenly Jerusalem, mother of the first-born.*

**A reading on the “Commentary on the prophet Micah” of St. Cyril of Alexandria, bishop.**

“Behold, I place in Sion a stone, a chosen stone, a cornerstone, a precious stone, and he who believes” in him “will not waver” (Is. 28: 16). The builders of Sion have discarded the chosen and precious stone, but it “has become the cornerstone” (Ps. 117. 22; Mt. 21: 42). Christ in fact reigns over the Gentiles and over the circumcised, because he has recreated them as only one new man, making peace by means of the cross and reuniting all of them on the unique cornerstone with the bond of the Spirit. In fact it is read that “the multitude of those who had come to the faith had only one heart and only one spirit” (Act. 4: 32). Since with holiness and faith we have been conformed to the most important and precious cornerstone, justly Peter writes with wisdom that: “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house” (1 Pet. 2: 5) “in order to be a holy temple, in which God lives by his Spirit” (Ep. 2: 21-22).

“At the end of days the mountain of the temple of the Lord will be lifted up” (Is. 2: 2). In these words the prophecy of the gathering of the Church from among all the nations already appears clearly.

The Israel of the flesh having been eliminated, the sacrifices prescribed by the law having come to an end, the priesthood of the Levites having been

abandoned, and that same temple so nobly famous having been burnt with the destruction of Jerusalem, Christ formed the Church of the nations. And right from then he became similar to us, as he will be in the last days, that is at the end of the world. He calls mountain the Church which is the house of the living God (cfr. 1 Tm. 3: 15). It is truly lofty because in it there is absolutely nothing that is base or vile, but the preaching of the divine truth lifts it up to that which is sublime; besides the life itself of those who are justified in Christ and sanctified in the Spirit is edified enthusiastically upwards.

To us Christ is close to our hearts, and we repute his teachings to be the right road on which to advance, not only today and for the past, but forever. This is the truth. Those who today participate in his sufferings will always walk together, they will participate in his glory and will also reign with him (cfr. Rom. 8: 17; 2 Tm. 12). Those who place nothing before his love who leave out the foolish worldly distractions and who search with care for justice and that which is pleasing to him, have Christ deeply at heart; those who try to excel in virtue, like Paul who writes: “I have been crucified with Christ and it is not I who live anymore, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2: 20).

He teaches besides that Israel cannot lose hope completely. It is in fact punished and rejected for its enormous wickedness, as an enemy of God and worshipper of idols, as an abominable profaner, stained with many crimes. They in fact killed the prophets and even the Saviour of the universe himself, putting on the cross he who had come to free them. But because of the fathers, the remnant, after having attained mercy and salvation, became a great people. To interpret as a great people the multitude of the justified in Christ, is a true and just thing. The loftiness then, for which it is worthy of admiration, is in the virtue of the soul and in the uprightness of the heart; that is the sanctification, the hope in Christ, sister of the faith, the marvellous strength, the stupendous patience: all this causes us to be the kingdom of Christ himself and to adhere to the master. One only, in fact, is our master, Christ (cfr. Mt. 23: 8). He therefore calls mount Sion the heavenly Jerusalem, mother of the first born, in which we will find ourselves with Christ.

**Responsorial.** *1 Pet. 2: 4, 5; Act. 4: 11*

**R:** As you come to him, the living stone: \* you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

**V:** He is the stone which has become the cornerstone.

**R:** You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

**Gospel. Mt. 8: 5 – 17**

***Many will come from east and from the west***

*and they will sit down at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*

**A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.**

As he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, beseeching him and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralysed at home, in terrible distress." And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." But the centurion answered him, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard him, he marvelled, and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; be it done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.

And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever; he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and served him.

That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases."