

WEEK 26

SUNDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Mic. 3:1 – 12*

For the faults of its leaders Jerusalem will be destroyed.

A reading from the prophet Micah.

And I said: Hear, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel! Is it not for you to know justice? -- you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin from off my people, and their flesh from off their bones; who eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them, and break their bones in pieces, and chop them up like meat in a kettle, like flesh in a cauldron.

Then they will cry to the LORD, but he will not answer them; he will hide his face from them at that time, because they have made their deeds evil. Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry "Peace" when they have something to eat, but declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths. Therefore it shall be night to you, without vision, and darkness to you, without divination.

The sun shall go down upon the prophets, and the day shall be black over them; the seers shall be disgraced, and the diviners put to shame; they shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God. But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.

Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong. Its heads give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for hire, its prophets divine for money; yet they lean upon the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD in the midst of us? No evil shall come upon us." Therefore because of you Zion shall be ploughed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.

Responsorial. *Ps. 78: 1; cfr. Dan. 3: 42, 29*

R: O God, they have profaned your holy temple, they have reduced Jerusalem to ruins. * Treat us according to your mercy.

V: We have sinned, we have acted wickedly, going far away from you.

R: Treat us according to your mercy.

Second Reading. N. 28

By his stripes we are healed.

A reading from the “Treatise on the Incarnation of the Lord” of Theodore, bishop of Cyr.

We are healed by the sufferings of our Saviour. This is what the prophet taught when he said: “Surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, by his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; so like a lamb he has been led to the slaughter and like a sheep before its shearers he was dumb” (Is. 53: 4-6, 7).

When the shepherd sees the sheep scattered he takes hold of one of them and leads it to the pastures that he has chosen, and by the example of this one he leads the others in his direction. So too when the divine Word saw mankind wandering aimlessly, he took upon himself the form of a slave and made it his own, in this way turning a fully human nature to himself. Then he led men to the divine pastures, men who beforehand had been badly nourished and a prey to wolves.

That is why our Saviour took our nature. That is why Christ our Lord submitted to the saving passion. When he was given up to death and committed to the grave he broke the hold of that ancient tyranny and gave the promise of incorruptibility to those who were in the grip of corruption. For when he restored the temple that had been destroyed and raised it up again he gave true and firm promises even to the dead and those who were awaiting his resurrection.

He said: “The nature that was taken from among you has been inhabited by God and united with the divine nature. Thus, it has received the gift of resurrection; and now that corruptibility and all forms of passion have been put aside it has passed over to incorruptibility and immortality. In the same way you too will be freed from the harsh slavery of death and, when you have set aside corruption together with all passions, you will be clothed with immortality”.

For this reason he has sent the gift of baptism to all men through the apostles. “Go therefore”, he said, “and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28: 19). Baptism is a sort of representation and type of the Lord’s death. “For if we have been united with him in a death like his”, said St. Paul, “we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rm. 6: 5).

Responsorial *Cf. Jn 10:15, 18; Ezek 34:16*

R: I lay down my life for my sheep. No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will. * This command I have received from my Father.

V: I will search for the lost sheep, I will bind those that are wounded, I will pasture all with justice.

R: This command I have received from my Father.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Judith 2:1 – 6; 3:6a; 4: 1 – 2, 9 – 15*

The people in danger, pray.

A reading from the book of Judith.

In the eighteenth year, on the twenty-second day of the first month, there was talk in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar king of the Assyrians about carrying out his revenge on the whole region, just as he said. He called together all his officers and all his nobles and set forth to them his secret plan and recounted fully, with his own lips, all the wickedness of the region; and it was decided that every one who had not obeyed his command should be destroyed.

When he had finished setting forth his plan, Nebuchadnezzar king of the Assyrians called Holofernes, the chief general of his army, second only to himself, and said to him, "Thus says the Great King, the lord of the whole earth: When you leave my presence, take with you men confident in their strength, to the number of one hundred and twenty thousand foot soldiers and twelve thousand cavalry. Go and attack the whole west country, because they disobeyed my orders.

Then he went down to the seacoast with his army and stationed garrisons in the hilltop cities and took picked men from them as his allies. By this time the people of Israel living in Judea heard of everything that Holofernes, the general of Nebuchadnezzar the king of the Assyrians, had done to the nations, and how he had plundered and destroyed all their temples; they were therefore very greatly terrified at his approach, and were alarmed both for Jerusalem and for the temple of the Lord their God.

So the Israelites did as Joakim the high priest and the senate of the whole people of Israel, in session at Jerusalem, had given order. And every man of Israel cried out to God with great fervour, and they humbled themselves with much fasting. They and their wives and their children and their cattle and every resident alien and hired labourer and purchased slave - - they all girded themselves with sackcloth. And all the men and women of Israel, and their children, living at Jerusalem, prostrated themselves before the temple and put ashes on their heads and spread out their sackcloth before the Lord. They even surrounded the altar with sackcloth and cried out in unison, praying earnestly to the God of Israel not to give up their infants as prey and their wives as booty, and the cities they had inherited to be destroyed, and the sanctuary to be profaned and desecrated to the malicious joy of the Gentiles.

So the Lord heard their prayers and looked upon their affliction; for the people fasted many days throughout Judea and in Jerusalem before the sanctuary of the Lord Almighty. And Joakim the high priest and all the priests who stood before the Lord and ministered to the Lord, with their loins girded with sackcloth, offered the continual burnt offerings and the vows and freewill offerings of the people. With ashes upon their turbans, they cried out to the Lord with all their might to look with favour upon the whole house of Israel.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Jdt. 7: 28 (Vulg. 7: 19); Ps. 105: 6*

R: We have heard of the anguish that the cities suffer and we have felt faint; fear and panic have invaded our children and us. * The mountains themselves do not want to accept our flight: Lord, have pity.

V: Our fathers and we have sinned, we have been unjust, we have committed iniquity.

R: The mountains themselves do not want to accept our flight: Lord, have pity.

Second Reading. Hom. 6

Prayer is the light of the soul and the true knowledge of God.

A reading from the “Homily on prayer” of St. John Chrysostom, bishop.

The prayer or conversation with God is a supreme good: in fact it is an intimate relation or union with God. And as the eyes of the body are illuminated when they see the light, so also the soul that is attentive to God is illuminated by his ineffable light. I intend to speak of a prayer that is not purely exterior, but which springs from the intimacy of the soul; which does not remain circumscribed to certain intervals of time, but is performed uninterruptedly day and night. In fact there is no need to only turn the soul to God suddenly at the moment of prayer, but also when we are engaged with any other occupation: in the assistance of the poor, in other interests or in works of beneficence, we must insert the desire and the remembrance of God, in a way that those actions, seasoned by the love of God as with salt, become a food that is very pleasing to the Lord of the universe. But to us is granted the possibility of enjoying forever the advantage that is derived from prayer, if we have dedicated to it the maximum part of our time.

Prayer is the light of the soul, the true knowledge of God: mediator between God and men, medicine of the passions, remedy to the pains of the sicknesses, comfort of the soul, guide on the heavenly way, that does not turn towards the earth, but is directed towards the summit of the heavens itself. It flies above the creatures, rends the air with the soul and surpasses it, pushing itself past the dancing choirs of the stars, it opens the door of the heavens, it rises up above the angels, up to the inaccessible Trinity itself. There it adores the divinity, there it is held worthy of the union with the King of heaven. The soul, lifted up by it into the heights of heaven, embraces the Lord with ineffable embraces, desiring the divine food like a baby who calls his mother amidst tears: it presents with insistence its supplications and receives gifts that are more excellent than every other visible creature.

Do not believe that the prayer consists in words. Prayer is the desire of God, ineffable love, not produced by men but generated by divine grace, of which also the Apostle says: “We do not even know what it is suitable to ask for, but the Spirit himself intercedes with insistence for us with

inexpressible groans” (Rm. 8: 26). If the Lord grants to someone such a prayer, it constitutes for him an inalienable richness and a heavenly food that satisfies the soul: he who has tasted it is inflamed by an eternal desire of the Lord that flares up in his soul like a very ardent fire.

When you prepare yourself to accomplish this prayer, cover your house with modesty and humility, make it luminous with the light of justice, adorn it with pure gold leaves, that is with good works; decorate it not with precious stones but with faith and the greatness of heart, placing above everything prayer, as the arch that crowns the house. In this way you will prepare your dwelling perfectly for the Lord and you will receive him in it as in a splendid palace, possessing him immediately with his grace, like an image erected in the temple of the soul. To him be glory and power forever and ever.

Responsorial. *Ps. 33: 4, 6; Col. 1: 13, 12*

R: Glorify the Lord with me, together let us exalt his name. * Look to the Lord and be radiant and you will not be confused.

V: It is he who has freed you from the power of darkness and who has made you participate in the lot of the saints in light.

R: Look to the Lord and be radiant and you will not be confused.

YEAR A

Gospel. *Mt. 21: 28-31*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

Jesus said, "What do you think? A man had two sons; and he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he repented and went. And he went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go.

Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him; and even when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him.

Third Reading Cc. 39-40

The true penance is not to fall back again into the same faults

A reading from the book “Which rich man will save himself”, of Clement of Alexandria

The doors are opened to anyone who of a true heart converts to God, and the Father welcomes the son with a heart full of joy, provided he is truly repentant. The true penance then is not only to not fall back again into the same faults, but **to tear out completely from the soul those sins, for which we recognize ourselves guilty of death**. This having been removed, God will dwell again with you. Christ said in fact that in heaven there is the highest and incomparable joy for the Father and for the angels, when a sinner converts and does penance. For this he proclaimed: “What I want is love and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6); “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked desists from his conduct and lives” (Ezek 33:11); “Even if your sins were like scarlet they will become white as snow, if they were red as crimson they will become like wool” (Is 1:18).

Only God can cancel sins and not impute crimes, since God commanded us also to forgive every day the repentant brothers.

That if we, though being wicked know how to do good, how much more the Father of mercies; the good Father from whom every consolation comes, who is full of mercy and very kind, know how to use an extreme patience waiting for the one who converts.

To convert oneself sincerely means to stop sinning, nor to turn anymore to the things of the past. God therefore grants the forgiveness of past sins; each one then remains responsible himself of not falling into new sins. And to repent signifies this: **to have sorrow for the sins committed and to ask with insistence that their memory be cancelled by the Father**: he only, through his mercy, can destroy the past as if it had not taken place, and cancel with the grace of the Spirit the evil of the past life.

Do you want, O thief, that the crime be forgiven you? Stop robbing. That which you have robbed, give back and add something more. You give false witness, learn to be truthful. You commit perjury, abstain from oaths and break the other inclinations and vices.

Perhaps it is impossible to cut off immediately certain passions that have already developed all at once; but with the grace of God, with the

prayers of the others and the help of the brothers, together with a true penance and an assiduous meditation this also can be obtained.

Responsorial. *Sir. 5: 6-7; Rm. 2: 4*

R: With the Lord is mercy and anger, his indignation will be poured out on the sinners. * Do not wait to convert yourself to the Lord, because his anger will suddenly blaze out and at the time of punishment you will be annihilated.

V: Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness should lead you to repentance?

R: Do not wait to convert yourself to the Lord, because his anger will suddenly blaze out and at the time of punishment you will be annihilated.

YEAR B

Gospel. *Mk. 9: 38-43, 47-48*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Mark.

John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us.

For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ, will by no means lose his reward. "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the

kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.

Third Reading. *Nn 42-45*

Make yourselves imitators of God, since you are his beloved children.

A reading from the treatise “On the four steps of vehemence of charity” of Richard of St. Vittore.

When a soul of this world should be consumed by the fire of charity so much as to become malleable and liquefied like wax, what does it lack if not that “the will of God, that is that which is good, pleasing to him and perfect” (Rm. 12: 2) be proposed to it as a norm in order to reach the perfect charity of which it always conforms itself? As melted metal flows with ease towards the lower places, wherever it finds a passage, so also the soul in this state submits itself to every obedience and bends itself voluntarily to every humiliation according to the divine disposition.

To the soul in this state is offered the example of the humility of Christ, saying to it: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross” (Phil 2: 5-7, 8). This is the model of the humility of Christ, to which the one who wants to reach the highest level of the perfect charity should conform himself. “No one has a greater love than this; to give his life for his own friends” (Jn. 15: 13); those therefore who can offer their lives for their friends fulfilling the warning of the Apostle “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly beloved children” (Ep. 5: 1), have reached the summit of love and find themselves on the fourth level of charity.

In the third level the soul glories in God, in the fourth instead it humiliates itself for love of God. In the third level it shapes itself to the splendour of the divine glory, in the fourth it conforms itself to the humility of Christ. In the third level, in a certain way it dies in God, in the fourth it is as if resurrected in Christ. He therefore who finds himself in the fourth level can truly say: “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2: 20). He is generated therefore like a new creature, to which this phrase can be applied: “The old has gone, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5: 17). He who is dead to himself in the third level, is like risen from the dead in the fourth. Already

“he does not die anymore, death has no more power over him: the life he lives, he lives to God” (Rm. 6: 9, 10).

In a certain way, therefore, the soul in this level becomes immortal and impassive. How could it be mortal if it cannot die anymore? And how can it be made to die if it cannot separate itself from him who is the life? We know well of who this sentence is: “I am the way, the truth and the life” (Jn. 14: 6). How therefore can he who cannot be separated from him die? Does it not seem that he who does not suffer anymore for the injuries that he has been subjected to is in a certain way impassive, but rejoices for every insult and welcomes as a honour every punishment that is afflicted on him, according to that expression of the Apostle: “I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me” (2 Cor. 12: 9)? He who takes pleasure in the sufferings and in the insults for Christ remains in fact almost impassive.

Responsorial. *1 Pet. 2: 21; Mt. 8: 17*

R: Christ suffered for you, * leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

V: He has taken our infirmities and he has burdened himself with our sicknesses.

R: Leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

YEAR C

Gospel. *Lk. 16: 19-31*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

"There was a rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, full of sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried; and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom. And he called out, `Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to

dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead.'"

Third Reading. *Disc. 33a, 4*

What is learnt at the school of Christ the master?

A reading from the "Discourses on the Old Testament" of St. Augustine, bishop.

Listen to the gospel, observe and consider the thoughts of two men. "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and banqueted abundantly everyday" (Lk. 16: 19). Do not let yourself be deceived by the apparent happiness of the one who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who banqueted abundantly. He was a proud man, an impious man, whose thoughts were turned towards vanity and who craved for vanity. The day on which he died all his plans went up in smoke. "At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus" (Lk. 16: 20). He does not say the name of the rich man but that of the poor man. God does not pronounce the name of the one who was known to everyone, but of the unknown. Do not be surprised; God proclaimed that which he found written in his book. Of the wicked in fact it is said: "May their name be cancelled from the book of the living, and may they not be inscribed among the just!" (Ps. 68: 29). To the apostles also when they were boasting because the demons had been subjected to them in the name of the Lord, although it was such an extraordinary thing, so that they would not get proud as men do, he said: "However do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven" (Lk. 10: 20).

Thus God, who dwells in heaven, was silent about the name of the impious rich man because he did not find it written in heaven and pronounced the name of the poor man because he found it written there, in fact he commanded that it should be written.

But let us observe that poor man. We have spoken of the thoughts of the impious and famous rich man, dressed in purple and fine linen, who banqueted splendidly every day, which finished in nothing on the day in which he died. The poor Lazarus instead lay at his gate “covered with sores, and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. And even the dogs came and licked his sores (Lk. 16: 20-21).

I would like to see you in this situation, O Christian! Behold the end of the both of them. Even in this life, God can grant health, take away misery and give what is necessary to the Christian. But even if this does not happen, what would you prefer? To be like the poor man or like the rich man? Do not deceive yourself. From the conclusion you can deduce what is the mistaken choice. That poor man, good, immersed in the difficulties of the present life, did not desire anything else other than that this life would finish so that he could enter into the eternal peace.

When both of them died, the desires of the poor man were not lost; in fact he was taken by the angels into the bosom of Abraham and in that day all his desires were realized. When “he breathes his last and returns to the earth his plans do not disappear” because “he hopes in the Lord his God” (Ps. 145: 4, 5).

This is learnt at the school of Christ the master, this the faithful soul hopes for, this is the most certain reward of the Saviour.

Responsorial. *Mt. 5. 1,2,3; Is. 66: 2*

R: The disciples came to Jesus and he began to teach them saying. * Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

V: On whom will I turn my gaze? On the humble and on the one who is contrite of heart, on the one who fears my word.

R: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

MONDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading *Mic 6:1 – 15*

The Lord judges his people

Hear what the LORD says: Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the LORD has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel. "O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of bondage; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Be'or answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the LORD."

"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

The voice of the LORD cries to the city -- and it is sound wisdom to fear your name: "Hear, O tribe and assembly of the city! Can I forget the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is accursed? Shall I acquit the man with wicked scales and with a bag of deceitful weights? Your rich men are full of violence; your inhabitants speak lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth.

Therefore I have begun to smite you, making you desolate because of your sins. You shall eat, but not be satisfied, and there shall be hunger in your inward parts; you shall put away, but not save, and what you save I will give to the sword. You shall sow, but not reap; you shall tread olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil; you shall tread grapes, but not drink wine.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Mic. 6: 8; Ps. 36: 3*

R: Man, you have been taught what is good and that which the Lord asks of you: * Practise justice, love piety, walk humbly with your God.

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

R: Practise justice, love piety, walk humbly with your God.

Second Reading. *Book 3, t. 5*

Return to me by means of penance.

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

Return to me from the oldness of error and of sin, and having removed the vices of your souls, renew yourselves with penance. Think at one’s best, receive the grace, that of Christ, which renews in the newness of life.

Return to me, islands. It is probable that by islands he intends the Church, which, besieged by difficulties and by the dangers of this world and agitated by the waves of those who rise against them, all the same remains firm and unmoveable. They are founded, in fact, on the rock that is Christ.

With these words he means also the multitude of those who are called by means of the faith; once addicted to sins, abominable and impure, full of vices and full of wrinkles, they passed through Christ to the newness of life and were made a pure virgin, without stain or wrinkle, on the contrary holy and uncontaminated. Return therefore to me (cfr. Mal. 3: 7).

Who is it that makes justice rise up from the east, who calls it to his feet, and it goes? (cfr. Is. 41:2). We must not admire God the dominator of all the things only for the unique and pure magnificence of the creatures, but also for the benefits that he lavishes on us, with which he gives us an image of his peace and of his clemency. He saves in fact the mortals, freeing from death, from corruption and from the tyranny of the devil the human race, which was already completely lost. He annihilated the enemy with all his satellites and he justified us by means of the faith, annihilating sin that raged as a tyrant against us. But all these things are given to us marvellously through Christ, who “has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30).

We have in this way triumphed, becoming participants of the mercy and of the charity, and of all that which is useful for salvation. This also one

of the holy prophets predicted for us, when he affirmed: For you who fear my name, a sun of justice will rise, and there will be healing in his wings (cfr. Mal. 3: 20). Who therefore will make justice, that is Christ, rise like the sun from the east? Who will call him, that is make him come and appear to the inhabitants of the earth; and appear in such a way that he will go to the feet of the one who calls him, and will not remain only at the feet of God the Father?

In this way in fact the Lord lived on the earth: he accomplished the works of the Father and he manifested him to us in his nature. He was in fact, and is, equal to him in power, therefore through the works he fully persuaded men that he had in everything the same power of the Father. With full consciousness in fact he said: "If I do not accomplish the works of my Father, do not believe in me; but if I accomplish them, even if you do not want to believe in me, believe at least the works" (Jn. 10: 37-38).

Responsorial *Ez 18: 31, 32; 2 Pet 3: 9*

R: Free yourselves from all the iniquity committed and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. * I take no pleasure in the death of the one who dies. Word of the Lord God. Convert and live.

V: The Lord is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

R: I take no pleasure in the death of the one who dies. Word of the Lord God. Convert and live.

CYCLE 2

First Reading *Judith 5: 1 – 21*

When Holofernes, the general of the Assyrian army, heard that the people of Israel had prepared for war and had closed the passes in the hills and fortified all the high hilltops and set up barricades in the plains, he was very angry. So he called together all the princes of Moab and the commanders of Ammon and all the governors of the coastland, and said to them, "Tell me, you Canaanites, what people is this that lives in the hill country? What cities do they inhabit? How large is their army, and in what does their power or strength consist? Who rules over them as king, leading

their army? And why have they alone, of all who live in the west, refused to come out and meet me?"

Then Achior, the leader of all the Ammonites, said to him, "Let my lord now hear a word from the mouth of your servant, and I will tell you the truth about this people that dwells in the nearby mountain district. No falsehood shall come from your servant's mouth. This people is descended from the Chaldeans. At one time they lived in Mesopotamia, because they would not follow the gods of their fathers who were in Chaldea. For they had left the ways of their ancestors, and they worshiped the God of heaven, the God they had come to know; hence they drove them out from the presence of their gods; and they fled to Mesopotamia, and lived there for a long time. Then their God commanded them to leave the place where they were living and go to the land of Canaan. There they settled, and prospered, with much gold and silver and very many cattle. When a famine spread over Canaan they went down to Egypt and lived there as long as they had food; and there they became a great multitude -- so great that they could not be counted. So the king of Egypt became hostile to them; he took advantage of them and set them to making bricks, and humbled them and made slaves of them. Then they cried out to their God, and he afflicted the whole land of Egypt with incurable plagues; and so the Egyptians drove them out of their sight. Then God dried up the Red Sea before them, and he led them by the way of Sinai and Kadesh-barnea, and drove out all the people of the wilderness.

So they lived in the land of the Amorites, and by their might destroyed all the inhabitants of Heshbon; and crossing over the Jordan they took possession of all the hill country. And they drove out before them the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Jebusites and the Shechemites and all the Gergesites, and lived there a long time. As long as they did not sin against their God they prospered, for the God who hates iniquity is with them. But when they departed from the way that he had appointed for them, they were utterly defeated in many battles and were led away captive to a foreign country; the temple of their God was razed to the ground, and their cities were captured by their enemies.

But now they have returned to their God, and have come back from the places to which they were scattered, and have occupied Jerusalem, where their sanctuary is, and have settled in the hill country, because it was uninhabited. Now therefore, my master and lord, if there is any unwitting

error in this people and they sin against their God and we find out their offence, then we will go up and defeat them. But if there is no transgression in their nation, then let my lord pass them by; for their Lord will defend them, and their God will protect them, and we shall be put to shame before the whole world."

Responsorial *Cf. Jdt 16: 13, 5; 6: 19; Sir 36: 15-16 (Vulg. Jdt. 16: 16; 6: 15; Sir 36: 18)*

R: Almighty Lord, great and glorious God, you who granted victory through the hand of a woman, * listen to the prayer of your servants.

V: Blessed are you, Lord, who do not abandon those who trust in you and knock down those who glory in their power.

R: Listen to the prayer of your servants.

Second Reading *Num 1 – 2*

This is what you need to ask for in prayer

The beginning of the treatise “On prayer” of Origen, presbyter

The marvellous realities, which transcend to a great extent our fragile human nature, flee from the comprehension of the human intellect. But by the will of God they become accessible through the multiple and immense grace, which he infuses in men through the ministry of Jesus Christ and the co-operation of the Spirit.

If therefore the human nature cannot acquire wisdom with which all things were created – of him in fact David says: “you have made everything with wisdom” (Ps. 103: 24) – the impossible became possible through our Lord Jesus Christ, “who through the work of God has become for us wisdom, justice, sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1: 30).

Who could deny that it is impossible for man to scrutinize the heavenly realities? Yet this became possible through the immense grace of God. He who was taken up into the third heaven scrutinized that which was in the three heavens, when “he heard inexpressible words which no one is permitted to pronounce” (2 Cor. 12: 4).

And who would dare to affirm that man could know the thought of the Lord? If no one knows the thoughts of God other than the Spirit of God, it is impossible that man knows them. See above all how this becomes possible: “ We have not received the spirit of the world, he says, but the

Spirit of God, in order to know all that God has given to us. Of these things we speak, not with a language suggested by human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit” (1 Cor. 2: 12-13).

One of the things that is impossible because of our poverty is every attempt of dealing accurately with the prayer in a way that is worthy of God; and precisely to know and to teach how and why it is necessary to pray, what should be said to God in prayer, which are the times that are more adapt for this; since, says the Apostle, “we do not even know what it is suitable to ask” in order to pray as one should (Rm. 8: 26).

It is necessary in fact not only to pray, but to pray as one should and to ask what one must. Even if we were to arrive to the understanding of what we need to ask for in prayer, such a result would be insufficient, if we were not to ask for it as one should. But what use would it be to us to pray as we should, if we do not know what we need to ask for?

To ask for that which we should, with regard to the material of the oration, to pray as one should, with regard to the attitude of the one who is praying. Behold, for example, what we should ask for in prayer: “Search first for the kingdom of God and his justice and you will be given in addition” the other things of little importance; ask for the heavenly goods and you will be given in addition the earthly ones (cfr. Mt. 6: 33); “pray for your persecutors” (Mt. 5: 44); Pray to the Lord of the harvest that he may send workers to his harvest” (Mt. 9: 38). “Praying then, do not waste words” (Mt. 6:7).

Responsorial *cf. Rm. 8: 26; Zec. 12: 9, 10*

R: We do not know what is suitable to ask for in prayer; but * the Spirit himself intercedes for us with insistence, with inexpressible groans.

V: In that day I will pour over the house of David and above all the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and of consolation.

R: The Spirit himself intercedes for us with insistence, with inexpressible groans.

Gospel *Luke 9:46 – 50*

And an argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. But when Jesus perceived the thought of their hearts, he took a child and put him by his side, and said to them, "Whoever receives this

child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me; for he who is least among you all is the one who is great."

John answered, "Master, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he does not follow with us." But Jesus said to him, "Do not forbid him; for he that is not against you is for you."

TUESDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *2 Kings 17: 1 – 18*

End of the kingdom of Israel.

A reading from the second book of Kings.

In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah Hoshe'a the son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel, and he reigned nine years. And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, yet not as the kings of Israel who were before him. Against him came up Shalmane'ser king of Assyria; and Hoshe'a became his vassal, and paid him tribute. But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshe'a; for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year; therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison.

Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria, and for three years he besieged it. In the ninth year of Hoshe'a the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

And this was so, because the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods and walked in the customs of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs which the kings of Israel had introduced.

And the people of Israel did secretly against the LORD their God things that were not right. They built for themselves high places at all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city; they set up for themselves pillars and Ashe'rim on every high hill and under every green tree; and there they burned incense on all the high places, as the nations did whom the LORD carried away before them. And they did wicked things, provoking the LORD to anger, and they served idols, of which the LORD had said to them, "You shall not do this."

Yet the LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and

my statutes, in accordance with all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets." But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God. They despised his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols, and became false, and they followed the nations that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them that they should not do like them.

And they forsook all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made for themselves molten images of two calves; and they made an Ashe'rah, and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Ba'al. And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings, and used divination and sorcery, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger. Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah only.

Responsorial. *Sir. 48: 15-16*

R: The people did not convert and did not renounce their sins, until they were deported from their country. * They were dispersed over all the earth, only a small number of people remained.

V: Some of them did what was pleasing to the Lord, but others multiplied sins.

R: They were dispersed over all the earth, only a small number of people remained.

Second Reading.

The nature of the Church and the sacraments.

A reading from the Book "On the contemplation of the ecclesiastical reality" attributed to St. Germain of Constantinople, bishop.

The Church is the temple of God, holy temple, house of prayer, reunion of the nations, body of Christ, his name, bride of Christ, who calls the nations to penance and prayer; purified with the water of baptism, washed with his precious blood, adorned with the jewels of the bride, countersigned with the ointment of the Holy Spirit, according to the word of the prophet: "Your name is ointment poured out, we will run to the odour of your perfumes" (Sg. of Sgs. 1: 2,3 vulg.).

The Church is also the earthly heaven, in which the Most High dwells and moves; it bears in the cross the image of the pain, of the burial and of the resurrection of Christ; prefigured in the joy over the tent of meeting of Moses and in the patriarchs, founded on the apostles; in whom there is the propitiatory and the Holy of Holies; pre-announced in the prophets, adorned in the apostles, brought to perfection in the martyrs and established on the throne of their holy relics.

The Church can also be called the house of God, where the mystical sacrifice of life is celebrated on the table which nourishes and vivifies the souls: in it every divine dogma is a precious pearl of the doctrine of the Lord entrusted to his disciples.

“Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3: 5). And to his apostles the Lord proclaimed: “Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28: 19). But we are baptized in the death of Christ and in his resurrection. In fact, immersed in the water, having resurfaced and received the triple aspersion, we symbolize and we confess the burial of three days and the resurrection of the same Christ, who also was baptized in the Jordan by John.

That the baptized are anointed with oil, corresponds to the oil with which the kings, priests and prophets were anointed; Christ also was anointed as king and priest, having been consecrated by means of the incarnation. We also are anointed with the scope of preventing the devil from overcoming us with the strength of sin that brings to death; this has come to us through the fault of Adam. The mystery of the water manifests to us the mystical bath of the water and of the fire of the Holy Spirit, through which we obtain the purification from the stains of our sin, the gift of the regeneration and eternal life. Through baptism the filial adoption having been achieved, we are freed from the slavery and the power of the devil, and we receive the freedom of the grace of the Son of God: in it sanctified and cleaned with the water and the Spirit, the Son leads us to God the Father saying: Holy Father, here I am, with those whom you have given me (cfr. Is. 8: 18) so that they also may be sanctified, and know you, the one true God and he whom you have sent, Jesus Christ (cfr: Jn. 17: 2, 6, 23) so that they also may be heirs of my kingdom.

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

R: They will be filled with the abundance of your house and they will drink at the torrents of your delights. * In you is the spring of life, in your light we see the light.

V: We are filled with the goods of your house.

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

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Judith 6: 1 – 10, 14 – 16; 7:1, 4- 5*

Achior is handed over to the Israelites.

A reading from the book of Judith.

When the disturbance made by the men outside the council died down, Holofernes, the commander of the Assyrian army, said to Achior and all the Moabites in the presence of all the foreign contingents: "And who are you, Achior, and you hirelings of Ephraim, to prophesy among us as you have done today and tell us not to make war against the people of Israel because their God will defend them? Who is God except Nebuchadnezzar? He will send his forces and will destroy them from the face of the earth, and their God will not deliver them -- we the king's servants will destroy them as one man. They cannot resist the might of our cavalry.

We will burn them up, and their mountains will be drunk with their blood, and their fields will be full of their dead. They cannot withstand us, but will utterly perish. So says King Nebuchadnezzar, the lord of the whole earth. For he has spoken; none of his words shall be in vain. "But you, Achior, you Ammonite hireling, who have said these words on the day of your iniquity, you shall not see my face again from this day until I take revenge on this race that came out of Egypt. Then the sword of my army and the spear of my servants shall pierce your sides, and you shall fall among their wounded, when I return. Now my slaves are going to take you back into the hill country and put you in one of the cities beside the passes, and you will not die until you perish along with them.

If you really hope in your heart that they will not be taken, do not look downcast! I have spoken and none of my words shall fail."

Then Holofernes ordered his slaves, who waited on him in his tent, to seize Achior and take him to Bethulia and hand him over to the men of Israel. Then the men of Israel came down from their city and found him; and they untied him and brought him into Bethulia and placed him before the magistrates of their city, who in those days were Uzziah the son of Micah, of the tribe of Simeon, and Chabris the son of Gothoniël, and Charmis the son of Melchiel. They called together all the elders of the city, and all their young men and their women ran to the assembly; and they set Achior in the midst of all their people, and Uzziah asked him what had happened. The next day Holofernes ordered his whole army, and all the allies who had joined him, to break camp and move against Bethulia, and to seize the passes up into the hill country and make war on the Israelites. When the Israelites saw their vast numbers they were greatly terrified, and every one said to his neighbour, "These men will now lick up the face of the whole land; neither the high mountains nor the valleys nor the hills will bear their weight." Then each man took up his weapons, and when they had kindled fires on their towers they remained on guard all that night.

Responsorial. *Ps. 9: 10, 35; 10: 4*

R: God, you who sit on the throne, the just judge, in tribulation be a refuge to the poor, * because only you see the anguish and the pain.

V: The wretch abandons himself to you, you are the sustenance of the orphan,

R: because only you see the anguish and the pain.

Second Reading. *N. 2*

How to pray.

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

With regard to the way of praying: “I desire that men pray; wherever they find themselves, lifting up their eyes to heaven with pure hearts without anger and without quarrels. In the same way let the woman pray, with decent garments, adorning themselves with decency and with reserve, not with braids and gold ornaments, with pearls or with sumptuous dresses, but with good works, as it is suitable to women who make a profession of piety” (1 Tm. 2: 8-10).

This other text also instructs us on the way of praying: “If you present your offering on the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar and go first and reconcile yourself with your brother and then come back to offer your gift” (Mt. 5: 23).

Paul, who though he knew all this and much more could have been able to draw from the law, from the prophets and from the inexhaustible richness of the gospels, displaying the single argument with abundance and variety, recognizes above all that he is far away from knowing how he needs to pray, for this he says: We do not know what it is suitable to say in prayer (cfr. Rm. 8: 26). But then he adds in what way this can be remedied by the one, who though in his ignorance, exerts to make himself worthy in a way that his deficiency turns out to be overcome. He says in fact: “The Spirit himself intercedes with insistence for us with inexpressible groans; and he who scrutinizes the hearts knows what the desires of the Spirit are, since he intercedes for the believers according to the design of God” (Rm. 8: 26-27).

Now the Spirit, which cries in the hearts of the faithful: “Abba, Father!” (Gal. 4: 6; Rm. 8: 15), knowing that the groans emitted down here by the sinners make their position worse instead of bettering it, intercedes with God with inexpressible groans, making our groans his with immense goodness and mercy. He sees in his wisdom that our soul is prostrated in the dust (cfr. Ps. 43: 26), and imprisoned in a “miserable body” (Phil. 3: 21), he intercedes therefore with God not with any type of groans, but with inexpressible groans, similar to those “inexpressible words that no one is permitted to pronounce” (2 Cor. 12: 4).

But I think that not being content to intercede, the Spirit intensifies and renews with insistence his prayer for those who can repeat with Paul: “In all these things we are more than conquerors” (Rm. 8: 37). While it is probable that the Spirit prays simply for those who do not arrive to so much, but neither let themselves be overcome.

Besides to the passage: “We do not even know what it is suitable to ask, but the Spirit himself intercedes with insistence for us with inexpressible groans” (Rm. 8: 26) corresponds this other: “I will pray with the spirit, but I will also pray with the intelligence; I will sing with the spirit, but I will also sing with the intelligence” (1 Cor. 14: 15). In reality our intellect cannot pray, if in front of him, who is almost in an attitude of listening, the Spirit does not pray; as also it cannot sing and praise the

Father in Christ, with melodious sounds, rhythmic and well tuned, if the Spirit “who scrutinizes every thing, even the depths of God” (1 Cor. 2: 10) does not first praise and celebrate him who has scrutinized the depths and has understood him as only he can.

Responsorial. *Jn. 16: 24; Ps. 144: 19*

R: Till now you have not asked for anything in my name. * Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.

V: The Lord repays the desire of those who fear him, he listens to their cry and saves them.

R: Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.

Gospel. *Lk. 9: 51 – 56*

He set out decisively towards Jerusalem.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

When the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him; but the people would not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them. And they went on to another village.

WEDNESDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *2 Kings 17: 24 – 41*

Origin of the Samaritans.

A reading from the second book of Kings.

And the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sephar-va'im, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria, and dwelt in its cities. And at the beginning of their dwelling there, they did not fear the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them. So the king of Assyria was told, "The nations which you have carried away and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the law of the god of the land; therefore he has sent lions among them, and behold, they are killing them, because they do not know the law of the god of the land." Then the king of Assyria commanded, "Send there one of the priests whom you carried away thence; and let him go and dwell there, and teach them the law of the god of the land." So one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD.

But every nation still made gods of its own, and put them in the shrines of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in the cities in which they dwelt; the men of Babylon made Suc'coth-be'noth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, the men of Hamath made Ashi'ma, and the Av'vites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sephar'vites burned their children in the fire to Adram'melech and Anam'melech, the gods of Sephar-va'im. They also feared the LORD, and appointed from among themselves all sorts of people as priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. So they feared the LORD but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away. To this day they do according to the former manner. They do not fear the LORD, and they do not follow the statutes or the ordinances or the law or the commandment that the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel.

The LORD made a covenant with them, and commanded them, "You shall not fear other gods or bow yourselves to them or serve them or sacrifice to them; but you shall fear the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt with great power and with an outstretched arm; you shall bow yourselves to him, and to him you shall sacrifice. And the statutes and the ordinances and the law and the commandment that he wrote for you, you shall always be careful to do. You shall not fear other gods, and you shall not forget the covenant that I have made with you. You shall not fear other gods, but you shall fear the LORD your God, and he will deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies." However they would not listen, but they did according to their former manner.

So these nations feared the LORD, and also served their graven images; their children likewise, and their children's children -- as their fathers did, so they do to this day.

Responsorial. *2 Kgs. 17: 38-39; Deut. 6: 4*

R: You will not forget the covenant concluded with you, and you will not venerate foreign divinities. * You will venerate the Lord your God, who will free you from the power of all your enemies.

V: Listen, Israel, the Lord is your God, the Lord is one only.

R: You will venerate the Lord your God, who will free you from the power of all your enemies.

Second Reading. *Book 1, 6*

*The new Church of the faithful has been gathered
Through the grace of the Holy Spirit.*

A reading from the "Books of Dialogues" of St. Anselm of Avelberg, bishop.

The faith in the Holy Trinity, revealed little by little in proportion to the capacity of the believers, communicated almost in particular, growing towards its fullness, is finally accomplished.

Therefore from the coming of Christ until the day of judgement, marked as the sixth age, in which is renewed the unique and same Church

with the presence of the Son of God, is not to be found in only one or uniform state, but in many and various. One aspect of the Christian religion was manifested in the primitive Church, when Jesus, coming out from the Jordan and led by the Holy Spirit in the desert, having been left by the seducer after the temptations, crossing Judea and Galilee, elected the twelve apostles: he instructed them in the sublime doctrine of the Christian faith. He taught them to be poor in spirit and all the other things that are written in the sermon of the mount; he taught them to despise the fallen world and he instructed them with the innumerable and salutary precepts of the evangelical doctrine.

But after the passion, the resurrection and the ascension of Christ, and after the Holy Spirit had been sent, many seeing the signs and the prodigies that took place by the hand of the apostles, joined themselves to their community and it happened, as Luke writes, that: “The multitude of those who had come to the faith had only one heart and only one soul and no one claimed as his own that which belonged to him, but everything was held in common among them.

No one in fact amongst them was needy. To each was distributed according to his needs. Of the others, no one dared to associate with them, but the people exalted them” (Act. 4: 32, 34; 5: 13).

And a new Church of the faithful was gathered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, renewed first of all among the Jews, then among the Gentiles, abandoning little by little the rites both of one and of the other, but conserving some natural and legal elements. Taken from the natural laws or from the written ones, which were not and are not contrary to the Christian faith, but on the contrary are useful to all those who observe them devoutly and faithfully. They began already then to preach openly the full faith in the Holy Trinity, with the testimony of the Old and of the New Testament, faith that before was revealed in a hidden way and insinuated gradually. New sacraments arose, new rites, new commandments, new instructions. They wrote the apostolic and canonical letters. The Christian law was established with the teachings and the writings; the faith that is called catholic was preached to the whole world; and the holy Church, passing through different states that gradually followed up to our days, renews itself like the youth of the eagle (cfr. Ps. 102: 5) and will always renew itself, maintaining firm however the foundation of the faith in the Holy Trinity, outside of which no one else could ever place another, even though the structure of the

major part of the various religions are built in the holy temple of the Lord through a construction that is not uniform.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Is. 63: 11; Vulg. ; Ep. 4: 11, 12*

R: The Lord remembers his people; he draws them out with the shepherds of his flock; * he puts his Holy Spirit in the midst of them.

V: It is he who has established some as pastors and masters, to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up.

R: He puts his Holy Spirit in the midst of them.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Judith 8: 1a, 10 – 14, 28 – 33; 9: 1 – 6, 14*
Judith worries about the plight of her people.

A reading from the book of Judith.

At that time Judith heard about these things: she was the daughter of Merari the son of Ox, son of Joseph, son of Oziel, son of Elkiah, son of Ananias, son of Gideon, son of Raphaim, son of Ahitub, son of Elijah, son of Hilkiah, son of Eliab, son of Nathanael, son of Salmiel, son of Sarasadai, son of Israel. she sent her maid, who was in charge of all she possessed, to summon Chabris and Charmis, the elders of her city. They came to her, and she said to them, "Listen to me, rulers of the people of Bethulia! What you have said to the people today is not right; you have even sworn and pronounced this oath between God and you, promising to surrender the city to our enemies unless the Lord turns and helps us within so many days. Who are you, that have put God to the test this day, and are setting yourselves up in the place of God among the sons of men? You are putting the Lord Almighty to the test -- but you will never know anything!

You cannot plumb the depths of the human heart, nor find out what a man is thinking; how do you expect to search out God, who made all these things, and find out his mind or comprehend his thought? No, my brethren, do not provoke the Lord our God to anger.

Then Uzziah said to her, "All that you have said has been spoken out of a true heart, and there is no one who can deny your words. [Jdt 8:29] Today

is not the first time your wisdom has been shown, but from the beginning of your life all the people have recognized your understanding, for your heart's disposition is right. But the people were very thirsty, and they compelled us to do for them what we have promised, and made us take an oath which we cannot break. So pray for us, since you are a devout woman, and the Lord will send us rain to fill our cisterns and we will no longer be faint."

Judith said to them, "Listen to me. I am about to do a thing that will go down through all generations of our descendants. Stand at the city gate tonight, and I will go out with my maid; and within the days after which you have promised to surrender the city to our enemies, the Lord will deliver Israel by my hand.

Then Judith fell upon her face, and put ashes on her head, and uncovered the sackcloth she was wearing; and at the very time when that evening's incense was being offered in the house of God in Jerusalem, Judith cried out to the Lord with a loud voice, and said, "O Lord God of my father Simeon, to whom you gave a sword to take revenge on the strangers who had loosed the girdle of a virgin to **defile** her, and uncovered her thigh to put her to shame, and **polluted** her womb to disgrace her; for you have said, 'It shall not be done' -- yet they did it.

So you gave up their rulers to be slain, and **their bed, which was ashamed of the deceit they had practiced, to be stained with blood**, and you did strike down slaves along with princes, and princes on their thrones; and you gave their wives for a prey and their daughters to captivity, and all their booty to be divided among your beloved sons, who were zealous for you, and **abhorred the pollution of their blood**, and called on you for help -- O God, my God, hear me also, a widow.

"For you have done these things and those that went before and those that followed; you have designed the things that are now, and those that are to come. Yes, the things you did intend came to pass, and the things you did will presented themselves and said, 'Lo, we are here'; for all their ways are prepared in advance, and your judgment is with foreknowledge. And cause your whole nation and every tribe to know and understand that you are God, the God of all power and might, and that there is no other who protects the people of Israel but you alone!"

Responsorial. *Cfr. Jdt. 8: 20, 14, 16*

R: We do not recognize any other god other than the Lord, in whom we hope: * He does not despise us, nor does he take away his salvation from our race.

V: With abundant tears we beg his indulgence and we humble our souls in front of him.

R: He does not despise us, nor does he take away his salvation from our race.

Second Reading. *Nm. 2, 5*

God knows everything before it happens.

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

According to me, it was one of the disciples of Jesus, who had realized how much the human weakness is far from the perfection of prayer and he realized it all the more listening to the wise and great words pronounced by the Saviour in his oration to the Father, who said to the Lord, when he had finished his prayer: “Lord, teach us how to pray, as John also has taught his disciples” (Lk. 11: 1).

But how can it be that a man, who has been raised in the discipline of the law, who had listened continuously to the words of the prophets and had frequented with perseverance the synagogue, not know how to pray before having seen the Lord in oration? And what did John himself teach on prayer to the disciples who came to him from Jerusalem, from the entire Judea and from the territories of the Jordan in order to be baptised by him? Perhaps, being more than a prophet, he had intuition with regard to the prayer, that he probably transmitted in secret to those who presented themselves to him before baptism in order to be taught and not to all those who were baptised.

These truly spiritual orations, because prayed by the Spirit in the heart of the faithful, are rich with a marvellous and secret doctrine. Such is, in part, the prayer of Anna in the first book of Kings. She, while she “prolonged her prayer in front of the Lord, and prayed in her heart” (1 Sam. 1: 12-13), did not have need of the scripture. The psalm 89 then is entitled: “Prayer of Moses, man of God” and 101: “Prayer of an afflicted, who is tired and pours out his anguish in front of God”. These orations, being truly compounded and formulated by the Spirit, are also full of teachings of the divine Wisdom, for which it can be said of that which is proposed in them:

“He who is wise let him understand these things, let he who has intelligence comprehend them” (Hos. 14: 10; cfr. Ps. 106: 43).

Since, therefore, it is so difficult to deal with prayer we need to be illuminated by the Father, taught by the first-born Word and helped by the Spirit, in order to understand and to say something worthy of such a sublime argument, I pray as a man, in order to obtain in this respect a fecund and spiritual knowledge and the explanations of the prayer referred to in the gospels.

But what need is there to address prayers to him who knows our necessity already before we pray? “Because our Father knows what we need even before we ask him” (Mt. 6: 8). It is right in fact that the Father and Creator of the universe, who “loves all existing things and despises nothing of all that he has created” (Wis. 11: 24) dispenses healthily to each one that which is suitable, without waiting for his prayers. Exactly like a father, who when he looks after his little children does not wait for their requests, either because they are completely incapable of formulating them, or because through inexperience often they want to have dangerous and inopportune things. And we men are much further away from the mind of God as the minds of the children are away from that of their parents.

Responsorial. *Rm. 11: 34, 35; Is. 40: 14*

R: Who has ever been able to know the thoughts of the Lord? Or who has ever been his counsellor? * Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?

V: Of who has he asked council, so that he could instruct him and teach him the way of justice?

R: Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?

Gospel. *Lk. 9: 57 – 62*

I will follow you wherever you go.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

As they were going along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head."

To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But he said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own

dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

THURSDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. 2 Chr. 29: 1 – 2; 30: 1 – 16a

The priestly Passover of king Hezekiah.

A reading from the second book of Chronicles.

Hezekiah began to reign when he was twenty-five years old, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi'jah the daughter of Zechariah. And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done. Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to the LORD the God of Israel. For the king and his princes and all the assembly in Jerusalem had taken counsel to keep the Passover in the second month -- for they could not keep it in its time because the priests had not sanctified themselves in sufficient number, nor had the people assembled in Jerusalem -- and the plan seemed right to the king and all the assembly. So they decreed to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba to Dan, that the people should come and keep the Passover to the LORD the God of Israel, at Jerusalem; for they had not kept it in great numbers as prescribed. So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his princes, as the king had commanded, saying, "O people of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria.

Do not be like your fathers and your brethren, who were faithless to the LORD God of their fathers, so that he made them a desolation, as you see. Do not now be stiff-necked as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the LORD, and come to his sanctuary, which he has sanctified forever, and serve the LORD your God, that his fierce anger may turn away from you. For if you return to the LORD, your brethren and your children will find compassion with their captors, and return to this land. For the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him."

So the couriers went from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zeb'ulun; but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. Only a few men of Asher, of Manasseh, and of Zeb'ulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. The hand of God was also upon Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the LORD. And many people came together in Jerusalem to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great assembly.

They set to work and removed the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for burning incense they took away and threw into the Kidron valley. And they killed the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month. And the priests and the Levites were put to shame, so that they sanctified themselves, and brought burnt offerings into the house of the LORD. They took their accustomed posts according to the Law of Moses the man of God; the priests sprinkled the blood that they received from the hand of the Levites.

Responsorial. *Cfr. 2 Chron. 29: 4, 5; 1 Cor. 3: 17*

R: Hezekiah said to the priests and the Levites: Bring out the impurity of the sanctuary. * Purify yourselves and purify the temple of the Lord.

V: Holy is the temple of the Lord which you are.

R: Purify yourselves and purify the temple of the Lord.

Second Reading. *Disc on Passover*

Christ is truly immolated in our Passover, not in figure.

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

You know, O dearest brothers, that during this mortal life we cannot celebrate the Passover without rustic lettuce, that is without bitterness. Passover, as you well know means passage. As sometimes it has already happened to us we find in the sacred Scriptures a triple passage, almost a triple Passover. In fact a Passover is celebrated in the coming out of Israel from Egypt and it is realized in the passage of the Jews through the Red Sea, from slavery to freedom, from the pots of meat to the manna of angels.

Another Passover is celebrated when not only the Jews, but the entire human race passed from death to life, from the yoke of the devil to that of Christ, from the slavery of the darkness to the freedom of the glory of the

sons of God, from the impure food of the vices to that true Bread, the Bread of angels themselves, who says of himself: “I am the living bread which has come down from heaven” (Jn. 6: 51).

We will celebrate with joy the third Passover, when we will pass from that which is mortal to immortality, from corruption to incorruptibility, from misery to happiness, from toil to rest, from fear to security. The first is the Passover of the Jews, the second that of the Christians, the third is that of the saints and those who are perfect. In the Passover of the Jews a lamb is immolated, in ours Christ is immolated, finally in the Passover of the saints and those who are perfect Christ is glorified. And consider the levels and the differences of these solemnities, how Christ works our salvation, he who “extends from one end of the world to the other with strength and governs with excellent goodness every thing (Wis. 8: 1).

In fact in the Passover of the Jews a lamb is immolated, but in it, as a figure, is shadowed the immolation of Christ. In our Passover instead Christ is immolated not in figure, but really.

In the Passover of the saints and those who are perfect Christ is not immolated anymore, but rather he is manifested. In that first Passover the passion of Christ was prefigured, in the second it was accomplished, in the third the fruit of his passion is shown in the power of the resurrection. In this way wisdom overcomes malice.

In fact my Lord Jesus, power of God, and wisdom of God, completely overcame in a wise, sweet and strong way the malice of that ancient serpent. Malice certainly is an astute wickedness, which generates and contains in itself pride and jealousy. Because of the pride and the jealousy of the devil death introduced the germ of every sin on the face of the earth. And so my Lord Jesus Christ, in a wise way and no less stronger than sweet, completely overcame this malice because of which the whole human race was perishing.

Responsorial. *Ex. 12: 5, 6, 13; 1 Pet. 1: 18, 19*

R: Your lamb must be without defect; the whole assembly of the community of Israel will immolate it at sunset. * The blood on your houses will be the sign that you are inside; there will not be the plague of extermination for you.

V: You were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

R: The blood on your houses will be a sign that you are inside, there will not be the plague of extermination for you.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Judith 10: 1 – 5, 11 – 17; 11: 1 – 8, 20 – 23*

Judith presents herself to Holofernes.

A reading from the book of Judith.

When Judith had ceased crying out to the God of Israel, and had ended all these words, she rose from where she lay prostrate and called her maid and went down into the house where she lived on Sabbaths and on her feast days; and she removed the sackcloth which she had been wearing, and took off her widow's garments, and bathed her body with water, and anointed herself with precious ointment, and combed her hair and put on a tiara, and arrayed herself in her gayest apparel, which she used to wear while her husband Manasseh was living. And she put sandals on her feet, and put on her anklets and bracelets and rings, and her earrings and all her ornaments, and made herself very beautiful, to entice the eyes of all men who might see her. And she gave her maid a bottle of wine and a flask of oil, and filled a bag with parched grain and a cake of dried fruit and fine bread; and she wrapped up all her vessels and gave them to her to carry.

The women went straight on through the valley; and an Assyrian patrol met her and took her into custody, and asked her, "To what people do you belong, and where are you coming from, and where are you going?" She replied, "I am a daughter of the Hebrews, but I am fleeing from them, for they are about to be handed over to you to be devoured. I am on my way to the presence of Holofernes the commander of your army, to give him a true report; and I will show him a way by which he can go and capture all the hill country without losing one of his men, captured or slain."

When the men heard her words, and observed her face -- she was in their eyes marvellously beautiful -- they said to her, "You have saved your life by hurrying down to the presence of our lord. Go at once to his tent; some of us will escort you and hand you over to him. And when you stand before him, do not be afraid in your heart, but tell him just what you have said, and he will treat you well." They chose from their number a hundred

men to accompany her and her maid, and they brought them to the tent of Holofernes.

Then Holofernes said to her, "Take courage, woman, and do not be afraid in your heart, for I have never hurt any one who chose to serve Nebuchadnezzar, the king of all the earth. And even now, if your people who live in the hill country had not slighted me, I would never have lifted my spear against them; but they have brought all this on themselves. And now tell me why you have fled from them and have come over to us -- since you have come to safety. Have courage; you will live, tonight and from now on. No one will hurt you, but all will treat you well, as they do the servants of my lord King Nebuchadnezzar."

Judith replied to him, "Accept the words of your servant, and let your maidservant speak in your presence, and I will tell nothing false to my lord this night. And if you follow out the words of your maidservant, God will accomplish something through you, and my lord will not fail to achieve his purposes. Nebuchadnezzar the king of the whole earth lives, and as his power endures, who had sent you to direct every living soul, not only do men serve him because of you, but also the beasts of the field and the cattle and the birds of the air will live by your power under Nebuchadnezzar and all his house. For we have heard of your wisdom and skill, and it is reported throughout the whole world that you are the one good man in the whole kingdom, thoroughly informed and marvellous in military strategy.

Her words pleased Holofernes and all his servants, and they marvelled at her wisdom and said, "There is not such a woman from one end of the earth to the other, either for beauty of face or wisdom of speech!" And Holofernes said to her, "God has done well to send you before the people, to lend strength to our hands and to bring destruction upon those who have slighted my lord. You are not only beautiful in appearance, but wise in speech; and if you do as you have said, your God shall be my God, and you shall live in the house of King Nebuchadnezzar and be renowned throughout the whole world."

Responsorial. *cfr. Jdt. 9: 8 (Vulg. 9: 10, 11)*

R: Lord God, who from ancient times crushed armies, lift up your arm against the nations who lay traps for your servants: * and let your right hand show its glory amongst us.

V: Knock down their strength with your power and overturn their violence with your anger,

R: and let your right hand show its glory amongst us.

Second Reading. N. 6

God preordains everything.

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

If God knows all the future things and they have to happen, then prayer is useless. But even if, by hypothesis, God was not to know the future events, with this we would not fulfil them nor would we want them less. God however, thanks to his foreknowledge, disposes that every single thing that depends on our free will, should be usefully ordained to the government of the universe and to the harmonious disposition of the created.

If therefore God knows beforehand all that which is in our will, it is obvious that everything should be ordained by the Providence according to the scale of the values. Even the object of the prayer of man, his dispositions, that which he believes and desires to obtain, will be known predictably and, once foreseen, they will be integrated in the order of Providence.

For example, as if he was to say: This man who has prayed with insistence, I will answer because of his prayer itself; I will not answer this other one because he is not worthy of being answered, or because he asks for a thing that is not good for him to obtain and which is indecorous for me to grant. I will not answer this one for his prayer but for he himself. If then someone is upset because, having affirmed that the foreknowledge of God cannot make a mistake, it seems that he admits the need for things, we answer that God knows exactly this, that is that a person does not necessarily or firmly want the better, or that he will want the worst in such a way as to be incapable in the future of changing for the better.

Instead- says God- I will do this for the person who will ask me, since this is worthy of me, given that he does not pray unworthily or commit negligence in prayer. To this one, as soon as he has prayed a little bit, I will pour out “ much more than he can ask or think” (Ep. 3: 20): he who is worthy of me I will overcome with generosity and I will grant him more than he is capable of asking. And given that he will be like this, I will send him a guardian angel who from this moment will begin to cooperate in his salvation and will assist him always; to that other one then, who will be better than this one, I will send a more powerful angel.

To a third one who, after having consecrated himself to a more excellent doctrine, will relax and fall back into earthly conceptions, I will take away that valid help, when these will have been cast away from him, according to that which he will have merited, an evil power will present itself immediately, taking advantage of the occasion in order to threaten his tepidness and it will lead him to that sin to which he will show himself to be inclined. Thus it is to be believed that he who regulates is he who foresees everything.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Jb. 23: 13; Ep. 1: 11*

R: One only is God: * If he chooses, who can change it? He does what he wants.

V: Everything works efficaciously in conformity to his will.

R: If he chooses, who can change it? He does what he wants.

Gospel. *Lk. 10: 1 – 12*

Your peace will descend on him.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come. And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide,

for the labourer deserves his wages; do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you; heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off against you; nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' I tell you, it shall be more tolerable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

FRIDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 20:1 – 6*

Announcement of the deportation of the Egyptians and Ethiopians.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

In the year that the commander in chief, who was sent by Sargon the king of Assyria, came to Ashdod and fought against it and took it, -- at that time the LORD had spoken by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, "Go, and loose the sackcloth from your loins and take off your shoes from your feet," and he had done so, walking naked and barefoot -- the LORD said, "As my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Ethiopia, so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians captives and the Ethiopians exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. Then they shall be dismayed and confounded because of Ethiopia their hope and of Egypt their boast.

And the inhabitants of this coastland will say in that day, `Behold, this is what has happened to those in whom we hoped and to whom we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria! And we, how shall we escape?'"

Responsorial. *Jer. 17: 5, 7; Sir. 2: 13*

R: Cursed is the man who trusts in a man, who puts his trust in the flesh, and turns his heart away from the Lord. * Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and the Lord is his faith.

V: Woe to the indolent heart because it does not have faith; for this it will not be protected.

R: Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and the Lord is his faith.

Second Reading. Book 4, t. 1

We are called Christians or people of God.

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

From the east I will lead your descendents, and from the west I will gather you (cfr. Gen. 28: 14). The Only begotten Word of God appeared in an appearance like ours, that is made man, to those who are on the earth, in order to lead to the true and pure knowledge of God the Greeks and the Jews, who had fallen into apostasy and the turning away from the Creator because of many and various faults; and, gathered together in a spiritual unity through faith and holiness brought fully to perfection, he made them worthy of the union with him, and thus, through him, he reunited them to God the Father. It is not difficult to recognize from the words of the holy gospel that Christ became man for this reason. When in fact Lazarus rose from the dead in such a way so marvellous and beyond the expectations of everyone, the crowd of the impious Jews and the sect of the Pharisees hateful to God, having held council, said: “What shall we do? This man accomplishes many signs. If we let him act in this way, the Romans will come and destroy our holy place and our nation. But one of them, whose name was Caiaphas, said: You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man dies for the people than that the whole nation perish” (Jn. 11: 47-50). To such words the divine evangelist immediately added: “He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation, but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and to make them one” (Jn. 11: 51-52).

According to the first creation of man and the thought of He who did it, all were his children. But Satan dispersed all and precipitated them into many sins, dragging into error those whom he had snatched from the communion with Him. Christ has brought them back to the unity. He has come in fact to search for those who were lost (cfr. Mt. 18: 11).

When therefore he calls sons and daughters those who hasten from the four ends of the earth, he manifests the time of the coming of Christ, through whom the inhabitants of the earth are given the grace of adoption

through the sanctification in the Spirit. He shows moreover that the call is not only for one nation, but it is common and unique for all, saying that everyone would be called by his name. In fact we are called Christians, or people of God. Thus Peter, in the letter sent to those who are called through faith, says: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God" (1 Pet. 2: 9-10).

Responsorial. *Ex. 37: 27, 28; Heb. 8: 8*

R: I will be their God and they will be my people. * The nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary will be in the midst of them forever.

V: I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

R: The nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary will be in the midst of them forever.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Judith 12: 1 – 13:3*

The banquet of Holofernes.

A reading from the book of Judith.

Then he commanded them to bring her in where his silver dishes were kept, and ordered them to set a table for her with some of his own food and to serve her with his own wine. But Judith said, "I cannot eat it, lest it be an offence; but I will be provided from the things I have brought with me." Holofernes said to her, "If your supply runs out, where can we get more like it for you? For none of your people is here with us."

Judith replied, "As your soul lives, my lord, your servant will not use up the things I have with me before the Lord carries out by my hand what he has determined to do." Then the servants of Holofernes brought her into the tent, and she slept until midnight. Along toward the morning watch she arose and sent to Holofernes and said, "Let my lord now command that your servant be permitted to go out and pray." So Holofernes commanded

his guards not to hinder her. And she remained in the camp for three days, and went out each night to the valley of Bethulia, and **bathed** at the spring in the camp. When she came up from the spring she prayed the Lord God of Israel to direct her way for the raising up of her people.

So she returned **clean** and stayed in the tent until she ate her food toward evening.

On the fourth day Holofernes held a banquet for his slave only, and did not invite any of his officers. And he said to Bagoas, the eunuch who had charge of his personal affairs, "Go now and persuade the Hebrew woman who is in your care to join us and eat and drink with us. For it will be a disgrace if we let such a woman go without enjoying her company, for if we do not embrace her she will laugh at us." So Bagoas went out from the presence of Holofernes, and approached her and said, "This beautiful maidservant will please come to my lord and be honoured in his presence, and drink wine and be merry with us, and become today like one of the daughters of the Assyrians who serve in the house of Nebuchadnezzar." And Judith said, "Who am I, to refuse my lord? Surely whatever pleases him I will do at once, and it will be a joy to me until the day of my death!" So she got up and arrayed herself in all her woman's finery, and her maid went and spread on the ground for her before Holofernes the soft fleeces which she had received from Bagoas for her daily use, so that she might recline on them when she ate. Then Judith came in and lay down, and Holofernes' heart was ravished with her and he was moved with great desire to possess her; for he had been waiting for an opportunity to deceive her, ever since the day he first saw her.

So Holofernes said to her. "Drink now, and be merry with us!" Judith said, "I will drink now, my lord, because my life means more to me today than in all the days since I was born." Then she took and ate and drank before him what her maid had prepared. And Holofernes was greatly pleased with her, and drank a great quantity of wine, much more than he had ever drunk in any one day since he was born.

When evening came, his slaves quickly withdrew, and Bagoas closed the tent from outside and shut out the attendants from his master's presence; and they went to bed, for they all were weary because the banquet had lasted long. So Judith was left alone in the tent, with Holofernes stretched out on his bed, for he was overcome with wine. Now Judith had told her maid to stand outside the bedchamber and to wait for her to come out, as

she did every day; for she said she would be going out for her prayers. And she had said the same thing to Bagoas.

Responsorial. *1 Cor. 1: 27, 29; 2 Cor. 12: 9; 1 Cor. 1: 28*

R: God has chosen that which in the world is weak to confound the strong, so that no man can glory in front of God. * In fact the power of God manifests itself fully in weakness.

V: God has chosen that which in the world is despicable in order to reduce to nothing the things that exist.

R: In fact the power of God manifests itself fully in weakness.

Second Reading. *Nm. 7 – 8*

The assiduous prayer.

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

With regard to the objections against the prayer in order to obtain the rising of the sun; there is need to say what follows. As we have said, God makes use of the free will of all of us who live on the earth, and He turn it with wisdom to the advantage of the earthly events: much more should it be believed that he, (making use of the necessary norms, fixes and establishes that which holds together with wisdom the course of the sun and of the moon and of the stars), would have wanted to arrange all the harmony of the heavens and the movements of the stars for the advantage of the whole universe. And, if the prayer for that which depends on our will is not useless, much less is it in relation to the heavenly bodies, normal course is useful to the whole creation.

For the rest it is not out of purpose to make use of this example in order to incite men to pray and to shake them from negligence in prayer. There is no need to speak much, or to ask for trifles, or to beg for earthly goods and neither to enter into prayer angry and with a distraught soul. But it is not possible to understand how a person can dedicate himself to prayer without the purity of heart, nor is it possible that he who prays can obtain the

forgiveness of his sins, if first he has not forgiven with his heart the brother who asks forgiveness of him for all that he has caused.

Now I think that many are the advantages that come to the one who prays as he should, or at least tries to do so according to his strength. First of all it will be of the maximum utility if the one who dedicates himself to prayer, by this same fact puts himself in front of God and speaks with him with the knowledge that he is present and looks at him. We know that certain images of the things evoked in the memory trouble the thoughts that are born from them, when the mind reflects on them. It is to be believed instead that very useful is the memory of God present, who perceives all the movements of the soul, even the most secret, while it inclines itself to please itself, considering he who examines the hearts and scrutinizes the kidneys, in the act of penetrating every spirit. And even if, by hypothesis, he who prepares himself in this way for prayer must not draw any other advantage from it, it must not be thought that it is of little gain for him to have been put in this disposition for the entire time of prayer. Those who dedicate themselves assiduously to oration know from experience how much the frequent renovation of this interior behaviour moves them away from sin and stimulates them to virtue. If in fact the memory and the evocation of the wise and sensible man pushes us to emulation and often restrains our wicked tendencies, the more we remember God, universal Father, joined to the oration, who helps those who are convinced of being in front of and of speaking with him who is present and listens to them!

Responsorial. *Jer. 29: 12-13; cfr. Lk. 18: 1*

R: You will invoke me and you will run back to me and I will answer you.

* You will search for me and you will find me, because you will search for me with all your heart.

V: It is necessary to pray always, without tiring.

R: You will search for me and you will find me, because you will search for me with all your heart

Gospel. *Lk. 10: 13 – 16*

He who despises me despises the One who sent me.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

"Woe to you, Chora'zin! woe to you, Beth-sa'ida! for if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades. "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

SATURDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *2 Kings 20: 1 – 19*

Cure of Hezekiah and prophecy of the Exile in Babylon.

In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Set your house in order; for you shall die, you shall not recover.'" Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the LORD, saying, "Remember now, O LORD, I beseech you, how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: "Turn back, and say to Hezekiah the prince of my people, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you; on the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. And I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake." And Isaiah said, "Bring a cake of figs. And let them take and lay it on the boil, that he may recover."

And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What shall be the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the LORD on the third day?" And Isaiah said, "This is the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he has promised: shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or go back ten steps?" And Hezekiah answered, "It is an easy thing for the shadow to lengthen ten steps; rather let the shadow go back ten steps." And Isaiah the prophet cried to the LORD; and he brought the shadow back ten steps, by which the sun had declined on the dial of Ahaz.

At that time Mero'dach-bal'adan the son of Bal'adan, king of Babylon, sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah; for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick. And Hezekiah welcomed them, and he showed them all his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armoury, all that was found in his storehouses; there was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them.

Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, "What did these men say? And whence did they come to you?" And Hezekiah said, "They have come from a far country, from Babylon." He said, "What have they seen in your house?" And Hezekiah answered, "They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them." Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD: Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says the LORD. And some of your own sons, who are born to you, shall be taken away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. "Then said Hezekiah to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good." For he thought, "Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?"

Responsorial. *Is. 38: 10, 17, 12*

R: I said: In the middle of my life I go to the gates of the underworld. * You have preserved my life from the pit of destruction.

V: Like a weaver you have rolled up my life, you cut me off from the loom.

R: You have preserved my life from the pit of destruction.

Second Reading. *Book 3, t. 1*

We will be the possession and inheritance of God.

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

Lord our God, you will grant us peace, since you give success to all our undertakings; O Lord our God, possess us! Lord, let us not know anyone else other than you, you only, your name only we invoke (cfr. Is. 26: 12-13). The holy prophets were used to pouring forth prayers for Israel, in fact they were friends of God, and adorned with great piety. Generated from the roots of Abraham and from the blood of the holy fathers, it was just that they suffered for their tribes of Israel, foreseeing that they would perish for their wickedness towards Christ. From here the blessed prophet Isaiah takes the initiative, saying: Lord our God, give us peace, since you have given us everything (cfr. Is. 26: 12).

If you will give us peace we will be rich in all goods and we will become participants of all your gifts. But it is necessary to see of what peace he is referring to. In fact, either Christ himself is asked for: “he in fact is our peace” (Ep. 2: 14) according to the Scriptures, and through him we are also united to the Father with a spiritual relationship. Or these words mean something else: he who has not yet adhered to the faith, has not despised and cast away from himself the stain of sin, he lives separated from God, and justly is counted in the number of his enemies, of those who are hard headed, who fight against the same laws of the Lord.

Those instead who are sober, docile to the bit and ready to do all that is pleasing to him, are full of love and are in peace with him.

For the rest peace is a true gift of God, and it comes to us from the divine generosity. Grant us, therefore, Lord, to be in peace with you, and having removed from the midst of us the wicked and detestable sin, grant that we may unite ourselves spiritually to you through the mediation of Christ, as Saint Paul says: “Justified through faith, we are in peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rm. 5: 1). When this will happen, we will be the possession and inheritance of God. For this, wisely it is said: Lord, possess us; outside of you we do not know anyone, only your name do we invoke (Cfr. Is. 26: 13). It is necessary, in fact, that all those who are in peace with God conform their lives only to him, in constant communion with him, so as not to know anyone other than him and so as to not even pronounce the name of any other fictitious god.

He only, in fact, must be invoked, since he only is our God, according to nature and according to truth, as we have been taught by the mouth of Moses. You will adore the Lord your God, and you will serve only him and his name (cfr. Ex. 20: 5, Deut. 6: 13).

Responsorial. *Col. 2: 6, 9; Mt. 23: 10*

R: So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him. * For in Christ all the fullness of the divinity lives in bodily form.

V: One only is your master: Christ.

R: For in Christ all the fullness of the divinity lives in bodily form.

First Reading. *Judith 13: 4 – 20*

Death of Holofernes and thanksgivings.

A reading from the book of Judith.

So every one went out, and no one, either small or great, was left in the bedchamber. Then Judith, standing beside his bed, said in her heart, "O Lord God of all might, look in this hour upon the work of my hands for the exaltation of Jerusalem. For now is the time to help your inheritance, and to carry out my undertaking for the destruction of the enemies who have risen up against us." She went up to the post at the end of the bed, above Holofernes' head, and took down his sword that hung there. She came close to his bed and took hold of the hair of his head, and said, "Give me strength this day, O Lord God of Israel!"

And she struck his neck twice with all her might, and severed it from his body. Then she tumbled his body off the bed and pulled down the canopy from the posts; after a moment she went out, and gave Holofernes' head to her maid, who placed it in her food bag. Then the two of them went out together, as they were accustomed to go for prayer; and they passed through the camp and circled around the valley and went up the mountain to Bethulia and came to its gates.

Judith called out from afar to the watchmen at the gates, "Open, open the gate! God, our God, is still with us, to show his power in Israel, and his strength against our enemies, even as he has done this day!" When the men of her city heard her voice, they hurried down to the city gate and called together the elders of the city. They all ran together, both small and great, for it was unbelievable that she had returned; they opened the gate and admitted them, and they kindled a fire for light, and gathered around them. Then she said to them with a loud voice, "Praise God, O praise him! Praise God, who has not withdrawn his mercy from the house of Israel, but has destroyed our enemies by my hand this very night!"

Then she took the head out of the bag and showed it to them, and said, "See, here is the head of Holofernes, the commander of the Assyrian army, and here is the canopy beneath which he lay in his drunken stupor. The Lord has struck him down by the hand of a woman. As the Lord lives, who has protected me in the way I went, it was my face that tricked him to his destruction, and yet he committed no **act of sin** with me, to **defile** and **shame** me."

All the people were greatly astonished, and bowed down and worshipped God, and said with one accord, "Blessed are you, our God, who has brought into contempt this day the enemies of your people." And Uzziah said to her, "O daughter, you are blessed by the Most High God above all women on earth; and blessed be the Lord God, who created the heavens and the earth, who has guided you to strike the head of the leader of our enemies. Your hope will never depart from the hearts of men, as they remember the power of God.

May God grant this to be a perpetual honour to you, and may he visit you with blessings, because you did not spare your own life when our nation was brought low, but have avenged our ruin, walking in the straight path before our God." And all the people said, "So be it, so be it!"

Responsorial. *Cfr. Jdt. (Vulg.) 13: 22, 25, 24*

R: May the Lord, who through you has annihilated our enemies, bless you in his power: * In a way that your praise will be always on the mouths of men.

V: Blessed be the Lord creator of heaven and earth, because today he has so exalted your name,

R: in a way that your praise will be always on the mouths of men.

Second Reading. *Nm. 9 – 10*

The pure oration.

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

The things that are said must be proved with the sacred Scriptures. It is necessary that he who prays lifts up pure hands to heaven, forgiving all the insults received and casting away from his soul every passion in a way that he is not angry with anyone. So also, in order to avoid that the mind is obscured by extraneous thoughts, during the time of prayer it is necessary to forget all that which does not have a relation to the prayer itself. And who will doubt that this same state of the soul is better, given that St. Paul teaches about it in the first letter to Timothy, when he says: “I want men to pray, where ever they find themselves, lifting up pure hands without anger and without quarrels” (1 Tm. 2: 8).

The eyes of the mind are lifted up when they do not linger anymore on the earthly realities, nor do they fill themselves with the images of material

things, but reach such a stature that the mind can despise all that which passes and can dedicate itself to thinking of God alone, to whom he speaks with reverence and humility. Certain of being heard by him. How could they who “with unveiled faces like mirrors reflecting the glory of the Lord” are “transformed into that same image, of glory in glory” (2 Cor. 3: 18) not progress?

And how could the soul, isolated from the body and elevated to the retinue of the Spirit, in fact not only elevated but transfigured in him, not become spiritual, having put aside the nature that belongs to it? Now, to forget the insults constitutes the maximum perfection, to the point that in it is contained as in a compendium the entire law, as the prophet Jeremiah says: “For when I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, I said nothing to them, gave them no orders, about burnt offerings or sacrifices. But this I commanded them: exercise compassion and mercy each one with his neighbour” (Jer. 7: 22-23; Zec. 7: 9). Therefore, every time we incline ourselves to prayer forgetting the wrongs that we have received, we observe the precepts of the Lord who said: “When you stand in prayer, if you have something against someone, forgive him, so that also your Father who is in heaven may forgive you your sins” (Mk. 11: 25): and it is clear that, when we stand to pray with these dispositions, we have already obtained an excellent result.

All that precedes has been said supposing that, even if our prayer was not to give any other fruit, we would obtain an excellent gain if we were to come to understand how one should pray and to put it into practice. It is then evident that he who prays like this, while he is still speaking and he contemplates the power of he who listens to him, hears him answer: “Here I am!” (Is. 58: 9); this is before he stands in prayer he has put aside all anxiety with regard to Providence. This in fact is what those words mean: “If you remove oppression from your midst, the clenched fist and malicious words” (Is. 58: 9). In reality he who is happy with all that happens is free from all ties and does not ever stretch out his hand against God, who disposes all that he wants in order to put us to the test; not only, but this man does not grumble not even in the secret of his heart and much less with his voice. It seems in fact that those who do not dare to curse Providence with the voice and with all their heart for that which happens, pretend to hide from the Lord of the universe that which they bear with animosity, as the wicked servants, who do not openly rebuke the orders of the master.

Responsorial. *Jn. 4: 23-24*

R: The true worshippers will adore the Father in spirit and truth; * because the Father searches for such worshippers.

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

R: Because the Father searches for such worshippers.

Gospel. *Lk. 10:17 – 24*

Rejoice because your names are written in heaven.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

Then turning to the disciples he said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.