

WEEK 1

SUNDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Dt. 6: 4 – 25*

The Law of love.

A reading from the book of Deuteronomy.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

"And when the LORD your God brings you into the land which he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you, with great and goodly cities, which you did not build, and houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, and cisterns hewn out, which you did not hew, and vineyards and olive trees, which you did not plant, and when you eat and are full, then take heed lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve him, and swear by his name. You shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the peoples who are round about you; for the LORD your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.

"You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah. You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land which the LORD swore to give to your fathers by thrusting out all your enemies from before you, as the LORD has promised.

"When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances which the LORD our God has commanded you?' then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes; and he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land which he swore to give to our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as at this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.'

Responsorial. *Deut. 6: 3, 5; 7:9*

R: Listen, Israel, and take care to put into practise all that the Lord has ordered you; * acknowledge that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God, who maintains his covenant and kindness with those who love him.

V: You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.

R: Acknowledge that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God, who maintains his covenant and kindness with those who love him.

Second Reading. *Nm. 49 – 50*

Who can express the love of God?

A reading from the “Letter to the Corinthians” of St. Clement 1, pope and martyr.

Let him who has love in Christ keep the commandments of Christ. Who can describe the blessed bond of the love of God? What man is able to tell the excellence of its beauty, as it ought to be told? The height to which love exalts is unspeakable. Love unites us to God. Love covers a multitude of sins. Love bears all things, is long-suffering in all things. There is nothing base, nothing arrogant in love. Love admits of no schisms: love gives rise to no seditions: love does all things in harmony. By love have all the elect of God been made perfect; without love nothing is well pleasing to God. In love has the Lord taken us to Himself. On account of the Love he bore us, Jesus Christ our Lord gave His blood for us by the will of God; His

flesh for our flesh, and His soul for our souls. You see, beloved, how great and wonderful a thing is love, and that there is no declaring its perfection. Who is fit to be found in it, except such as God has vouchsafed to render so? Let us pray, therefore, and implore of His mercy, that we may live blameless in love, free from all human partialities for one above another. All the generations from Adam even unto this day have passed away; but those who, through the grace of God, have been made perfect in love, now possess a place among the godly, and shall be made manifest at the revelation of the kingdom of Christ. For it is written, "Enter into your secret chambers for a little time, until my wrath and fury pass away; and I will remember a propitious day, and will raise you up out of your graves."

Blessed are we, beloved, if we keep the commandments of God in the harmony of love; that so through love our sins may be forgiven us. For it is written, "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not impute to him, and in whose mouth there is no guile." This blessedness comes upon those who have been chosen by God through Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Responsorial. *1 Jn. 4: 16. 7*

R: We have believed in the love that God has for us. * He who is in this love dwells in God and God dwells in him.

V: Let us love one another, because love is from God.

R: He who is in this love dwells in God and God dwells in him.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Ex. 5: 1 – 6: 1*

Pharaoh oppressed harshly the people of Israel.

A reading from the book of Exodus.

[Exo 5:1] Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'"

[Exo 5:2] But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover I will not

let Israel go."

[Exo 5:3] Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us; let us go, we pray, a three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword."

[Exo 5:4] But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get to your burdens."

[Exo 5:5] And Pharaoh said, "Behold, the people of the land are now many and you make them rest from their burdens!"

[Exo 5:6] The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen,

[Exo 5:7] "You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as heretofore; let them go and gather straw for themselves.

[Exo 5:8] But the number of bricks which they made heretofore you shall lay upon them, you shall by no means lessen it; for they are idle; therefore they cry, 'Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.'

[Exo 5:9] Let heavier work be laid upon the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words."

[Exo 5:10] So the taskmasters and the foremen of the people went out and said to the people, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I will not give you straw.

[Exo 5:11] Go yourselves, get your straw wherever you can find it; but your work will not be lessened in the least.'"

[Exo 5:12] So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt, to gather stubble for straw.

[Exo 5:13] The taskmasters were urgent, saying, "Complete your work, your daily task, as when there was straw."

[Exo 5:14] And the foremen of the people of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and were asked, "Why have you not done all your task of making bricks today, as hitherto?"

[Exo 5:15] Then the foremen of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, "Why do you deal thus with your servants?

[Exo 5:16] No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, 'Make bricks!' And behold, your servants are beaten; but the fault is in your own people."

[Exo 5:17] But he said, "You are idle, you are idle; therefore you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.'

[Exo 5:18] Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, yet you shall deliver the same number of bricks."

[Exo 5:19] The foremen of the people of Israel saw that they were in evil plight, when they said, "You shall by no means lessen your daily number of bricks."

[Exo 5:20] They met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them, as they came forth from Pharaoh;

[Exo 5:21] and they said to them, "The LORD look upon you and judge, because you have made us offensive in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."

[Exo 5:22] Then Moses turned again to the LORD and said, "O LORD, why hast thou done evil to this people? Why didst thou ever send me?"

[Exo 5:23] For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he has done evil to this people, and thou hast not delivered thy people at all."

CHAPT

ER 6

[Exo 6:1] But the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, yea, with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land."

Responsorial. *Cfr. Ex. 5: 1, 3*

R: Moses came to Pharaoh and announced the word of the Lord to him:
*Let my people leave, so that they may celebrate a feast for me in the desert.

V: The God of the Hebrews has sent me to say to you:

R: Let my people leave, so that they may celebrate a feast for me in the desert.

Second Reading. *Lett. 140, 13 – 15*

The passion of Christ is a gift of love.

A reading from the "Letters" of St. Augustine, bishop.

The man Christ cannot be proposed as an example of earthly happiness, as he himself has revealed in the message of the New Testament, that does not regard the temporal life but the eternal one. Therefore his humiliation, passion, scourging, the spittle, contempt, cross, wounds and the death itself, as one overcome and completely subjected. All this so that his faithful may

learn what gift of love to ask for and to hope for from him of whom they would become sons. It would therefore not be just to serve God in order to reach an earthly happiness, degrading and despising one's own faith, considering it as something of little importance.

Christ is man and at the same time also God: from his humanity that is so full of mercy and from his aspect of servant we must learn what to despise in this life and to hope for in the other. He in the hour of his passion, when it seemed that the enemies were carrying off great victory, expressed himself with the voice of our weakness, in which our old man was crucified, in order to cancel the body of sin: "My God, my God why have you abandoned me?" (Ps. 21: 2). With the voice of our infirmity, in which our Head transfigured himself, in the psalm 21 is said: "My God, my God" look at me "why have you abandoned me?" because he who prays, if his prayer is not answered, feels himself abandoned.

Jesus became this voice, the voice of his body, that is the Church that had to be changed from the old man into the new one; truly voice of his human weakness, to whom had been denied the goods of the Old Testament so that he could learn to desire and hope for those of the New.

Responsorial. *Mt. 8: 17; Is. 53: 6*

R: He has taken our infirmity * and he has taken on himself our sicknesses.

V: The Lord made the iniquity of all of us fall on him.

R: And he has taken on himself our sicknesses.

YEAR A

Gospel. *Mt. 4: 1 – 11*

Jesus fasts for forty days in the desert and is tempted.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

[Mat 4:1] Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

[Mat 4:2] And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry.

[Mat 4:3] And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

[Mat 4:4] But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

[Mat 4:5] Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple,

[Mat 4:6] and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

[Mat 4:7] Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"

[Mat 4:8] Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them;

[Mat 4:9] and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

[Mat 4:10] Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"

[Mat 4:11] Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.

Third Reading. Disc. 40: 10

The Christian has the possibility of overcoming temptations.

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

If after baptism the tempter, persecutor of the light, will attack you, and certainly he will attack you – in fact he also tempted the Word of God hidden in the flesh, that is the light itself veiled by the humanity – you know how to overcome him: do not fear the battle. Oppose him with the water, oppose him with the Spirit in which all the fiery arrows of that evil one will be destroyed.

If he makes present to you your poverty – he did not hesitate in fact to do it also with Christ, making him notice his hunger so that he would transform the stones into bread – remember his answers (cfr. Mt. 4: 4). Teach him that which he does not know; oppose him with that word of life that is the bread that has descended from heaven and gives life to the world.

If he threatens you with vainglory – as he did with him when he took him to the pinnacle of the temple and said to him: “Throw yourself down”, in order to show your divinity (Mt. 4: 6) – do not allow yourself to be carried away by pride. If he overcomes you in this, he will not stop here. He is insatiable, all craving; he entices also with the aspect of goodness and overwhelms the good in evil: this is his way of fighting.

That thief is also an expert connoisseur of the Scripture. Here that “it is written” regards the bread, there it regards the angels. In fact it is written: “To his angels he will give orders for you, they will carry you in their hands” (Lk. 4: 10, 11). O sophist of vice! Why do you let what follows go in silence? I understand exactly, even if you have remained silent, because it said: I will walk over you, asp and basil, I will tread underfoot serpents and scorpions; protected and strengthened, well established, by the Trinity.

If he attacks you with avarice, making all the kingdoms flash before your eyes in an instant as if they belonged to him and demanding your adoration, despise him as a wretch. Defended by the sign of the cross, tell him: I also am the image of God, I have not yet been thrown out like you, because of the pride, from the heavenly glory; I am clothed in Christ; with the baptism Christ has become my inheritance: it is you who has to adore me. Believe me, overcome and disgraced by these words, he will retire from all those who are illuminated, as he drew away from the Christ, origin of the light.

Baptism confers these benefits on him who recognizes its strength. It offers those sumptuous banquets to those who suffer a hunger that is worthy of praise.

Responsorial. *Mt. 4: 1, 3, 2*

R: Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil; * the tempter drew near to him and said: “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread”.

V: And after having fasted for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

R: The tempter drew near to him and said: “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread”.

YEAR B

Gospel. *Mk. 1: 12 – 15*

Jesus, tempted by Satan, is served by the angels.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Mark.

[Mark 1:12] The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

[Mark 1:13] And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him.

[Mark 1:14] Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God,

[Mark 1:15] and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."

Third Reading. *Disc. 30*

The Spirit and the Desert.

A reading from the “Discourses” of Isaac of Stella, abbot.

“Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert” (Mt. 4: 1). My Lord Jesus Christ does everything or led, or sent, or called, or commanded; by his own initiative he does nothing. Sent he comes into the world, led he goes into the desert, called he rises from the dead, as it is written: Arise, my glory, arise, harp and zither! (cfr. Ps. 56: 9).

Towards the passion, however, he hurries spontaneously and of his own will, as the prophet had foretold: “ He has been sacrificed, because he wanted it” (Is. 53: 7 Vulg.). Exactly in this he made himself obedient to the Father until death. Master, in fact, and model of obedience, he did not want either to do or to suffer anything else outside of this, which is the only way that leads to life in the truth: “He was led by the Spirit into the desert” or, as another evangelist says: “The Spirit thrust him into the desert” (Mk. 1: 12).

“Those who are guided by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Rm. 8: 14). He however, being Son in a more particular and more worthy way, is thrust or led into the desert in a different and more excellent way than the others.

“Full” he says “of the Holy Spirit, he went away from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert” (Lk. 4: 1). To the others the Holy Spirit is given in a certain measure and according to this measure they are guided in everything; he however, in whom the fullness of the Divinity was pleased to dwell, received the fullness of the Spirit. He therefore is brought more strongly and more fully to fulfil the orders of the Father. “Having returned” he says “from the Jordan, he was thrust into the desert”. He who descended into the world, comes from the Jordan, from here then, returning again, he leaves this world and goes to the Father. Therefore, he who desires to ascend come to the Jordan, come to the descent, come to humility, which is the only condition in order to ascend. In fact, “whoever humiliates himself will be exalted” (Lk. 14: 11 and 18: 14).

Here he finds the Holy Spirit, that rests on the humble and on the meek, on he who fears the word of God, who resists the proud while he gives his grace to the humble, so that they can despise the world and flee the century, overcome the devil and draw away from the multitudes, in the midst of whom the wicked discourses corrupt the customs; they search for the desert and the hidden places where they await God and where they can invoke him like a sparrow, and meditate on him like a dove; where, answering, he will speak to their hearts saying, according to the prophet: “I will lead him in to the desert and I will speak to his heart” (Hos. 2: 16).

Thus our Lord Jesus Christ, meek and humble of heart, after having reached such a humility and meekness that he subjected himself into the hands of him who was inferior to him in order to be baptised, at that instant merited to be favoured as the paternal voice attests: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” because of his humility and obedience; and for this he justly raised him up and favoured him above the others; therefore from then listen to him. And on the humble and meek the Holy Spirit, by whom he was led into the desert, descended as into his own and intimate temple.

Responsorial. *Ps. 90:2 – 3, 5*

R: Say to the Lord: My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust. *
He will free you from the snare of the hunter, from the plague that destroys.

V: His faithfulness will be your shield and armour; you will not fear the terrors of the night.

R: He will free you from the snare of the hunter, from the plague that destroys.

YEAR C

Gospel. *Lk. 4: 1 – 13*

Jesus was led into the desert by the Spirit and tempted by the devil.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

[Luke 4:1] And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit

[Luke 4:2] for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing in those days; and when they were ended, he was hungry.

[Luke 4:3] The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."

[Luke 4:4] And Jesus answered him, "It is written, `Man shall not live by bread alone.'"

[Luke 4:5] And the devil took him up, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time,

[Luke 4:6] and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory; for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.

[Luke 4:7] If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours."

[Luke 4:8] And Jesus answered him, "It is written, `You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'"

[Luke 4:9] And he took him to Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here;

[Luke 4:10] for it is written, `He will give his angels charge of you, to guard you,'

[Luke 4:11] and `On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

[Luke 4:12] And Jesus answered him, "It is said, `You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"

[Luke 4:13] And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Third Reading. Disc. 3

*Jesus was tempted so that the Church could learn
that it goes to him through many tribulations and temptations.*

**A reading from the “Discourses on the Song of Songs” of Origen,
presbyter.**

The life of mortals is full of insidious snares, it is all a net of deception aimed at the human race because of hate against the Lord, by that gigantic hunter called Nembroth. In fact who, if not the devil, is not the true giant who also rebelled against God? The snares of the temptations and the deception of the traps are called precisely nets of the devil. And since the enemy had stretched these nets all over and had made almost every one fall, it was necessary that someone stronger and more powerful than him should come to break them in order to open a way for those who would follow him. For this reason the Saviour also, before reaching the nuptial union with the Church, was tempted by the devil, so that with his victory over the temptations he could prepare her and call her to himself, teaching her clearly with his example that it is not in idleness and in pleasures, but through many tribulations and temptations that she had to come to Christ. No one else had been capable of going beyond these nets, as it is written: “all had sinned” (Rm. 3: 23). And again, the Scripture says: “There isn’t a man on earth who is so just that he does only good and does not sin” (Qo. 7: 20), and again: There is no one without sin, even if he has lived for only one day (cfr. Ps. 50: 7; Jb. 15: 14). Therefore our Lord and Saviour Jesus has been the only one who did not commit sin, but the Father “took him out from sin in our favour” (2 Cor. 5: 21), so that “sending his own Son in a flesh similar to that of sin, and in view of sin, he has condemned sin in the flesh” (Rm. 8: 3).

He drew near therefore to these nets, but was the only one who did not remain entangled in them, on the contrary, breaking them and destroying

them, he gave to his Church the courage to trod underfoot the snares and to go beyond them, saying with all ardour: “We have been freed like a bird from the snare of the hunters; the snare has been broken and we have escaped” (Ps. 123: 7).

But who broke that snare if not he who was the only one who could not be overcome? Because he died, it is true, but of his own spontaneous will and not, like us, for having sinned. And being free among the dead, through this, he weakened him who had power over death, he freed those who were slaves of death. And not only did he resurrect himself, but he awakened them also and made them sit with him in the heavens. In fact, ascending to heaven, he led as a slave the slavery, not only liberating the souls but resurrecting also the bodies, as the gospel attests when it says that: “many bodies of holy dead men will rise and will appear to many, and they will enter into the holy city” of the living God, Jerusalem (Mt. 27: 52, 53).

Responsorial. *Lk.22: 28; 12: 32*

R: You are those who have persevered with me in my trials, * and I will prepare a kingdom for you, as the Father has prepared one for me.

V: Do not fear, little flock, because it has pleased your Father to give you his kingdom,

R: and I will prepare a kingdom for you, as the Father has prepared one for me.

MONDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Dt. 7: 6 – 14; 8: 1 – 6*

Israel, the elected people.

A reading from the book of Deuteronomy.

"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the LORD loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and requites to their face those who hate him, by destroying them; he will not be slack with him who hates him, he will requite him to his face. You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment, and the statutes, and the ordinances, which I command you this day.

"And because you hearken to these ordinances, and keep and do them, the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love which he swore to your fathers to keep; he will love you, bless you, and multiply you; he will also bless the fruit of your body and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the young of your flock, in the land which he swore to your fathers to give you. You shall be blessed above all peoples; there shall not be male or female barren among you, or among your cattle.

"All the commandment which I command you this day you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to give to your fathers. And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not. And he

humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. Your clothing did not wear out upon you, and your foot did not swell, these forty years. Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him.

Responsorial. *1 Jn. 4: 10, 16; cfr. Is. 63: 8, 9*

R: God has loved us first and has sent his Son as the victim of expiation for our sins. * We have recognised and believed in this love that God has for us.

V: The Lord is our Saviour, with love he has ransomed us.

R: We have recognised and believed in this love that God has for us.

Second Reading. *Nm. 2. 16*

I will save my people.

A reading from the Dogmatic Constitution “Lumen Gentium” of the Second Vatican Council on the Church.

The eternal Father, by a free and hidden plan of His own wisdom and goodness, created the whole world. His plan was to raise men to a participation of the divine life. Fallen in Adam, God the Father did not leave men to themselves, but ceaselessly offered helps to salvation, in view of Christ, the Redeemer "who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature" All the elect, before time began, the Father "foreknew and pre-destined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that he should be the firstborn among many brethren". He planned to assemble in the holy Church all those who would believe in Christ. Already from the beginning of the world the foreshadowing of the Church took place. It was prepared in a remarkable way throughout the history of the people of Israel and by means of the Old Covenant. In the present era of time the Church was constituted and, by the outpouring of the Spirit, was made manifest. At the end of time it will gloriously achieve completion, when, as is read in the Fathers, all the just, from Adam and "from Abel, the

just one, to the last of the elect," will be gathered together with the Father in the universal Church.

Finally, those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God. In the first place we must recall the people to whom the testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. On account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues. But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Mohammedans, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and all things, and as Saviour wills that all men be saved. Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel. She knows that it is given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life.

Responsorial. *Ep. 1: 9, 10; Col. 1: 19 – 20*

R: God's plan, which he will complete when the time has reached its fullness, is to bring all creation together in Christ, * everything in heaven as also everything on the earth.

V: God wanted all perfection to be found in him and all things to be reconciled through him and for him.

R: Everything in heaven as also everything on the earth.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Ex. 6: 2 – 13*

Vocation of Moses (second narration)

A reading from the book of Exodus.

[Exo 6:2] And God said to Moses, "I am the LORD.

[Exo 6:3] I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them.

[Exo 6:4] I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they dwelt as sojourners.

[Exo 6:5] Moreover I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold in bondage and I have remembered my covenant.

[Exo 6:6] Say therefore to the people of Israel, `I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment,

[Exo 6:7] and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

[Exo 6:8] And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD."

[Exo 6:9] Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel; but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel bondage.

[Exo 6:10] And the LORD said to Moses,

[Exo 6:11] "Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the people of Israel go out of his land."

[Exo 6:12] But Moses said to the LORD, "Behold, the people of Israel have not listened to me; how then shall Pharaoh listen to me, who am a man of uncircumcised lips?"

[Exo 6:13] But the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them a charge to the people of Israel and to Pharaoh king of Egypt to bring the

people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

Responsorial. *Cfr. 1 Pt. 2: 9, 10; Ex. 6: 7, 6*

R: You are the elected race, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, that God has acquired; you, who once were not a people, now instead you are the people of God. * I will take you as my people and I will become your God.

V: I am the Lord! I will draw you out of the slavery of the Egyptians and I will free you with a powerful arm.

R: I will take you as my people and I will become your God.

Second Reading. *Disc. 14 on the love of the poor, 23 – 25*

Let us show the love of God for one another.

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

Acknowledge whence you have existence, breath, and understanding. Acknowledge whence you have what is most important of all, your knowledge of God, your hope of the kingdom of heaven, your contemplation of glory which in this life is of course through a glass darkly but hereafter will be more perfect and clearer. Acknowledge that you have been made a son of God, a co-heir with Christ. Acknowledge, and now I speak with daring, that you have been made divine. From where and from whom have all these benefits come to you?

Or, to turn to lesser matters, what you see with your eyes, who gave you the power to gaze on the beauty of the sky, the course of the sun, the circle of the moon, and the multitude of the stars? Who gave you the power to discern the harmony and order that shines out like music in them all?

From whom do you have the rain, agriculture, your food, crafts, dwelling houses, laws and constitutions, civilized life, friendship and intimacy with your relations? To whom do you owe it that some of the animals are tamed and subject to us, and others are given over for our food? Who made you lord and king over everything on earth? Without naming all the individual items, who gave man all the gifts by which he is superior to other living beings?

Surely the answer to all these questions is quite simply God – and God now asks you before all things and in return for all things, to show kindness. When there are so many benefits which we have either received from him or which we hope to receive from him in future, surely we would be

ashamed to refuse him this one point in return, namely kindness and love. Although he is our God and our Lord, he is not ashamed to be called our Father, and will we shut ourselves off from those who are related to us?

Brethren and friends, let us by no means be wicked stewards of God's gift to us. If we are, we will have to listen to St. Peter saying: Be ashamed, you who hold back what belongs to another, take as an example the justice of God, and no one will be poor.

While others suffer poverty, let us not labour to hoard and pile up money, for if we do, holy Amos will threaten us sharply in these words: Hear this, you who say, When will the new moon be over, that we may sell; and the Sabbath, that we may open up our treasures?

Let us imitate the first and most important law of God who sends his rain on the just and the sinners and makes the sun shine on all men equally. God opens up the earth, the springs, the streams and the woods to all who live in the world. He gives the air to the birds, the water to the fish, and the basic needs of life abundantly to all, without restriction or limitation or preference. These basic goods are common to all, provided by God generously and with nothing lacking. He has done this so that creatures of the same nature may receive equal gifts and that he may show us how rich is his kindness.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Lk. 6: 35; Mt. 5: 45; Lk. 6: 36*

R: Love your enemies and do good, and lend without any thought of return, and you will be sons of the Most High, * who causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike.

V: Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate,

R: who causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike.

Gospel. *Mt. 25: 31 – 46*

Every time that you did something for even one of these my smaller brothers, you did it to me.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

[Mat 25:31] "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.

[Mat 25:32] Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,

[Mat 25:33] and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.

[Mat 25:34] Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;

[Mat 25:35] for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,

[Mat 25:36] I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

[Mat 25:37] Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink?

[Mat 25:38] And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee?

[Mat 25:39] And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?'

[Mat 25:40] And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'

[Mat 25:41] Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;

[Mat 25:42] for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,

[Mat 25:43] I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

[Mat 25:44] Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?'

[Mat 25:45] Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.'

[Mat 25:46] And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

TUESDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Dt. 9: 7 – 21, 25- 29*

Prayer of intercession of Moses.

A reading from the book of Deuteronomy.

Remember and do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day you came out of the land of Egypt, until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD. Even at Horeb you provoked the LORD to wrath, and the LORD was so angry with you that he was ready to destroy you. When I went up the mountain to receive the tables of stone, the tables of the covenant which the LORD made with you, I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water. And the LORD gave me the two tables of stone written with the finger of God; and on them were all the words which the LORD had spoken with you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. And at the end of forty days and forty nights the LORD gave me the two tables of stone, the tables of the covenant. Then the LORD said to me, ‘Arise, go down quickly from here; for your people whom you have brought from Egypt have acted corruptly; they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them; they have made themselves a molten image.’

“Furthermore the LORD said to me, ‘I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stubborn people; let me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they.’ So I turned and came down from the mountain, and the mountain was burning with fire; and the two tables of the covenant were in my two hands. And I looked, and behold, you had sinned against the LORD your God; you had made yourselves a molten calf; you had turned aside quickly from the way which the LORD had commanded you. So I took hold of the two tables, and cast them out of my two hands, and broke them before your eyes. Then I lay prostrate before the LORD as before, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin which you had committed, in doing what was evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and hot

displeasure which the LORD bore against you, so that he was ready to destroy you. But the LORD hearkened to me that time also. And the LORD was so angry with Aaron that he was ready to destroy him; and I prayed for Aaron also at the same time. Then I took the sinful thing, the calf which you had made, and burned it with fire and crushed it, grinding it very small, until it was as fine as dust; and I threw the dust of it into the brook that descended out of the mountain.

“At Tab'erah also, and at Massah, and at Kib'roth-hatta'avah, you provoked the LORD to wrath. And when the LORD sent you from Ka'desh-bar'nea, saying, ‘Go up and take possession of the land which I have given you’, then you rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God, and did not believe him or obey his voice. You have been rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew you.

“So I lay prostrate before the LORD for these forty days and forty nights, because the LORD had said he would destroy you. And I prayed to the LORD, ‘O Lord GOD, destroy not thy people and thy heritage, whom thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, whom thou hast brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; do not regard the stubbornness of this people, or their wickedness, or their sin, lest the land from which thou didst bring us say, “Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land which he promised them, and because he hated them, he has brought them out to slay them in the wilderness”. For they are thy people and thy heritage, whom thou didst bring out by thy great power and by thy outstretched arm.’

Responsorial. *Cfr. Ex. 32: 11, 13, 14; 33: 3, 17*

R: Moses entreated the Lord his God and said: Why, Lord, will you let your anger blaze out against your people? Remember Abraham, Isaac, Israel, to whom you swore to give a land where milk and honey flows. * And the Lord abandoned his intention to harm his people.

V: The Lord said to Moses: You have found grace before me, and I have known you by name.

R: And the Lord abandoned his intention to harm his people.

Second Reading. *Disc. 14, 8*

What has God not done for us?

A reading from the “Discourses on the Letter to the Romans” of St. John Chrysostom, bishop.

What has God not done for us? He made the visible and the invisible world for us; for us he permitted the prophets to be welcomed badly, made prisoners and thrown into the furnace, and suffer thousand other evils.

He raised those prophets for us, so also the apostles; for us he handed his only begotten Son over to death; he wanted us to sit at his right hand, while he bore every insult for us; in fact he says: “the insults of those who insult you fall on me” (Ps. 68: 10).

And even if many times and in many ways we go far away from him, he does not abandon us, but he exhorts us again and predisposes that others intercede for us, so that he can give us his grace: thus he did with Moses, when he said: “Let my anger blaze out against them and destroy them” (Ex. 32: 10), in order to induce him to pray for them.

Now also he does the same, and for this he has lavished on us the gift of prayer. He has truly done this not because he has need of our supplication, but so that we, considering ourselves saved, may not become worse. Therefore he often says to the Hebrews to reconcile themselves for love of David or for someone else, disposing in this way himself a way of reconciliation. He certainly would appear more benevolent if he descended in order to be placated by himself and not through others; but he did not want to do this, so that this way of reconciliation would not become a motive of tepidness for those who would be saved. In fact he said to Jeremiah: “Do not pray for this people, because they will not listen to you” (Jer. 7: 16); he however did not want him to stop praying, but he desired to frighten them: and the prophet, understanding this, did not stop entreating.

This also happened to the Ninevites: having pronounced a future sentence for them, without having mentioned a benevolent hope, he frightened them greatly and induced them to penance. With the Hebrews also he does this, inciting them and rendering the prophet more venerable in their eyes, so that at least in this way they would listen to him. Later, since it dealt with an incurable sickness and this is not seen with the other prophets, first he admonishes them to remain in that place; they having refused and taken refuge in Egypt, he concedes this also, provided they did not fall into the impiety of the Egyptians. Not having obeyed even in this, he sends a prophet with them so as not to repel them completely. What, in

fact did the prophets not suffer because of them? Cut off, thrown out, covered with insults, stoned, and an infinity of other serious torments, and notwithstanding this the Israelites turned always to them. Samuel did not stop crying for Saul and, even though he had suffered serious and intolerable offences from him, he forgot every insult. Jeremiah composed the Lamentations precisely for the Jewish people; and even though having been granted by the commander of the Persians the security and the freedom to live where he wanted, he preferred a miserable dwelling in a foreign land in order to live with his unhappy people, rather than to live in his own house.

Responsorial. *Jam. 5: 10 – 11; Jdt. 8: 27b*

R: Take, O brothers, as a model of patience the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. * Behold, we call blessed those who have suffer with patience.

V: It is with the aim of correcting that the Lord punishes those who are close to him.

R: Behold, we call blessed those who have suffer with patience.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Ex. 6: 29 – 7: 25*

The first plague of Egypt.

A reading from the book of Exodus.

[Exo 6:29] the LORD said to Moses, "I am the LORD; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you."

[Exo 6:30] But Moses said to the LORD, "Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips; how then shall Pharaoh listen to me?"

CHAPT

ER 7

[Exo 7:1] And the LORD said to Moses, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet.

[Exo 7:2] You shall speak all that I command you; and Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land.

[Exo 7:3] But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt,

[Exo 7:4] Pharaoh will not listen to you; then I will lay my hand upon Egypt and bring forth my hosts, my people the sons of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment.

[Exo 7:5] And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them."

[Exo 7:6] And Moses and Aaron did so; they did as the LORD commanded them.

[Exo 7:7] Now Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty- three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

[Exo 7:8] And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron,

[Exo 7:9] "When Pharaoh says to you, 'Prove yourselves by working a miracle,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your rod and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.'"

[Exo 7:10] So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the LORD commanded; Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent.

[Exo 7:11] Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts.

[Exo 7:12] For every man cast down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.

[Exo 7:13] Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them; as the LORD had said.

[Exo 7:14] Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened, he refuses to let the people go.

[Exo 7:15] Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water; wait for him by the river's brink, and take in your hand the rod which was turned into a serpent.

[Exo 7:16] And you shall say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, "Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness; and behold, you have not yet obeyed."

[Exo 7:17] Thus says the LORD, "By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the rod that is in my hand, and it shall be turned to blood,

[Exo 7:18] and the fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile shall become foul, and the Egyptians will loathe to drink water from the Nile."'''

[Exo 7:19] And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, `Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, and their ponds, and all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.'"

[Exo 7:20] Moses and Aaron did as the LORD commanded; in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, he lifted up the rod and struck the water that was in the Nile, and all the water that was in the Nile turned to blood.

[Exo 7:21] And the fish in the Nile died; and the Nile became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.

[Exo 7:22] But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts; so Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them; as the LORD had said.

[Exo 7:23] Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not lay even this to heart.

[Exo 7:24] And all the Egyptians dug round about the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile.

[Exo 7:25] Seven days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Ap. 16: 4 – 6, 7*

R: The angel poured out his cup on the rivers and they became blood. And he said: You are just, you who are and who were, you, the Holy One, because thus you have judged. * They have shed the blood of the saints and the prophets.

V: I heard a voice that came from the altar which said: Yes, O Lord, almighty God, true and just are your judgements!

R: They have shed the blood of the saints and the prophets.

Second Reading. *Cc. 1 – 3*

He who gives life, also teaches how to pray.

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

The evangelical precepts, beloved brethren, are nothing else than divine teachings, — foundations on which hope is to be built, supports to strengthen faith, nourishments for cheering the heart, rudders for guiding our way, guards for obtaining salvation, — which, while they instruct the docile minds of believers on the earth, lead them to heavenly kingdoms.

God, moreover, willed many things to be said and to be heard by means of the prophets His servants; but how much greater are those which the Son speaks, which the Word of God who was in the prophets testifies, with His own voice; not now bidding to prepare the way for His coming, but Himself coming and opening and showing to us the way, so that we who had before been wandering in the darkness of death, without forethought and blind, being enlightened by the light of grace, might keep the way of life, with the Lord for our ruler and guide!

He, among the rest of His salutary admonitions and divine precepts wherewith He counsels His people for their salvation, Himself also gave a form of praying — Himself advised and instructed us what we should pray for. He who made us to live, taught us also to pray, with that same benignity, to wit, wherewith He has condescended to give and confer all things else; in order that while we speak to the Father in that prayer and supplication which the Son has taught us, we may be the more easily heard.

Already He had foretold that the hour was coming “when the true worshippers should worship the Father in spirit and in truth;” and He thus fulfilled what He before promised, so that we who by His sanctification have received the Spirit and truth, may also by His teaching worship truly and spiritually.

For what can be a more spiritual prayer than that which was given to us by Christ, by whom also the Holy Spirit was given to us? What praying to the Father can be more truthful than that which was delivered to us by the Son who is the Truth, out of His own mouth? So that to pray otherwise than He taught is not ignorance alone, but also sin; since He Himself has established, and said, “You reject the commandments of God, that you may keep your own traditions.”

Let us therefore, beloved brethren, pray as God our Teacher has taught us. It is a loving and friendly prayer to beseech God with His own word, to come up to His ears in the prayer of Christ. Let the Father acknowledge the words of His Son when we make our prayer, and let Him also who dwells within in our breast Himself dwell in our voice. And since we have Him as

an Advocate with the Father for our sins, let us, when as sinners we petition on behalf of our sins, put forward the words of our Advocate. For since He says, that “whatsoever we shall ask of the Father in His name, He will give us,” how much more effectually do we obtain what we ask in Christ’s name, if we ask for it in His own prayer!

Responsorial. *Jn. 16: 24; 14: 13*

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

V: Whatever you ask for in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son:

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

Gospel. *Mt. 6: 7 – 15*

You pray like this.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

“And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

Our Father who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;

And forgive us our debts,

As we also have forgiven our debtors;

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil.

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

WEDNESDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Dt. 10: 12 – 11: 7, 26 – 28*

The need to follow only God.

A reading from the book of Deuteronomy.

"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I command you this day for your good? Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it; yet the LORD set his heart in love upon your fathers and chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as at this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner therefore; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve him and cleave to him, and by his name you shall swear. He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and terrible things which your eyes have seen. Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now the LORD your God has made you as the stars of heaven for multitude.

"You shall therefore love the LORD your God, and keep his charge, his statutes, his ordinances, and his commandments always. And consider this day (since I am not speaking to your children who have not known or seen it), consider the discipline of the LORD your God, his greatness, his mighty hand and his outstretched arm, his signs and his deeds which he did in Egypt to Pharaoh the king of Egypt and to all his land; and what he did to the army of Egypt, to their horses and to their chariots; how he made the water of the Red Sea overflow them as they pursued after you, and how the LORD has destroyed them to this day; and what he did to you in the wilderness, until you came to this place; and what he did to Dathan and Abi'ram the sons of Eli'ab, son of Reuben; how the earth opened its mouth

and swallowed them up, with their households, their tents, and every living thing that followed them, in the midst of all Israel; for your eyes have seen all the great work of the LORD which he did. "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods which you have not known.

Responsorial. *1 Cor. 7: 19; Ph. 3: 3; Gal. 6: 15*

R: Circumcision or non-circumcision does not count for anything; instead the observance of the commandments of God counts. * We are the true circumcised, if we render the cult that is moved by the Spirit of God and glorify ourselves in Christ Jesus.

V: It is not the circumcision that counts in Christ Jesus, nor the non-circumcision, but to be a new creature.

R: We are the true circumcised, if we render the cult that is moved by the Spirit of God and glorify ourselves in Christ Jesus.

Second Reading. *Cap. 12. 13. 14*

The need to love God alone.

A reading from the “Chapters on spiritual perfection” of Diadochus of Photike, bishop.

He who holds himself dear cannot love God; but he who, for the sake of the immeasurable riches of divine love, does not hold himself dear, he it is who loves God. That is why such a one never seeks his own glory, but rather the glory of God; for he who holds himself dear seeks his own glory. He who holds God dear loves the glory of his creator.

It is the mark of the soul that is sensitive to the love of God ever to seek the glory of God in its fulfilment of every commandment, and to delight in its own abasement, since to God, on account of his greatness, belongs glory, and to man belongs abasement whereby we become members of the household of God. If we do that, we too will rejoice, like Saint John the Baptist, in the glory of the Lord, and begin to say unceasingly: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn. 3: 30).

I know someone who so loves God, although he feels compunction about not loving him, as he wants to, that his soul is constantly in the grip of a fervent desire to see God glorified in him, and to see himself as if he were not. This person does not recognise what he is even when he is praised with words, since in his great desire for abasement he does not think of his own dignity. He celebrates the liturgy as the law prescribes for priests but he is so intent on the love of God that he loses all awareness of his own dignity in the depths of his love for God. He buries any glory that would come to him in a spirit of humility, so that at all times, in his own eyes and estimation he seems to be only a useless servant, estranged, as it were, from his own dignity by his desire for abasement. This we too should do so that we flee from all honour and glory because of the immeasurable riches of the love of the Lord who has so loved us.

He who has a heartfelt love for God is known by him. For a person grows in the love of God in the measure in which, he takes that love into his inmost soul. Which is why, afterwards, such a one passionately longs for the illumination of knowledge to the point of feeling in his very bones, no longer aware of himself but wholly transformed by the love of God.

Such a one is in this life without being in it. He still lives in his own body but unceasingly goes out to God through love by the very momentum of his soul. Henceforward, his heart burning with the fire of love he adheres to God with a sort of irresistible desire, as if quite torn away from the love of self by the love of God. 'For if we are beside ourselves,' says the Apostle, 'it is for God; if we are in our right mind it is for you' (2 Cor. 5: 13).

Responsorial. *Cf. Jn. 3: 16; 1 Jn. 4: 10*

R: God loved the world so much that he gave us his only Son, * so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.

V: This is what love is: not our love for God, but God's love for us shown when he sent his Son,

R: so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.

First Reading. Ex. 10: 21 – 11: 10

The plague of darkness and the announcement of the plague of the first-born.

A reading from the book of Exodus.

[Exo 10:21] Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt."

[Exo 10:22] So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days;

[Exo 10:23] they did not see one another, nor did any rise from his place for three days; but all the people of Israel had light where they dwelt.

[Exo 10:24] Then Pharaoh called Moses, and said, "Go, serve the LORD; your children also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind."

[Exo 10:25] But Moses said, "You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.

[Exo 10:26] Our cattle also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must take of them to serve the LORD our God, and we do not know with what we must serve the LORD until we arrive there."

[Exo 10:27] But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go.

[Exo 10:28] Then Pharaoh said to him, "Get away from me; take heed to yourself; never see my face again; for in the day you see my face you shall die."

[Exo 10:29] Moses said, "As you say! I will not see your face again."

CHAPTE

R 11

[Exo 11:1] The LORD said to Moses, "Yet one plague more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence; when he lets you go, he will drive you away completely.

[Exo 11:2] Speak now in the hearing of the people, that they ask, every man of his neighbor and every woman of her neighbor, jewelry of silver and of gold."

[Exo 11:3] And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in

the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people.

[Exo 11:4] And Moses said, "Thus says the LORD: About midnight I will go forth in the midst of Egypt;

[Exo 11:5] and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sits upon his throne, even to the first-born of the maidservant who is behind the mill; and all the first-born of the cattle.

[Exo 11:6] And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever shall be again.

[Exo 11:7] But against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, not a dog shall growl; that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between the Egyptians and Israel.

[Exo 11:8] And all these your servants shall come down to me, and bow down to me, saying, 'Get you out, and all the people who follow you.' And after that I will go out." And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger.

[Exo 11:9] Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you; that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt."

[Exo 11:10] Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh; and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Wis. 18: 4; 17: 20; 18: 1*

R: Those who held your children in prison deserved to be deprived of the light: * these, in fact, had to carry the everlasting light of the law to the world.

V: A profound night extended over the Egyptians; for your saints instead a living light shone.

R: these, in fact, had to carry the everlasting light of the law to the world.

Second Reading. *Dim. 11 on the circumcision, 11 – 12*

The circumcision of the heart.

A reading from the “Demonstrations” of Aphraates, bishop.

The law and the covenant underwent a complete change. First of all God changed the agreement he had made with Adam and made a fresh one with Noah. God then made a further agreement with Abraham and he changed this so as to make a new one with Moses. The covenant with Moses was not being observed and now in this last epoch of the world God

made yet another covenant but this one is not going to be changed. God had laid down a law for Adam that he was not to eat from the tree of life. In Noah's case, as a visible sign of their alliance, God gave him a rainbow in the sky. For Abraham chosen on account of his faith, the covenant took the form of circumcision which would be a mark and characteristic for his descendants. In the case of Moses the covenant was signified by the paschal lamb, slain on behalf of the people.

These covenants were all different from each other. As is stated by him who laid them down, the real circumcision is of the kind described by Jeremiah: Circumcise the foreskins of your heart. If the agreement made by God with Abraham was firm, this final covenant too is firm and unchanging. God cannot lay down any further law, whether dealing with those who are subject to the Mosaic Law or with those who are outside the law.

God gave the law with its observances and commandments to Moses. When the Jews failed to keep it, he abolished this law and its commandments and promised a new covenant, different from the old, although he himself is of course the same God who decreed them both. Here is the new covenant which he promised to give. From the least to the greatest among them, they will all recognise me. Now in this final covenant there is no longer any circumcision of the flesh or any other visible sign of the chosen people.

Beloved, we have it as certain that in the different ages of our human story God has set up laws which, for as long as he chose, held good but then fell into desuetude. As Saint Paul says: in each age the kingdom of God once existed under various forms.

Now, our God is truthful and his ordinances are trustworthy; whatever covenant he has ever made was established and proved true for its own time. Those who are truly circumcised in their hearts, live and are circumcised a second time on the other side of the real Jordan, which is baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

When Jesus the son of Nun passed over the Jordan with his people, he circumcised them a second time with a stone knife. Jesus our Saviour circumcises a second time, with circumcision of the heart, those who believe in him and are washed in baptism. They are circumcised with a sword that is his word, sharper than any two-edged sword.

Jesus the son of Nun led the people over to the Promised Land. Jesus our Saviour promised the land of life to all who, passing over the true river Jordan, have believed and are circumcised in their hearts.

Blessed are those who are circumcised in their hearts and are born again of water in this second circumcision. They will share in the inheritance of Abraham, who was the faithful leader and father of all peoples, because his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness.

Responsorial. *cfr. Heb. 8: 8, 10; 2 Cor. 3: 3*

R: I will establish a new covenant with the House of Israel. I will put my law into their minds.* I will write it on their hearts, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God.

V: I will write my law not on stone tablets but on the pages of the human heart.

R: I will write it on their hearts, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God.

Gospel. *Lk. 11: 29 – 32*

To this generation will not be given any sign other than that of Jonah.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

When the crowds were increasing, Jesus began to say, "This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the men of Nin'evah, so will the Son of man be to this generation. The queen of the South will arise at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nin'evah will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold something greater than Jonah is here.

THURSDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Dt. 12: 1 – 14*

The law of the only temple.

A reading from the book of Deuteronomy.

[Deu 12:1] "These are the statutes and ordinances which you shall be careful to do in the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess, all the days that you live upon the earth.

[Deu 12:2] You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, upon the high mountains and upon the hills and under every green tree;

[Deu 12:3] you shall tear down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and burn their Ashe'rim with fire; you shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy their name out of that place.

[Deu 12:4] You shall not do so to the LORD your God.

[Deu 12:5] But you shall seek the place which the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there; thither you shall go,

[Deu 12:6] and thither you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the offering that you present, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herd and of your flock;

[Deu 12:7] and there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your households, in all that you undertake, in which the LORD your God has blessed you.

[Deu 12:8] You shall not do according to all that we are doing here this day, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes;

[Deu 12:9] for you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance which the LORD your God gives you.

[Deu 12:10] But when you go over the Jordan, and live in the land which the LORD your God gives you to inherit, and when he gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you live in safety,

[Deu 12:11] then to the place which the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there, thither you shall bring all that I command you:

your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the offering that you present, and all your votive offerings which you vow to the LORD.

[Deu 12:12] And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your menservants and your maidservants, and the Levite that is within your towns, since he has no portion or inheritance with you.

[Deu 12:13] Take heed that you do not offer your burnt offerings at every place that you see;

[Deu 12:14] but at the place which the LORD will choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I am commanding you.

Responsorial. *2 Kgs. 21: 7 – 8; 2 Cor. 6: 16*

R: In this temple I will place my name forever. I will not tolerate anymore that the feet of Israel go wandering, * provided they try to fulfil all that I have commanded them.

V: We are the temple of the living God, as God himself has said: I will live in the midst of them and I will walk with them.

R: provided they try to fulfil all that I have commanded them.

Second Reading. *Lett. 14: 36 – 37*

Christ is always alive and intercedes for us.

A reading from the “Letters” of St. Fulgentius of Ruspe, bishop.

First of all, we should note that to conclude our prayer we say ‘through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord’ but never ‘through the Holy Spirit’. It is not for nothing that the Catholic Church is united in this practice which is founded on the mystery that the man Jesus Christ was made mediator between God and men, a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, who taking his own blood, entered once for all into the Holy Place not made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself where, at the right hand of God he intercedes for us.

The Apostle expressed his insight into the priesthood of Jesus with the words, ‘Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name’. Through him, then, we offer a sacrifice of praise and prayer, because through his death we, while we were yet enemies, have been reconciled. For it is through him who

deigned to become a sacrifice on our behalf that our sacrifice can be found acceptable in the sight of God. Hence Saint Peter advises us in these words, 'Like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ'. That, therefore, is the reason we say to God the Father, 'through Jesus Christ our Lord'.

When mention is made of the priest, this refers to the mystery of the Lord's incarnation, whereby the Son of God who, 'though he was in the form of God, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant'; and in that way humbled himself and became obedient unto death.' Whilst possessing equality with the Father's divinity, for a little while he was made lower than the angels.

For, whilst remaining equal to the Father, the Son was made lower in that he deigned to be born in the likeness of men. He it was who lowered himself when he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant. The lowering of Christ is precisely this emptying. And the emptying is nothing other than his acceptance of the form of a servant.

So, whilst remaining in the form of God, Christ is the only-begotten of God, to whom as to the Father we offer sacrifices; but by taking the form of a servant, Christ was made a priest through whom we can offer a living, holy sacrifice, pleasing to God. Nor could we have a sacrifice had not Christ become a victim for us; for in him the very nature of our race becomes a true and saving sacrifice.

When we affirm that our prayers are offered through our Lord the eternal priest, we profess our faith that the true flesh of our race is in him, according to the words of the Apostle: 'For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins'. Hence, when we say 'your Son', and add: 'who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit', we call to mind that unity which belongs to the nature of the Father and the Son and the Spirit: and we profess that it is one and the same Christ, one in nature with the Father and the Holy Spirit, who exercises the priestly office on our behalf.

Responsorial. *cfr. Heb. 4: 15, 14*

R: Let us be confident in approaching the throne of grace: * we shall receive mercy from the Son of God and find grace to help us in time of need.

V: For it is not as if we had a high priest incapable of feeling our weaknesses with us.

R: We shall receive mercy from the Son of God and find grace to help us in time of need.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Ex. 12: 1 – 20*

The Passover of the unleavened bread.

A reading from the book of Exodus.

[Exo 12:1] The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt,

[Exo 12:2] "This month shall be for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you.

[Exo 12:3] Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month they shall take every man a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household;

[Exo 12:4] and if the household is too small for a lamb, then a man and his neighbor next to his house shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb.

[Exo 12:5] Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old; you shall take it from the sheep or from the goats;

[Exo 12:6] and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs in the evening.

[Exo 12:7] Then they shall take some of the blood, and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat them.

[Exo 12:8] They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it.

[Exo 12:9] Do not eat any of it raw or boiled with water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts.

[Exo 12:10] And you shall let none of it remain until the morning, anything that remains until the morning you shall burn.

[Exo 12:11] In this manner you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's passover.

[Exo 12:12] For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD.

[Exo 12:13] The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

[Exo 12:14] "This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance for ever.

[Exo 12:15] Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the first day you shall put away leaven out of your houses, for if any one eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

[Exo 12:16] On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly; no work shall be done on those days; but what every one must eat, that only may be prepared by you.

[Exo 12:17] And you shall observe the feast of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt: therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as an ordinance for ever.

[Exo 12:18] In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, and so until the twenty-first day of the month at evening.

[Exo 12:19] For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses; for if any one eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land.

[Exo 12:20] You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread."

Responsorial. *cfr. Ap. 5: 8, 9; 1 Pt. 1: 18, 19*

R: The elders prostrated themselves before the Lamb and they sang a new song: * Lord, you have ransomed us for God with your blood.

V: Not with the price of silver and of gold were we liberated, but with the precious blood of Christ, the lamb without stain.

R. Lord, you have ransomed us for God with your blood.

Second Reading. *Disc. 19, 3*

The true lamb has immolated himself for us.

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

The Israelites in Egypt immolated a lamb according to the commandment and the teaching of Moses. As well as this they had the order of adding to it unleavened bread and wild lettuce. In fact thus it is written: “For seven days you will eat unleavened bread with bitter herbs” (Ex. 13: 6 – 7). Could it be therefore that we too are perpetually tied to symbols and images? What then do those words of Paul mean, he who was undoubtedly an expert of the Law and among the most famous for wisdom, “we know that the Law is spiritual” (Rm. 7: 14). Could it be possible to doubt him, who carried Christ in himself, and who, I repeat, spoke correctly and would not have affirmed anything that was false? And for what reason must we submit ourselves also to the ancient Law, from the moment that Christ has affirmed so clearly: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish, but to fulfil them. Truly I say to you: until the heavens and the earth have passed away, not even one comma or mark will pass away from the Law without everything being fulfilled. The heavens and the earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away”? (Mt. 5: 17 – 18; 24: 35). That true lamb who takes away the sins from the world has therefore been immolated also for us, who have been called to holiness through faith.

Therefore let us draw near with him to those sublime and truly holy spiritual banquets, prefigured in a certain way by the unleavened bread prescribed by the Law, that have to be received spiritually.

In fact in the Sacred Scriptures the leaven has always been understood as the symbol of iniquity and sin. For which our Lord Jesus Christ exhorts his holy disciples to abstain from the yeast of the scribes and Pharisees, with these words: “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Scribes and the Pharisees” (Mt 16: 6). And also the most learned Paul writes, recommending the blessed to stay as far away as possible from the yeast of impurity that stains the soul: “Get rid of the old leaven, in order to be a new dough, so that you may be unleavened bread” (1 Cor. 5: 7).

In order to be spiritually united with Christ, our Saviour, and to have a pure soul, it is not therefore useless, on the contrary it is necessary and it must be dear to us, to free ourselves from our miseries and to avoid sin, in a word to keep our soul far away from all that could contaminate us. And thus, free from all remorse of fault, we can draw near praiseworthily to Communion. But to add the bitter herbs means to proceed amidst hard effort in order to arrive at the achievement of patience. In the first place, certainly, for itself. In fact, it would be the most absurd thing to believe that people who are dedicated to piety can follow virtue in a different way, imposing oneself on other people's estimation through great efforts, without passing through struggles and difficulties and giving a luminous and magnificent example of strength.

The way of virtue is hard and difficult and it is not accessible to many; it is level and easy only for those who run along it with an agile step, without being afraid to fight with the difficulties, on the contrary subjecting themselves spontaneously to the effort.

Christ himself exhorts us with these words: "Enter by the narrow door, because large is the door and spacious the road that leads to perdition, and many are those who enter by it; how narrow instead is the door and narrow the way that leads to life, and how few are those who find it" (Mt. 7: 13 – 14).

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

R: The lamb must be without defect; all the community of Israel will immolate it at dusk. * The blood will be a sign: there will not be the plague of extermination for you.

V: You have been liberated with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without defect and without blemish.

R: The blood will be a sign: there will not be the plague of extermination for you.

Gospel. *Mt. 7: 7 – 12*

Whoever asks, receives.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

[Mat 7:7] "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

[Mat 7:8] For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

[Mat 7:9] Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?

[Mat 7:10] Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?

[Mat 7:11] If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

[Mat 7:12] So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

FRIDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Dt. 15: 1 – 18*

The remission of debts.

A reading from the book of Deuteronomy.

[Deu 15:1] "At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release.

[Deu 15:2] And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the LORD's release has been proclaimed.

[Deu 15:3] Of a foreigner you may exact it; but whatever of yours is with your brother your hand shall release.

[Deu 15:4] But there will be no poor among you (for the LORD will bless you in the land which the LORD your God gives you for an inheritance to possess),

[Deu 15:5] if only you will obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all this commandment which I command you this day.

[Deu 15:6] For the LORD your God will bless you, as he promised you, and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; and you shall rule over many nations, but they shall not rule over you.

[Deu 15:7] "If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother,

[Deu 15:8] but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.

[Deu 15:9] Take heed lest there be a base thought in your heart, and you say, 'The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye be hostile to your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and it be sin in you.

[Deu 15:10] You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him; because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.

[Deu 15:11] For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land.

[Deu 15:12] "If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you.

[Deu 15:13] And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed;

[Deu 15:14] you shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your wine press; as the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him.

[Deu 15:15] You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today.

[Deu 15:16] But if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, since he fares well with you,

[Deu 15:17] then you shall take an awl, and thrust it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your bondman for ever. And to your bondwoman you shall do likewise.

[Deu 15:18] It shall not seem hard to you, when you let him go free from you; for at half the cost of a hired servant he has served you six years. So the LORD your God will bless you in all that you do.

Responsorial. Lk. 6: 35 – 38

R: Love your enemies, do good and lend without hoping for anything in return. * Be merciful as your Father is merciful.

V: Forgive and you will be forgiven, give and you will be given.

R: Be merciful as your Father is merciful.

Second Reading. Hom. 13

Let us imitate the example of the good Shepherd.

A reading from the “Homilies” of St. Asterius of Amasea, bishop.

If you want to live up to the standard set by God, you must imitate his example in whose likeness you are made. You are Christians and that very name means that you believe in charity. You must imitate the charity and love of Christ. Meditate carefully on the richness of Christ's charity. When he was to appear to man in human fashion, he sent before him John, a

herald of repentance and author of virtue, and, even before John, there were all the prophets to teach men that they should change their ways.

Finally, after a short while, Christ came on earth and cried out personally, with his own voice: Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy-burdened, and I will refresh you. Look at how he received those who listened to his voice. He gave them a ready pardon for their sins and in a moment he quickly freed them from those who troubled them: the Word made them holy, the Spirit sealed them, their old nature was buried, the new man was born and grew young again through grace. What was the result? He who had been an enemy, became a friend; he who had been a stranger, became a son; he who had been common and profane, became sacred and holy.

Let us be shepherds after the style of our Lord. If we meditate on the gospels, we will learn as in a mirror how to be considerate and kind.

Sketched out in the gospel in parables and hidden sayings, I find a man who is shepherd of a hundred sheep. When one of them left the flock and wandered off, the shepherd did not stay with those who stayed grazing in the flock without wandering. On the contrary, he went off to search for the single stray, he followed it through countless valleys and ravines, climbed many difficult mountains, searched with great trouble in lonely places, until he found it. When he had found the lost sheep, far from beating it or driving it to return to the flock, he laid it on his shoulders and gently carried it back and returned it to its fellows. The Good Shepherd rejoiced more over this one that was found, than over all the others.

Let us think over the hidden meaning of this parable. The sheep and the shepherd in the story do not refer simply to an ordinary sheep and to the shepherd of dumb beasts. The whole story has a sacred meaning and it warns us not to think of any man as lost or beyond hope. We must not easily despair of those who are in danger or be slow to help them. If they stray from the path of virtue, we should lead them back and rejoice in their return and make it easy for them to rejoin the community of those who lead good and holy lives.

Responsorial. *cfr. Zec. 7: 9; Mt. 6: 14*

R: Practise justice and faithfulness. * Exercise compassion and mercy with one another.

V: If you forgive men the wrongs they have done, your heavenly Father will also forgive you your faults.

R: Exercise compassion and mercy with one another.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Ex. 12: 21 – 36*

The tenth plague: the death of the firstborn.

A reading from the book of Exodus.

[Exo 12:21] Then Moses called all the elders of Israel, and said to them, "Select lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the passover lamb.

[Exo 12:22] Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood which is in the basin; and none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning.

[Exo 12:23] For the LORD will pass through to slay the Egyptians; and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to slay you.

[Exo 12:24] You shall observe this rite as an ordinance for you and for your sons for ever.

[Exo 12:25] And when you come to the land which the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service.

[Exo 12:26] And when your children say to you, "What do you mean by this service?"

[Exo 12:27] you shall say, "It is the sacrifice of the LORD's passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he slew the Egyptians but spared our houses." And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

[Exo 12:28] Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

[Exo 12:29] At midnight the LORD smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of the cattle.

[Exo 12:30] And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where one was not dead.

[Exo 12:31] And he summoned Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise up, go forth from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as you have said.

[Exo 12:32] Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also!"

[Exo 12:33] And the Egyptians were urgent with the people, to send them out of the land in haste; for they said, "We are all dead men."

[Exo 12:34] So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their mantles on their shoulders.

[Exo 12:35] The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked of the Egyptians jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing;

[Exo 12:36] and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they despoiled the Egyptians.

Responsorial. *cfr. Ex. 12: 7, 13; 1 Pt. 1: 18, 19*

R: With the blood of the lamb, the sons of Israel dyed the doorposts and the lintel of the houses. * The blood will be a sign for you.

V: You have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish.

R. The blood will be a sign for you.

Second Reading. *Book 3, 5*

The brotherly charity must conform itself to the example of Christ.

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

The highest type of brotherly love is to love our enemies and there is no greater encouragement to do this than the remembrance of the wondrous patience exercised by him who, fairest of the sons of men, offered his gracious face to be spat upon by his enemies. All creation is ruled by a glance from his eyes and yet he allowed them to be blindfolded by wicked men. His body he exposed to scourging and, although his head strikes fear in the principalities and powers, he bowed it to the pain of the crown of thorns. He submitted himself to insults and finally gave us an example by

enduring in peace with gentleness, patience and meekness, the cross, the nails, the lance, the vinegar and gall. Then as a sheep he was led to the slaughter and, like a lamb before his shearer, he remained silent and did not open his mouth.

Hearing the wondrous voice, full of gentleness and love, saying, 'Father, forgive them', who would not immediately embrace his enemies? Father, forgive them; can any greater degree of gentleness and love be added to this prayer? However, he did add something. To pray for them was too little, he wished also to make excuses for them. He said: Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. They are great sinners but with little understanding; and so he said: Father forgive them. They are crucifying without knowing who it is that they are crucifying, for, if they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory, and so he said: Father, forgive them.

They think of him as a law-breaker, as one who falsely claims to be God, and as a seducer of the people. I have hidden my face from them, says the Lord, and they have not recognised my majesty, and so: Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

It follows that, if a man would really love himself, he should avoid any corrupt love of the flesh. Not to be overcome by fleshly concupiscence, he should turn all his love to the sweetness of the flesh of the Lord. To love his brethren even more perfectly, he should open his arms to embrace even his enemies. In case this divine fire should grow cold by injuries done to him, a man should gaze constantly in his mind on the tranquil patience of his Lord and Saviour.

Responsorial. *cfr. Is. 53: 12; Lk. 23: 34*

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

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

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

Gospel. *Mt. 5: 20 – 26*

Go and reconcile with your brother.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

[Mat 5:20] For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

[Mat 5:21] "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, `You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.'

[Mat 5:22] But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, `You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire.

[Mat 5:23] So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

[Mat 5:24] leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

[Mat 5:25] Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison;

[Mat 5:26] truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny.

SATURDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Dt. 16: 1 – 17*

The feasts that the people of Israel have to celebrate.

A reading from the book of Deuteronomy.

[Deu 16:1] "Observe the month of Abib, and keep the passover to the LORD your God; for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night.

[Deu 16:2] And you shall offer the passover sacrifice to the LORD your God, from the flock or the herd, at the place which the LORD will choose, to make his name dwell there.

[Deu 16:3] You shall eat no leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat it with unleavened bread, the bread of affliction -- for you came out of the land of Egypt in hurried flight -- that all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt.

[Deu 16:4] No leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory for seven days; nor shall any of the flesh which you sacrifice on the evening of the first day remain all night until morning.

[Deu 16:5] You may not offer the passover sacrifice within any of your towns which the LORD your God gives you;

[Deu 16:6] but at the place which the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell in it, there you shall offer the passover sacrifice, in the evening at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt.

[Deu 16:7] And you shall boil it and eat it at the place which the LORD your God will choose; and in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents.

[Deu 16:8] For six days you shall eat unleavened bread; and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly to the LORD your God; you shall do no work on it.

[Deu 16:9] "You shall count seven weeks; begin to count the seven weeks from the time you first put the sickle to the standing grain.

[Deu 16:10] Then you shall keep the feast of weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you;

[Deu 16:11] and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your manservant and your maidservant, the Levite who is within your towns, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you, at the place which the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there.

[Deu 16:12] You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt; and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.

[Deu 16:13] "You shall keep the feast of booths seven days, when you make your ingathering from your threshing floor and your wine press;

[Deu 16:14] you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your manservant and your maidservant, the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are within your towns.

[Deu 16:15] For seven days you shall keep the feast to the LORD your God at the place which the LORD will choose; because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful.

[Deu 16:16] "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place which he will choose: at the feast of unleavened bread, at the feast of weeks, and at the feast of booths. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed;

[Deu 16:17] every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which he has given you.

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

R: The lamb must be without defect; all the community of Israel will immolate it at sunset. * The blood will be the sign for you; there will not be for you the plague of extermination.

V: You have been liberated with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb with out defects and without blemish.

R: The blood will be the sign for you, there will not be for you the plague of extermination.

Second Reading. *Book 4, 18, 1 – 2. 4. 5.*

The offering of the Church is pure.

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

The Church's offering which the Lord taught us to offer throughout the world, is accounted a pure sacrifice with God and accepted by him. For he does not need our sacrifice, but, provided the gift is accepted, the man who offers the sacrifice is himself glorified in the act of offering. Any gift we may offer to a king is a proof of the honour and loyalty we feel for him, and it was because he wished us to make our offering in all simplicity and innocence that the Lord said, 'When you offer your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift'. We must, therefore, offer God the first fruits of his creation, as Moses says, 'You shall not appear empty before the Lord your God'. By means of these gifts man may show his gratitude to God and so receive from him the honour that God gives.

Offerings as such have not been rejected. There were offerings under the old law and there are offerings now: offerings made then by the people, offerings made now by the Church. It is only the particular character of the offerings that has been changed; formerly they were made by slaves, now they are made by free men. One and the same Lord receives the sacrifices, but as there is a particular character belonging to the offerings of slaves, so too free men give sign of their freedom through the nature of the offerings they make. With God there is nothing that is purposeless, nothing that is without meaning or ill considered. Thus, under the old law they consecrated a tithe of their possessions, whereas those that have received their liberty, set aside all they have for the Lord's use, and it is because they hope to receive greater blessings that they cheerfully and freely surrender more than a minimum. The poor widow cast the whole of her livelihood into the temple treasury.

We must therefore, make an offering to God and show ourselves in everything grateful to him who made us, in the purity of our thoughts, the sincerity of our faith, the firmness of our hope and our burning charity, as we offer him the first fruits of the creatures that are his. This is the pure offering that the Church alone makes to her creator, presenting her gift to him gratefully from his creation.

We offer to him what belongs to him, as we appropriately recall our fellowship and union and confess the resurrection of flesh and spirit. For as the earthly bread, once it has received the invocation of God upon it, is no longer ordinary bread, but the Eucharist, and is made up of two elements,

heavenly and earthly, so too our bodies, once they have received the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, but contain within themselves the hope of resurrection.

Responsorial. *Heb. 10: 1, 14; Eph. 5: 2*

R: The Law is not a full and faithful model of the real things, it is only a faint outline; it can never, by the same sacrifices which are offered continually, make perfect those who draw near to God. *By a single offering, however, Christ has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

V: Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering to God.

R: By a single offering, however, Christ has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Ex. 12: 37 – 49; 13: 11 – 16*

Departure of the Hebrews. Laws on the Passover and on the firstborn sons.

A reading from the book of Exodus.

[Exo 12:37] And the people of Israel journeyed from Ram'ses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children.

[Exo 12:38] A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very many cattle, both flocks and herds.

[Exo 12:39] And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any provisions.

[Exo 12:40] The time that the people of Israel dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years.

[Exo 12:41] And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, on that very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.

[Exo 12:42] It was a night of watching by the LORD, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; so this same night is a night of watching kept to the LORD by all the people of Israel throughout their generations.

[Exo 12:43] And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the ordinance of the passover: no foreigner shall eat of it;

[Exo 12:44] but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him.

[Exo 12:45] No sojourner or hired servant may eat of it.

[Exo 12:46] In one house shall it be eaten; you shall not carry forth any of the flesh outside the house; and you shall not break a bone of it.

[Exo 12:47] All the congregation of Israel shall keep it.

[Exo 12:48] And when a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it.

[Exo 12:49] There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you."

[Exo 13:11] "And when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you,

[Exo 13:12] you shall set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb. All the firstlings of your cattle that are males shall be the LORD's.

[Exo 13:13] Every firstling of an ass you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every first-born of man among your sons you shall redeem.

[Exo 13:14] And when in time to come your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

[Exo 13:15] For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of cattle. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb; but all the first-born of my sons I redeem.'

[Exo 13:16] It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes; for by a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt."

Responsorial. *cfr. Lk. 2: 22, 23, 24*

R: The parents of Jesus brought him to Jerusalem to offer him to the Lord,
* as it is written in the law: Every first-born male will be consecrated to God.

V: They offered to the Lord a pair of young doves for him,

R: as it is written in the law: Every first-born male will be consecrated to God.

Second Reading. *Nm. 9 – 10*

The most profound questions about men.

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

The modern world shows itself at one and the same time both powerful and weak, capable of the noblest deeds or of the foulest. Before it lies the path to freedom or to slavery, to progress or to decline, to brotherhood or hatred. Moreover, man is becoming aware that the forces which he has unleashed are in his own hands, and that he himself must either control them or be enslaved by them. That is why he is putting questions to himself.

The dichotomy affecting the modern world is, in fact, a symptom of the deeper dichotomy that is in man himself.

He is the meeting point of many conflicting forces. In his condition as a created being he is limited by a thousand shortcomings, yet he feels unlimited in his yearnings and destined for a higher life. Torn by a welter of attractions he is compelled to choose between them and to reject some of them. Worse still, feeble and sinful as he is, he often does the very thing that he hates and does not do what he wants. And so he feels himself divided and the result is a host of discords in social life.

Many, it is true, fail to see the dramatic nature of this state of affairs in all its clarity for their vision is blurred on the practical level by materialism, or they are prevented from even thinking about it by the wretchedness of their plight.

Others delude themselves that they have found peace in a world-view now fashionable.

There are still others whose hopes are set on a genuine and total emancipation of mankind through human effort alone and look forward to some future paradise where all the desires of their hearts will be fulfilled.

Nor is it unusual to find people who having lost faith in life extol the kind of foolhardiness which would empty life of all significance in itself and invest it with a meaning of their own devising.

Nonetheless, in the face of modern developments there is a growing body of men who are asking the most fundamental of all questions or are

glimpsing them with a keener insight: what is man? What is the meaning of suffering, evil, death, which have not been eliminated by all this progress? Are these achievements worth the price that has to be paid? What can man contribute to society? What can he expect from it? What happens after this earthly life is ended?

The Church believes that Christ, who died and was raised for the sake of all, can show man the way and strengthen him through the Spirit in order to be worthy of his destiny: nor is there any other name under heaven given to men by which they must be saved. The Church likewise believes that the key, the centre and the purpose of the whole of man's history is to be found in its Lord and Master. She also maintains that in all these upheavals there is a great deal that is unchanging, a great deal that has its ultimate foundation in Christ, who is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

Responsorial. *1 Cor. 15: 55 – 56, 57; Lam. 3: 25*

R: Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, * so let us thank God for giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

V: The Lord is good to those who trust him, to the soul that searches for him.

R: So let us thank God for giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel. *Mt. 5: 43 – 48*

Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

[Mat 5:43] "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

[Mat 5:44] But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

[Mat 5:45] so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

[Mat 5:46] For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

[Mat 5:47] And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

[Mat 5:48] You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.