

READINGS
FOR
ORDINARY TIME
VOLUME V

WEEKS 24 - 34

PRO MANUSCRIPTO
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WEEK 24

SUNDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Hos. 8: 1 – 14*

Against the king, idolatry, the covenants and the cult.

From the prophet Hosea.

Set the trumpet to your lips, for a vulture is over the house of the LORD, because they have broken my covenant, and transgressed my law. To me they cry, My God, we Israel know you. Israel has spurned the good; the enemy shall pursue him.

They made kings, but not through me. They set up princes, but without my knowledge. With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction. I have spurned your calf, O Sama'ria. My anger burns against them. How long will it be till they are pure in Israel? A workman made it; it is not God. The calf of Sama'ria shall be broken to pieces.

For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind. The standing grain has no heads, it shall yield no meal; if it were to yield, aliens would devour it. Israel is swallowed up; already they are among the nations as a useless vessel. For they have gone up to Assyria, a wild ass wandering alone; Ephraim has hired lovers. Though they hire allies among the nations, I will soon gather them up. And they shall cease for a little while from anointing king and princes.

Because Ephraim has multiplied altars for sinning, they have become to him altars for sinning. Were I to write for him my laws by ten thousands, they would be regarded as a strange thing. They love sacrifice; they sacrifice flesh and eat it; but the LORD has no delight in them. Now he will remember their iniquity, and punish their sins; they shall return to Egypt.

For Israel has forgotten his Maker, and built palaces; and Judah has multiplied fortified cities; but I will send a fire upon his cities, and it shall devour his strongholds.

Responsorial. *Rm. 1: 18, 21, 23*

R: The anger of God will reveal itself from heaven against all wickedness and every injustice of men who suffocate the truth in injustice; * though

knowing God, they have not given glory to him, nor have they given thanks to him as God.

V: And they have exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God with the image and the figure of corruptible man.

R: Though knowing God, they have not given glory to him, nor have they given thanks to him as God.

Second Reading. Part 2,1

The salvation of the world is divided and ordered according to the division of the ages.

From the work “The Sacrament of the Altar” of Baldwin of Canterbury, bishop.

The food of Christ is the salvation of the world. In fact he hungers for it, for it he also thirsts, because it is his drink. Who can have water if he does not give it? Or who can be saved, if it is not he who saves him?

But the salvation for which the world thirsts, in part he has realised in those things that concern the preparation, in part in those relative to the redemption, in part in those that concern the supreme fulfilment.

All those things that he did in his saints from the beginning of the world up to the time of his advent concern the preparation, in order to prefigure the future redemption. Concerning the redemption: all the good that Christ fulfilled and that which he suffered while he was alive, up to the moment of his passion and his resurrection. Concerning finally the fulfilment: all the glory of the resurrection. Of this he himself says: “I accomplish healings today and tomorrow; and the third day I will have finished” (Lk. 13: 32).

The salvation of the world is divided and ordered according to the division of the ages, in the preparation, in the act and in the fruits; that is in figure, in grace and in glory. First of all God the Father sent salvation to Jacob with the promise of the Saviour. Then he gave salvation to the kings, that is to all the just men, with the coming of the Saviour. Finally he brought to fulfilment the work of salvation with the resurrection of the Saviour, conceding great victories to his king, showing himself faithful to his consecrated, to David, and to his descendants forever (cfr. Ps. 17: 51).

This work of our salvation has been fulfilled by Christ beginning from the ancient times. All of the economy of the things was directed by him

towards this end, and the same author of all things was pleased with that which concurred to this cause, and that of his glory, as it is written: “Renew the face of the earth. may the glory of the Lord be forever; the Lord rejoices in his works” (Ps. 103: 30 – 31).

Not only does he rejoice in what he has done before his coming, but precisely in it; yet coming into the world he took on himself with joy the scourging of our iniquity. Happy, I will say, or sad? I would say well in both ways. In fact of him it is written: “he exults like a valiant man who goes along the way” (Ps. 18: 6). And he himself says: My soul is sad to the point of death” (Mt. 26: 38). Not only did he experience the suffering of the flesh in the bitterness of the torments and in the hard and tiring life assumed for us, but he felt the true sadness in the heart, which above all he accepted voluntarily. He who was in the joy wanted to become truly sad. Nor above all was the sadness without joy, from the moment that for him the joy was born from the same sadness. For this he said: “I have ardently desired to eat this Passover” (Lk. 22: 15). The work of our salvation, fulfilled in every detail, is the will of the Father: it is the food of Christ, and that for which he hungers, that for which he said on the cross: “I thirst” (Jn. 19: 28); this is the medicinal drink, this is the fruit of the true vine, which is the same Christ, who says: “I am the true vine” (Jn. 15: 1).

Responsorial. *Ps. 104: 7, 8, 9, 10; Rm. 15: 8*

R: He is our God, * he always remembers his covenant, the covenant made with Abraham. He established it as a law for Jacob, as an eternal covenant.

V: I say that Christ made himself the servant of the circumcised in favour of the truthfulness of God, in order to fulfil the promises of the fathers.

R: He always remembers his covenant, the covenant made with Abraham. He established it as a law for Jacob, as an eternal covenant.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Esther 1: 1 – 3, 9 – 13, 15 – 16, 19; 2: 5 – 10, 16 – 1*

Repudiation of Vashti and the choice of Esther as queen.

From the book of Esther.

In the days of Ahasu-e'rus, the Ahasu-e'rus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, in those days when King Ahasu-e'rus sat on his royal throne in Susa the capital, in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his princes and servants, the army chiefs of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces being before him, Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the palace which belonged to King Ahasu-e'rus.

On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehu'man, Biztha, Harbo'na, Bigtha and Abag'tha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served King Ahasu-e'rus as chamberlains, to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty; for she was fair to behold. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command conveyed by the eunuchs. At this the king was enraged, and his anger burned within him. Then the king said to the wise men who knew the times -- for this was the king's procedure toward all who were versed in law and judgment, "According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti, because she has not performed the command of King Ahasu-e'rus conveyed by the eunuchs?" Then Memu'can said in presence of the king and the princes, "Not only to the king has Queen Vashti done wrong, but also to all the princes and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasu-e'rus.

If it please the king, let a royal order go forth from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be altered, that Vashti is to come no more before King Ahasu-e'rus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she.

Now there was a Jew in Susa the capital whose name was Mor'decai, the son of Ja'ir, son of Shim'e-i, son of Kish, a Benjaminite, who had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away. He had brought up Hadas'sah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother; the maiden was beautiful and lovely, and when her father and her mother died, Mor'decai adopted her as his own daughter. So when the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many maidens were gathered in Susa the capital in custody of Hegai, Esther also was taken into the king's palace and put in custody of Hegai who had charge of the women. And the maiden pleased him and won his favour; and he quickly provided her with her ointments

and her portion of food, and with seven chosen maids from the king's palace, and advanced her and her maids to the best place in the harem. Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mor'decai had charged her not to make it known.

And when Esther was taken to King Ahasu-e'rus into his royal palace in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign, the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

Responsorial. *Ps. 112: 5-8; Lk. 1: 51-52*

R: Who is equal to the Lord our God, who sits on high and bends down to look into the heavens and on the earth? * he lifts up the destitute from the dust to make them sit in the company of princes.

V: He has dispersed the proud hearted; he has thrown down the powerful from their thrones, he has raised up the humble.

R: He lifts up the destitute from the dust to make them sit in the company of princes.

Second Reading *Lett. 130: 8, 15. 17- 9, 18*

The aspirations of the heart, is the soul of prayer.

From the “Letter to Proba” of St. Augustine, bishop.

To what purpose do we cast about, seeking what to pray for, afraid we may perhaps not be praying as we should? Why not rather say with the psalm, ‘One thing have I asked of the Lord, this will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to visit his temple’? There the days are not events that come and go, nor is the beginning of one the end of another: all days are one and endless, in that place where the life itself which includes these days, has no end.

To obtain this blessed life, the true Life himself taught us to pray – not in many words, as though our prayers receive readier hearing the more loquacious we are; for we are praying to him who knows, as the Lord himself says, what is needful for us before we ask it of him.

Why does the Lord advise us to pray, when he knows what is needful for us before we ask it of him? This can puzzle us, if we do not understand

that our Lord and God does not want our wishes to be made known to himself, since he cannot be ignorant of them; but he wants our desire to be exercised in prayer, thus enabling us to grasp what he is preparing to give us. That is something very great indeed; but we are small and limited vessels for the receiving of it. So we are told: 'Widen your hearts; bear not the yoke with unbelievers'.

This very great reality 'the eye has not seen', because it has no colour; 'nor has the ear heard', because it has no sound, 'nor has it arisen in man's heart', because man's heart must rise up to it. We shall have the greater capacity to receive it, the more trustfully we believe, the more firmly we hope, the more ardently we desire.

So we pray always with unfailing desire in that faith, hope and charity. We pray to God at fixed intervals of hours and times, and in words, in order to remind ourselves by these symbols of reality, and to be aware how much progress we have made in our desire; also to rouse ourselves the more keenly to increase this desire. The more fervent the affection that precedes, the more worthy the effect that will follow. Thus the apostle's saying, 'Pray without ceasing', means nothing else but: without ceasing, desire, from him who alone can give it, the blessed life, which is none other than eternal life.

Responsorial. *cfr. Jer. 29: 13, 12, 11*

R: You will search for me with all your heart and you will find me. * You will invoke me, and I will grant your prayers.

V: My projects are of peace and not of disaster, to grant you a future full of hope.

R: You will invoke me, and I will grant your prayers.

YEAR A

Gospel. *Mt. 18: 21 – 35*

From the Gospel of St. Matthew.

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning,

one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Third Reading. *Disc. 83: 2 – 4*

Forgive us, as we forgive our debtors.

From the “Discourses” of St. Augustine, bishop.

The Lord proposes to us this similitude for our teaching. He admonishes us so that we will not get lost. “Thus, he says, my heavenly Father will also do the same to each one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from the heart” (Mt. 18: 35). Behold, brothers, the concept is clear, the admonition useful; a truly salutary obedience is asked of us so that that which has been commanded may be fulfilled. Because every man is a debtor towards God and has his brother as a debtor. Who can consider himself as a non-debtor to God, if not he in whom sin was not found? And who will not have his brother as a debtor if not he against whom no one has sinned? Do you believe that it is possible to find someone of the human race who is not implicated in some sin against his brother? Every man is therefore a debtor, and in his turn has some debtors. Therefore God who is just has given you with regard to the debtors the norm that he will observe with you.

Two in fact are the works of mercy which free us, and which the Lord himself has briefly displayed in the gospel: “Forgive and you will be forgiven; give and it will be given to you” (Lk. 6: 37 – 38). The first refers to forgiveness; the other refers to the granting of a good. And this also concerns forgiveness. You need to be forgiven when you sin, and at the same time you have someone whom you need to forgive. A beggar asks you for the concession of a good, but you also are a beggar of God. Everyone of us in fact when we pray are beggars of God; we are in front of the doors of the great Father of the family, we prostrate ourselves, we beg, we cry, desiring to receive something which is God himself. What does the beggar ask you? Bread. And you what do you ask of God if not Christ who says: “I am the living bread, that has come down from heaven?” (Jn. 6: 51). Do you want to be forgiven? “Give and it will be given to you” (Lk. 6: 38). If in fact we consider our sins and pass in front of us all that we have committed through works, with the hearing, with thoughts, in countless ways, I do not know if we would be able to sleep in peace. Every day therefore we ask, every day praying we turn to God so that he may listen to us, every day we prostrate ourselves saying: “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Mt. 6: 12). Which debts? All or a part? I will answer: All. You also do the same with your debtor. Establish therefore this norm, declare this condition; therefore when you pray remember this pact in order to be able to say: “Forgive us, as we forgive our debtors” (Mt. 6: 12).

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

R: Practise justice and faithfulness. * Exercise piety and mercy, each one towards his neighbour.

V: If you in fact forgive men their faults, your heavenly Father will forgive you also.

R: Exercise piety and mercy, each one towards his neighbour.

YEAR B

Gospel. *Mk. 8: 27 – 35*

From the Gospel of St. Mark.

And Jesus went on with his disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I

am?" And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." And he charged them to tell no one about him.

And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men."

And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

Third Reading. *Disc. 159: 1, 4 – 6*

*What he orders is not burdensome,
Because he helps to do that which he commands.*

From the “Discourses” of St. Caesarius of Arles, bishop.

“If any man would come after me, let him take up his cross” (Mk. 8: 34). It seems hard, dearest brothers, and that which the Lord ordered in the Gospel is judged as heavy when he says: if any one wants to come after me, let him deny himself. But that which he commands is not burdensome, because he helps us to do what he orders. In what place must we follow Christ, if not where he has already gone? We know in fact that he has risen and ascended into heaven: it is there that we should follow him. It is clear that we should not despair, because he himself has promised it, not because man is capable of anything. Before our head went into heaven, heaven was far away from us. And why should we despair of also going to him, if we are members of that head? For what reason therefore? Given that on earth toiling amidst many fears and pains, we follow Christ, in whom the greatest happiness, the greatest peace, eternal security is found.

But he who desires to follow Christ listens to the apostle who says: He who says that he dwells in Christ must behave as he behaved” (1 Jn. 2: 6). Do you want to follow Christ? Be humble as he was humble: do not despise his humility if you want to reach where he arrived. Certainly, when man

sinned, the way became hard, but it has become easy since Christ rising made it flat, and from a very narrow path he made a paved road. On this way one walks with the two feet of humility and charity. The loftiness of charity attracts everyone, but the humility is the first step. Why do you stretch your feet further than your strength? You want to fall, not to climb! Begin from humility that is from the first step, and you have already gone up. For this our Lord and Saviour not only said: “Deny yourself” but added “take up your cross and follow me” (Mk. 8: 34). What does take your cross mean? Bear all sorrow: follow me in this world. When they will have begun to follow my law and my precepts, they will find many who will protest, many who will obstruct them, they will not only find many who will deride them, but also many who will persecute them. And this not only among the pagans, but also from among those who seem to be in the Church with the body but who are outside because of the wickedness of their works, and glorifying themselves only with the name of Christian they continuously persecute the good faithful. If you therefore desire to follow Christ, do not defer to carry his cross: bear the wicked, without giving in. Therefore, if we want to fulfil the word of the Lord: “If anyone wants to come behind me, let him take up his cross and follow me” let us strive to fulfil with the help of God that which the Apostle says: “Let us be content when we have enough to eat and to clothe ourselves with” (1 Tm. 6: 8); because it may not happen that searching for more than what is necessary of the earthly goods, we want to enrich ourselves and we fall into the temptations and into the snares of the devil “and in senseless and disastrous greed that makes the men drown in ruin and perdition” (1 Tm. 6: 9). The Lord deigns to protect us freeing us from this temptation, he who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Responsorial. *Mt. 10: 24 – 25, 26; Is. 51: 7*

R: A disciple is not greater than his teacher, or a servant more than his master. * It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and for the servant like his master; do not fear them therefore.

V: Do not fear the insults of men, do not be afraid of their derision.

R: It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and for the servant like his master; do not fear them therefore.

YEAR C

Gospel. Lk. 15: 1 – 32

From the Gospel of St. Luke.

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

"Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

And he said, "There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants."' "

And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and

kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

Third Reading. *Disc. 168*

*Christ has looked for us on the earth,
We must look for him in heaven.*

From the "Discourses" of St. Peter Chrysologus, bishop.

When we find things that are lost, we always feel a new and immense joy; and it is a greater joy for us to find again that which we had lost rather than to have never lost that which was well conserved. But this parable speaks more about the divine mercy rather than of our human progress. To abandon the great things, to love the small, belongs to the divine power and not to human greed. Because God gives existence to the things that do not exist and goes in search of the things that are lost, without abandoning that which he has left; and he finds again the lost without losing that which was kept.

He is not an earthly shepherd, but heavenly, and this parable does not present the human happenings, but veils the divine mysteries; this appears

in the same verse that he quotes when he says: “who among you, if he had hundred sheep and lost one...” (Lk. 15: 4).

Do you see now that this shepherd is grieved for the loss of only one sheep as if all the flock had gone astray and so, leaving the ninety-nine sheep, follows only one, searches for only one, in order to find again all in that unique one and to redeem all in that single one. But it is already time that we explain the hidden meaning of the divine parable.

That man who had a hundred sheep is Christ, the good shepherd, the pious shepherd who in Adam, as in a unique sheep, had included the whole flock of the human race, and had placed him among the fields of paradise in the pastures of life; but he forgot the voice of the shepherd and gave faith to the howling of the wolves; he lost therefore the sheepfolds of salvation and was completely wounded by mortal wounds. Christ coming to search for him on earth, found him in the womb of a virginal field. He came in the flesh of his birth, and raising it up on the cross he took it on the shoulders of his passion; and full of joy for the happiness of the resurrection, ascending into heaven he carried it up to his dwelling. And he called his friends and neighbours (cfr. Lk. 15: 6), that is the angels, and said to them: “Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost” (Lk. 15: 6).

They angels congratulate and rejoice with Christ for the return of the sheep of the Lord, nor are they offended to see him preside from the throne of majesty; because envy had already been banished from heaven together with the devil, because of the Lamb who had cancelled the sin of the world, nor could the sin of envy penetrate anymore into the marvellous tabernacle. Brothers, let us search in heaven for the one who has searched for us on the earth; he will raise us up to the glory of his divinity, and we will carry him in our bodies with all holiness: “Glorify therefore and carry God in your body” (1 Cor. 6: 20 Vulg.) says the Apostle. He who does not carry any sin in the works of his flesh carries God in his body.

Responsorial. *Jn. 10: 14; Ez. 34: 11, 13*

R: I am the good shepherd, * I know my sheep and my sheep know me.

V: Behold, I myself will search for my sheep and I will take care of them. I will take them out from the nations and I will pasture them.

R: I know my sheep and my sheep know me.

MONDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading *Hosea 9:1 – 14*

Prediction of the exile and sterility

Rejoice not, O Israel! Exult not like the peoples; for you have played the harlot, forsaking your God. You have loved a harlot's hire upon all threshing floors. Threshing floor and wine vat shall not feed them, and the new wine shall fail them. They shall not remain in the land of the LORD; but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat **unclean** food in Assyria.

They shall not pour libations of wine to the LORD; and they shall not please him with their sacrifices. Their bread shall be like mourners' bread; all who eat of it shall be **defiled**; for their bread shall be for their hunger only; it shall not come to the house of the LORD. What will you do on the day of appointed festival, and on the day of the feast of the LORD? For behold, they are going to Assyria; Egypt shall gather them, Memphis shall bury them. Nettles shall possess their precious things of silver; thorns shall be in their tents.

The days of punishment have come, the days of recompense have come; Israel shall know it. The prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad, because of your great iniquity and great hatred. The prophet is the watchman of Ephraim, the people of my God, yet a fowler's snare is on all his ways, and hatred in the house of his God. They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gib'e-ah: he will remember their iniquity, he will punish their sins.

Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree, in its first season, I saw your fathers. But they came to Ba'al-pe'or, and consecrated themselves to Ba'al, and became detestable like the thing they loved.

Ephraim's glory shall fly away like a bird -- no birth, no pregnancy, no conception! Even if they bring up children, I will bereave them till none is left. Woe to them when I depart from them! Ephraim's sons, as I have seen, are destined for a prey; Ephraim must lead forth his sons to slaughter. Give

them, O LORD – what will you give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.

Responsorial *Ps 59:3, 13; Hos 9:7*

R: God, has repelled us, he has dispersed us; you are indignant, return to us! * In oppression come to our help, because the salvation of man is vain.

V: The days of punishment have come, the days of recompense have arrived.

R: In oppression come to our help, because the salvation of man is vain.

Second Reading *Book 2, t. 5*

Blessed is the man who hopes in the Lord.

From the “Commentary on the prophet Isaiah” of St. Cyril of Alexandria, bishop

With an ignorance that is truly extraordinary the Jewish people thought that they would never have fallen into the hands of the enemies, and that these would have never attacked them at all. On the contrary they thought that they would have led a pacific life, in profound tranquillity, even if they had offended God, arriving to the maximum grade of wickedness.

In fact they prostrated themselves in front of the idols, and erected altars and temples under the oak trees and poplar trees, they made sacrifices to vain gods and offered them libations, after having despised the glory that was due to the Most Holy God.

To the inhabitants of Jerusalem it is said through the mouth of Jeremiah: you do not want to say: Temple of the Lord is this, because truly if you do not amend your conduct and your actions, I will also make this place like Silo (cf. Jer 7:4). He struck them also through the prophet Micah saying: “Their leaders judge with gifts in view, their priests teach for profit, their prophets make oracles for money. They dare to lean to the Lord saying: Is not the Lord perhaps in the midst of us.

No evil shall strike us. Therefore because of you, Sion shall be ploughed like a field and Jerusalem will become a pile of ruins, the mountain of the temple a wooded height” (Mic. 3: 11 – 12).

He indicates here the devastation to the temples of Ieconia and blames the Israelites who, though finding themselves already in those same evils, and placed in very serious and imminent calamity, refused to do that which

the situation demanded and that could have reconciled the heavenly benevolence. In fact they would have had to cry and to implore, to climb up to the house of God, to announce penance and to ask that the faults of those who had been led astray could be forgotten, imploring from him only the intervention of salvation.

He taught them, saying by the mouth of a holy prophet: “Clothe yourselves with sackcloth and cry, o priests, shout out, ministers of the altar, come, keep vigil vested in sackcloth, ministers of my God, because the house of your God is without offering and libation. Proclaim a fast, convoke the assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the region in the house of the Lord your God, and cry to the Lord: Alas for, that day!” (Joel 1:13- 15). Therefore it was necessary that these things were done to placate in this way the one who could save. On the contrary, perhaps proud and puffed up with confidence, they did not think at all of doing these things and returned to the high places, in opposition to the rites of the fathers and of the land.

There was mourning on every side and the cry of women and of children exhausted because of hunger and thirst. In fact in the cities surrounded by siege, it is inevitable that these things happen.

It would have been necessary that they cried in order to obtain reformation, that they shed tears in front of God. Behold, he said, before you go to battle, before taking the sword into your hand, before you can put up an opposition, the city will become full of dead bodies. It is therefore useful and necessary for salvation that he who is capable of appeasing God the Saviour with these things, offers them to him according to the rite, even if he finds himself in serious difficulty. It is what the blessed David sings saying: “Lord God of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in you” (Ps. 83: 13).

Responsorial *Ps 105:47, 4*

R: Save us Lord our God and gather us from the midst of the nations, * so that we may proclaim your holy name and glory in your praise.

V: Remember us Lord, for the love of your people, visit us with your salvation,

R: so that we may proclaim your holy name and glory in your praise.

CYCLE 2

First Reading *Esther 3: 1 – 13, 14 – 15*

The Jews are in grave danger

After these things King Ahasu-e'rus promoted Haman the Ag'agite, the son of Hammeda'tha, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him. And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and did obeisance to Haman; for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mor'decai did not bow down or do obeisance. Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mor'decai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?" And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mor'decai's words would avail; for he had told them that he was a Jew. And when Haman saw that Mor'decai did not bow down or do obeisance to him, Haman was filled with fury. But he disdained to lay hands on Mor'decai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mor'decai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mor'decai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasu-e'rus.

In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasu-e'rus, they cast Pur, that is the lot, before Haman day after day; and they cast it month after month till the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. Then Haman said to King Ahasu-e'rus, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not for the king's profit to tolerate them. If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the king's business, that they may put it into the king's treasuries." So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the Ag'agite, the son of Hammeda'tha, the enemy of the Jews. And the king said to Haman, "The money is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you." Then the king's secretaries were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and an edict, according to all that Haman commanded, was written to the king's satraps and to the governors over all the provinces and to the princes of all the peoples, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language; it

was written in the name of King Ahasu-e'rus and sealed with the king's ring. Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces, to destroy, to slay, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.

A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by proclamation to all the peoples to be ready for that day. The couriers went in haste by order of the king, and the decree was issued in Susa the capital. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Susa was perplexed.

Responsorial. *Est. 4: 17b; Ps. 43: 27*

R: My Lord, sovereign of the universe, all the things are subjected to your power and no one can oppose your will: * save us, by your mercy.

V: Listen to my prayer: change our mourning into joy.

R: Save us, by your mercy.

Second Reading. *Lett. 130: 9, 18*

The fixed times of prayer.

From the “Letter to Proba” of St. Augustine, bishop.

Let us always desire the blessed life from the Lord, and always pray. At certain times we bring our minds back to the task of praying, from other cares and occupations which in some way cool our desire, reminding ourselves by the words of our prayer to concentrate on what we desire. This we do to prevent what had begun to grow lukewarm from going quite cold, and being completely extinguished: the remedy is to rouse it often into flame.

Hence the apostle's saying, ‘Let your requests be made known before God’, must not be taken as though they become known to God, who undoubtedly knew them before they were made; but that they become known to us in the sight of God as we practise forbearance, not showing off in the sight of men.

So too, when we have the opportunity to pray for long periods, that is, other duties involving good and necessary activity are not impeded (although in the midst of these, as I have said, we should always pray by desire), there is nothing wrong nor useless in this. Nor, as some people

think, is praying for long periods the same as praying with too many words. To use a lot of words is one thing, to prolong one's devotion is something quite different. It was written of our Lord himself that he spent the whole night praying, and that in his agony he prayed the longer. What else was he doing but showing us an example? In his temporal state he prayed when it was right to pray; now with the Father he eternally hears our prayer.

The brethren in Egypt are said to have offered frequent prayers, but those very brief and in the style of quick ejaculations, lest their vigilant, alert concentration, very necessary for one who is praying, might be weakened and blunted if too long drawn out. In this way they too sufficiently demonstrate that this concentration, just as it should not be beaten to bluntness if it cannot last, so if it does last should not be quickly broken off.

Away with much use of words in prayer; but let there be intensive prayer if fervent concentration perseveres. Saying much when we pray means doing a necessary thing with superfluous words. Intensive prayer means beating on the door of him to whom we are praying by long and devout stirring of the heart. Often this task is carried on more by groaning than by speaking, with more tears than breath. He sets our tears in his sight, and our groaning is not hidden from him who created all things by his Word, and does not require the words of men.

Responsorial. *Ps. 87: 2-3; Is. 26: 8*

R: Lord, God of my salvation, before you I cry day and night: * let my prayer come before your presence

V: To your name and to your memory all my desire turns:

R: let my prayer come before your presence.

Gospel *Lk 7:1 – 10*

Not even in Israel have I found such great faith

After he had ended all his sayings in the hearing of the people he entered Caper'na-um. Now a centurion had a slave who was dear to him, who was sick and at the point of death. When he heard of Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his slave. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to

have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he built us our synagogue."

And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. For I am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard this he marvelled at him, and turned and said to the multitude that followed him, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave well.

TUESDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading *Hosea 10:1 – 15 (Vulg. 10:1 – 11:1a)*

The idols and their kings will be destroyed

Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased the more altars he built; as his country improved he improved his pillars. Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. The LORD will break down their altars, and destroy their pillars. For now they will say: "We have no king, for we fear not the LORD, and a king, what could he do for us?"

They utter mere words; with empty oaths they make covenants; so judgment springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field. The inhabitants of Samaria tremble for the calf of Beth-a'ven. Its people shall mourn for it, and its idolatrous priests shall wail over it, over its glory which has departed from it. Yes, the thing itself shall be carried to Assyria, as tribute to the great king. Ephraim shall be put to shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his idol.

Samaria's king shall perish, like a chip on the face of the waters. The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. Thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us, and to the hills, fall upon us. From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel; there they have continued. Shall not war overtake them in Gibeah? I will come against the wayward people to chastise them; and nations shall be gathered against them when they are chastised for their double iniquity.

Ephraim was a trained heifer that loved to thresh, and I spared her fair neck; but I will put Ephraim to the yoke, Judah must plough, Jacob must harrow for himself. Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain salvation upon you.

You have ploughed iniquity, you have reaped injustice, you have eaten the fruit of lies. Because you have trusted in your chariots and in the multitude of your warriors, therefore the tumult of war shall arise among your people, and all your fortresses shall be destroyed, as Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of battle; mothers were dashed in pieces

with their children. Thus it shall be done to you, O house of Israel, because of your great wickedness. In the storm the king of Israel shall be utterly cut off.

Responsorial *Hos 10:8; Mt 24:22*

R: The heights of iniquity, the sin of Israel, will be destroyed; * they will say to the mountains: Cover us, and to the hills: Fall upon us.

V: If those days were not shortened, no living being would be saved.

R: They will say to the mountains: Cover us, and to the hills: Fall upon us.

Second Reading *Disc. 1,2*

Make the light of knowledge shine for you

From the “Commentary on psalm 118” of St. Ambrose, bishop

“Blessed is the man of upright conduct, who walks in the law of the Lord. blessed is he who is faithful to his teachings and who searches for him with all his heart” (Ps. 118: 1-2). What a beautiful command, full of doctrine and of grace! He does not say first “he who is faithful to his teachings” but first “blessed the man of upright conduct”. Before the doctrine he must in fact search for life. A good life is well accepted even without the doctrine: the doctrine without life instead does not have integrity. The gift of wisdom cannot expand itself in a soul that is not disposed. Therefore he says: the wicked search for me and do not find me; because wickedness blinds the eyes of the mind and, when it is obscured by the darkness of iniquity, it cannot discover the depth of the mysteries.

First of all therefore it is necessary to make war on the malice of life and to correct the habits. After having disposed these things in the just order, in a way that there is the correction of the fault and the grace of purity, we will dedicate ourselves – according to their order and method – to the study of the doctrine that we must know. First of all therefore the moral studies, then the mystical. In those is the life, in these the knowledge; if you search for perfection, know that the life is not without knowledge, nor the knowledge without life: and both of them complete each other. Therefore the Scripture says: “Sow for yourself according to justice” (Hos. 10: 12), harvest the fruit of life; make your light of knowledge shine out for yourself. He does not say first to make the light of knowledge shine out, but sow; nor only sow first according to justice, but also harvest in order to

obtain the fruit of life: and let the light of knowledge shine forth, in such a way that the perfection may be attested by the fruits that are not only glimpsed but gathered. Also in the first psalm this order is given: first he teaches us the way on which to walk and then the law on which to meditate. In fact he who has not followed the council of the wicked, nor has abandoned the way of piety and the paths of justice: with reason therefore he is proclaimed blessed, since he walks on the right path, and meditating day and night the law of the Lord, he obtains the grace of the beatitude.

Responsorial *Prov 23:26; 1:9; 5:1*

R: Pay attention to me, my son, and keep your eyes fixed on my counsel. *
It will be a gracious crown on your head.

V: My son, pay attention to my wisdom and give ear to my intelligence.

R: It will be a gracious crown on your head.

CYCLE 2

First Reading *Esther 4:1 –17*

Haman orders the extermination of all the Jews

When Mor'decai learned all that had been done, Mor'decai rent his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry; he went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes. When Esther's maids and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mor'decai, so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mor'decai to learn what this was and why it was. Hathach went out to Mor'decai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate.

Mor'decai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the

destruction of the Jews. Mor'decai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her and charge her to go to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people. And Hathach went and told Esther what Mor'decai had said. Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mor'decai, saying, "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law; all alike are to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden sceptre that he may live. And I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days." And they told Mor'decai what Esther had said.

Then Mor'decai told them to return answer to Esther, "Think not that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Then Esther told them to reply to Mor'decai, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish."

Mor'decai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Responsorial *Cf. Est 4:17t; Tb 13:2; Jdt 6:19*

R: I have no other hope other than in you, Lord, you who punish and use mercy: * forgive the sins of the people who suffer.

V: Creator of heaven and earth, look on the humiliation of our race:

R: Forgive the sins of the people who suffer.

Second Reading *Lett. 130: 11, 21 – 12, 22*

The Our Father

From the “Letter to Proba” of St. Augustine, bishop

We need words to help us recollect ourselves and see what we are asking for; not to make us suppose that the Lord must be given information or swayed by words.

So when we say, 'Hallowed be your name', we are counselling ourselves to desire that his name, which is always holy, may be held holy also among men; that is, that it may not be treated with contempt: and this for the benefit not of God but of men.

When we say, 'Your kingdom come', which will certainly come whether we wish it or not, we arouse our desire for that kingdom, that it may come for us, and that we may be worthy to reign therein.

When we say, 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven', we are asking him for obedience for ourselves, that his will may be done in us as it is done in heaven by his angels.

When we say, 'Give us this day our daily bread', we mean by 'today' this present time. We are asking either for sufficiency, by expressing its principal part, signifying the whole by the name of 'bread'; or for the sacrament of believers, which is necessary at the present time in order to obtain the happiness not of this present time but of eternity.

When we say, 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us', we are advising ourselves both as to what we should ask for, and what we should do to be worthy to receive it.

When we say, 'Lead us not into temptation', we counsel ourselves to make this petition lest we be abandoned by his help, and either be deceived into consenting to some temptation or be so downcast as to give in to it.

When we say, 'Deliver us from all evil', we bring ourselves to reflect that we are not yet in that happy state where we shall suffer no evil. This last petition in the Lord's prayer has such a wide scope that a Christian may in any trouble express his pain by it, pour forth his tears, begin from it, linger over it, and end his prayer at this point.

It is necessary by these words to impress the realities themselves on our memory. For whatever other words we may say – whether the devotion of the one praying precedes and forms the words to express itself, or accompanies the words and grows from them – if we are praying in the right way, we say nothing that has not already a place in the Lord's prayer. But whoever says anything that cannot be related to this prayer of the gospel, even though he is not praying unlawfully, he is praying in a fleshly, un-spiritual manner: and I do not know how that should not be called unlawful, since people reborn of the Spirit ought not to pray otherwise than spiritually.

Responsorial *Cf. 2 Mac. 1:5, 3*

R: May the Lord listen to your prayers and be favourable to you; * may he not abandon you in the hour of trial.

V: May he grant to all of you the will to adore him and to fulfil his desires.

R: may he not abandon you in the hour of trial.

Gospel *Lk 7:11 – 17*

Young man, I say to you, get up

Soon afterward he went to a city called Na'in, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." And he came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother.

Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" And this report concerning him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

WEDNESDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Hosea 11: 1 – 9 (Vulg. 1b – 11)*

The mercy of God is not lacking.

From the prophet Hosea.

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Ba'als, and burning incense to idols.

Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one, who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them.

They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me. The sword shall rage against their cities, consume the bars of their gates, and devour them in their fortresses.

My people are bent on turning away from me; so they are appointed to the yoke, and none shall remove it. How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! How can I make you like Admah!

How can I treat you like Zebai'im! My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come to destroy.

They shall go after the LORD, he will roar like a lion; yes, he will roar, and his sons shall come trembling from the west; they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria; and I will return them to their homes, says the LORD.

Responsorial. *Hos. 11: 8, 9; Jer. 31: 3*

R: My heart moves within me, my compassion grows warm and tender, says the Lord. * I will not execute my fierce anger, because I am God and not a man.

V: I have loved you with an eternal love, for this I still have pity towards you.

R: I will not execute my fierce anger, because I am God and not a man.

Second Reading. C. 13

God, abyss of charity.

From the “Dialogue of Divine Providence” of St. Catherine of Siena, virgin.

My sweetest Lord, turn your merciful eye on your people and on the mystical body of the holy Church. You will be glorified all the more forgiving and giving the light of the intellect to many, who not receiving the homage from only one miserable creature, which I am, I who have offended you so much and who have been the cause and instrument of so many evils.

What would happen to me if you were to see me alive, and your people dead? What would happen if, because of my sins and those of the other creatures, you were to see the Church, your beloved bride that was born to be light, in the darkness?

I ask you, therefore, for mercy for your people in the name of the charity that existed from eternity that moved you yourself to create man in your image and likeness. What was the reason for which you placed man in so much dignity? Certainly the inestimable love with which you have seen in you yourself your creature and you have fallen in love with her.

But then because of the sin committed it lost that sublimity with which you had created it. You, moved by that same fire with which you had created us, wanted to offer to the human race the means of reconciling ourselves with you. For this you have given us the Word, your unique Son.

He was the mediator between you and us. He was our justice, who punished in himself our injustices. He obeyed to the command that you, Eternal Father, gave him when he received our humanity. O abyss of charity! What heart would not be filled with emotion on seeing such great highness descending to such lowness, that is to the condition of our humanity?

We are your image, and you our image through the union that you have established between yourself and man, covering the eternal divinity with the poor cloud of the corrupted humanity of Adam.

For what reason? Certainly love.

For the sake of this ineffable love I beg you and I request you to use mercy on your creature.

Responsorial. *Ps. 100: 1-3*

R: I want to sing of love and justice, I want to sing hymns to you, O Lord. *
I will walk with an upright heart, inside my house.

V: I will act with wisdom in the way of innocence: when will you come to me?

R: I will walk with an upright heart, inside my house.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Esther 4: 17k- 17z*

The prayer of queen Esther.

From the book of Esther.

Queen Esther also took refuge with the Lord in the mortal peril that had overtaken her. She took off her sumptuous robes and put on sorrowful mourning. Instead of expensive perfumes, she covered her head with ashes and dung. She mortified her body severely, and the former scenes of her happiness and elegance were now littered with tresses torn from her hair. She besought the Lord God of Israel in these words:

My Lord, our king, the Only One, come to my help, for I am alone and have no helper but you and am about to take my life in my hands. I have been taught from infancy in the bosom of my family that you Lord, have chosen Israel out of all the nations and our ancestors out of all before them, to be your heritage forever; and that you have treated them as you promised.

But we have sinned against you and you have handed us over to our enemies for paying honour to their gods. Lord, you are upright. But they are not satisfied with the bitterness of our slavery: they have pledged themselves to their idols to abolish the decree that your own lips have uttered, to blot out your heritage, to stop the mouths of those who praise you, to quench your altar and the glory of your House and instead to open the mouths of the heathen, to sing the praise of worthless idols and forever to idolise a king of flesh.

Do not yield your sceptre, Lord, to what does not exist. Never let our ruin be matter for laughter. Turn these plots against their authors, and make an example of the man who leads the attack on us. Remember, Lord; reveal yourself in the time of our distress.

As for me, give me courage, King of gods and Master of all powers! Put persuasive words into my mouth when I face the lion; change his feeling into hatred for our enemy, so that he may meet his end, and all those like him!

As for ourselves, save us by your hand, and come to my help, for I am alone and have no one but you, Lord. You have knowledge of all things and you know that I have honours from the godless, that I loathe the bed of the uncircumcised, of any foreigner whatever. You know that I am under constraint, that I loathe the symbol of my high position bound round my brow when I appear at court; I loathe it as if it were a filthy rag and do not wear it on my days of leisure. Your servant has not eaten at Haman's table, nor taken pleasure in the royal banquets, nor drunk the wine of libations. Nor has your servant found pleasure from the day of her promotion until now except in you, Lord, God of Abraham.

O God, whose strength prevails over all, listen to the voice of the desperate, save us from the hand of the wicked, and free me from my fear”.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Est. 17 r, s, h; cfr. Wis. 12: 10*

R: Give me courage, O King of the saints and Lord of all authority; * put a just and measured word in my mouth.

V: Give us a place for penance, do not close the mouths of those who praise you;

R: put a just and measured word in my mouth.

Second Reading. *Lett. 130: 12, 22- 13, 24*

You will not find anything that is not already contained in this prayer.

From the “Letter to Proba” of St. Augustine, bishop.

He who says for example, ‘As you have been glorified in us, so be glorified in all the nations’, and, ‘Let your prophets be found faithful’, what is he saying other than, ‘Hallowed be your name’?

He who says, ‘Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved’, what is he saying other than, ‘Your kingdom come’?

He who says, 'Direct my ways according to your word and let no iniquity master me', what is he saying other than, 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'?

He who says, 'Give me neither poverty nor riches', what is he saying other than, 'Give us this day our daily bread'?

He who says, 'Remember O Lord, in David's favour all the hardships he endured', or, 'Lord, if I have done thus, if there is wickedness in my hands; if I have given back evil for evil', what is he saying other than, 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us'?

He who says, 'Rescue me from my enemies, O God, and deliver me from those who rise up against me', what is he saying other than, 'Deliver us from evil'?

And if you run through all the words of the sacred prayers, you will find nothing, in my opinion, which is not contained in that Lord's prayer. Hence there is freedom to use one form of words or another while praying, yet still saying the same things; but there should be no freedom to say different things.

We must pray in this way for ourselves, for our own people, for strangers, and for our very enemies, without hesitation; though according to the nearness or distance of relationships different emotions will arise in the heart of the one who prays.

There you have, I think, not only the manner of your prayer, but also what you should pray for; not from my teaching, but from his who deigned to teach us all.

The blessed life should be sought, and requested from God. The nature of blessedness has been much discussed by many people; but why should we go to many people and much explanation? In the scripture of God it is put briefly and truly: 'Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord'. In order that we may be that people, and attain to contemplation of him, and to everlasting life with him, 'The end of the commandment is charity from a pure heart, and good conscience and unfeigned faith'.

In the same trinity, hope is put in place of good conscience. Faith, then, and hope and charity lead to God the man who prays, the man, that is, who believes, hopes and desires, and gives heed to what he is requesting from the Lord in the Lord's prayer.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Ps. 101: 2, 18; 129: 2*

R: Lord, listen to my prayer, let my cry for help reach you: * for you do not despise the plea of the poor man.

V: Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my prayer:

R: for you do not despise the plea of the poor man.

Gospel. *Lk. 7: 31 – 35*

We have played the flute and you have not danced.

We have sung a lament and you have not cried.

From the Gospel of St. Luke.

"To what then shall I compare the men of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the market place and calling to one another, 'We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep.' For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine; and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of man has come eating and drinking; and you say, 'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by all her children."

THURSDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Hosea 13:1 – 14:1*

The final sentence of reproof.

From the prophet Hosea.

When Ephraim spoke, men trembled; he was exalted in Israel; but he incurred guilt through Ba'al and died.

And now they sin more and more, and make for themselves molten images, idols skilfully made of their silver, all of them the work of craftsmen. Sacrifice to these, they say. Men kiss calves! Therefore they shall be like the morning mist or like the dew that goes early away, like the chaff that swirls from the threshing floor or like smoke from a window. I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt; you know no God but me, and besides me there is no saviour. It was I who knew you in the wilderness, in the land of drought; but when they had fed to the full, they were filled, and their heart was lifted up; therefore they forgot me.

So I will be to them like a lion, like a leopard I will lurk beside the way. I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will tear open their breast, and there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild beast would rend them.

I will destroy you, O Israel; who can help you? Where now is your king, to save you; where are all your princes, to defend you -- those of whom you said, "Give me a king and princes"? I have given you kings in my anger, and I have taken them away in my wrath.

The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up, his sin is kept in store. The pangs of childbirth come for him, but he is an unwise son; for now he does not present himself at the mouth of the womb. Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your destruction? Compassion is hid from my eyes. Though he may flourish as the reed plant, the east wind, the wind of the LORD, shall come, rising from the wilderness; and his fountain shall dry up, his spring shall be parched; it shall strip his treasury of every precious thing.

Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword, their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open.

Responsorial. *Hos. 13: 6, 9, 4*

R: In their pastures they have satisfied themselves, and their hearts have become proud and for this they have forgotten me. * I will destroy you, Israel, and who can come to your help?

V: I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt, you know no God but me and besides me there is no Saviour.

R: I will destroy you, Israel, and who can come to your help?

Second Reading. *Book 3, t. 1*

Our every hope is placed in Christ.

From the “Commentary on the prophet Isaiah” of St. Cyril of Alexandria, bishop.

The blessed prophet Jeremiah indicated in the Christ the evangelical life and justice saying to the lovers of truth: “Stop in the street and look, inform yourselves with regard to the paths of the past, where the good road is and take it, in this way you will find peace for your souls” (Jer. 6: 16).

In fact the words of the holy prophets are the ways of the Lord and the Mosaic Law a prediction like in a shadow and a figure of the mystery that regards Christ. And thus, scrutinizing these paths, we learn to know the good road, that is the precept of Christian life, and advancing along it we find the true and spiritual peace of our souls. Therefore he says that the way of the just has been made flat (cfr. Is. 26: 7).

Is it not in fact straight and flat, clear of every precipice, if proclaiming the word of faith we are justified and purified abundantly and fully through the holy baptism? But the way of the just is flat even in another way. In fact, the enemies having been overcome, the tyranny of the devil having been driven away, every obstacle having been overcome, what can still impede or disturb the lovers of piety?

But consider then in what way, once the way of the just has been made flat, should the typical senses and the figures be annulled. In fact he does not say simply that the way of the Lord is the judgement (cfr. Is. 26: 8) and therefore does not consist in oblations of calves, sacrifices of sheep,

libations or incense; but that rather the judgement is identified with justice, in fact it is characteristic of the Scriptures, prophesied through divine inspiration, to indicate justice with the name of judgement, as the blessed David also says: The honour of the king loves judgement (cfr. Ps. 98: 4 Vulg.), that is justice. Every kingdom that loves justice is honoured in front of God and in front of men. Therefore the way of the Lord is the judgement and full of joy he leads those who enter into this straight path, and who say: "we hope in you; to your name and to your memory all our desire turns" (Is. 26: 8). In fact all our hope is placed in Christ, who we always have in our minds and in our desire, because he has saved us.

Responsorial. *Ps. 30: 2, 4*

R: In you, Lord, have I taken refuge, I will never be deluded. * By your justice save me.

V: You are my rock and my bulwark, by your name direct my steps.

R: By your justice save me.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Esther 5:1 – 5; 7: 2 – 10*

The king and Haman at the banquet of Esther. Haman hanged.

From the book of Esther.

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, opposite the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne inside the palace opposite the entrance to the palace; and when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she found favour in his sight and he held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the top of the sceptre. And the king said to her, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom." And Esther said, "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come this day to a dinner that I have prepared for the king." Then said the king, "Bring Haman quickly, that we may do as Esther desires." So the king and Haman came to the dinner that Esther had prepared.

And on the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favour in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king."

Then King Ahasu-e'rus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, that would presume to do this?" And Esther said, "A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!" Then Haman was in terror before the king and the queen.

And the king rose from the feast in wrath and went into the palace garden; but Haman stayed to beg his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king. And the king returned from the palace garden to the place where they were drinking wine, as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was; and the king said, "Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?" As the words left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face.

Then said Harbo'na, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, "Moreover, the gallows which Haman has prepared for Mor'decai, whose word saved the king, is standing in Haman's house, fifty cubits high." And the king said, "Hang him on that." So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mor'decai. Then the anger of the king abated.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Est. 10: 3f; Is. 48: 20*

R: Israel has cried to God, and the Lord has saved his people; he has freed them from all evil, * he has worked signs and great wonders among the nations.

V: Announce with shouts of joy: the Lord has ransomed his servant Jacob,

R: he has worked signs and great wonders among the nations.

Second Reading. *Lett. 130: 14, 25- 26*

We do not know what is suitable to ask.

From the "Letter to Proba" of St. Augustine, bishop.

You may still ask why the apostle said, ‘We do not know how to pray as we ought’; for it is impossible to believe that either he or those to whom he was saying this did not know the Lord’s prayer.

The apostle shows that he himself is not exempt from this ignorance. He hardly knew how to pray as he ought when, to prevent his being elated by the greatness of his revelations, there was given him a sting of the flesh, an angel of Satan to buffer him, which caused him to ask the Lord three times to take it away from him – surely this was not to know how to pray as he ought? In the end he heard the Lord’s reply as to why the prayer of such a great man as he was not granted. ‘My grace suffices for you; for virtue is perfected in weakness.

So in these afflictions that can both benefit and do harm, we do not know how to pray as we ought. Yet because they are difficult and troublesome, annoying our sense of our own weakness, we pray with our entire human will for them to be taken away from us. But we owe this much trust to our Lord God, that if he does not take them away, we should not suppose ourselves to be neglected by him, but should rather hope with devout patience for good things greater than the evils. For in this way virtue is made perfect in weakness. These things are written to stop a man thinking highly of himself if his prayer is heard when he asks impatiently for something it would be better for him not to obtain; on the other hand, should his prayer not be heard, he may become utterly depressed, despairing of the divine mercy towards himself, though it maybe what he is asking could cause much more terrible afflictions if granted or else bring good fortune which might corrupt and ruin him. In such cases, then, we do not know how to pray as we ought.

Hence if something happens contrary to our prayer, we should bear it patiently, give thanks in all circumstances, and have not the least doubt that it was more opportune for God’s will to be done than our own. The Mediator gave us this kind of example. When he had said: ‘Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me’, he then changed the human will that was in him from the fact of his assuming human nature, and immediately added, ‘But not what I will, but what you will Father’. Hence deservedly by the obedience of one man many are made righteous.

Responsorial. *Mt. 7: 7, 8; Ps. 144: 18*

R: Ask and it will be given to you: whoever asks receives, * He who searches finds and he who knocks will have the door opened to him.

V: The Lord is close to all those who invoke him with a sincere heart.

R: He who searches finds and he who knocks will have the door opened to him.

Gospel. Lk. 7: 36 – 50

Her many sins have been forgiven her because she has loved much.

From the Gospel of St. Luke.

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house, and took his place at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."

And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "What is it, Teacher?" "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly."

Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

FRIDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Hosea 14: 2 – 10*

Invitation to conversion. Promise of salvation.

From the prophet Hosea.

Take with you words and return to the LORD; say to him, "Take away all iniquity; accept that which is good and we will render the fruit of our lips. Assyria shall not save us, we will not ride upon horses; and we will say no more, 'Our God,' to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy."

I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be as the dew to Israel; he shall blossom as the lily, he shall strike root as the poplar; his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon.

They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow, they shall flourish as a garden; they shall blossom as the vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon. O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress, from me comes your fruit.

Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Hos. 14: 5; Jl. 4: 21*

R. I will cure them of their unfaithfulness, with a true heart I will love them.

* My anger has gone away from them.

V: I will avenge their blood, I will not leave it unpunished; I, the Lord, will dwell in Sion.

R: My anger has gone away from them.

Second Reading. *Nm. 26 – 27*

He will free them from their worries.

From the "Treatise on the Incarnation of the Lord" of Theodore, bishop of Cyr.

Jesus hastened of his own accord to meet the sufferings which according to the scriptures he would have had to undergo. He had often warned his disciples that he would have to suffer; and, when Peter protested against this, he rebuked him, finally he showed them how the salvation of the world depended on these sufferings. This is why he gave himself up to the men who had come to arrest him, saying: 'I am the one whom you seek'. When he was accused he made no reply, and when he could have hidden he made no effort to do so, although on more than one occasion in the past he had gone out of his way to avoid the traps that had been set for him.

Then he wept over Jerusalem, for he saw it hastening to its own destruction by its lack of faith, and he warned that the once famous temple was going to be utterly destroyed. Patiently too he suffered that blow on the face from the man who was a slave in fact and in spirit. Buffeted, spat upon, reviled, tormented and finally nailed to the cross, he accepted as his companions in punishment the two thieves on his right and on his left. He was numbered with murderers and criminals, tasted the gall and vinegar from the evil vine, was crowned with thorns instead of palm leaves and clusters of grapes, was dressed in purple and mocked, struck with a reed, pierced in the side with a spear and finally laid in the tomb.

All of these things he suffered in the interests of our salvation. For those who had been slaves to sin had also become subject to the penalties due to sin, and he who was free from all sin and who had lived a life of perfect holiness, took upon himself the punishment of sinners, wiping out by his cross the curse that had been decreed long ago. 'Christ', said Paul, 'redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree"'. For after Adam had sinned he heard these words: 'Cursed be the ground because of you, thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you'. But the crown of thorns put an end to Adam's punishments.

When he tasted the gall he accepted all the bitterness and difficulties of the vulnerable life of mortal man. When he tasted the vinegar he took upon himself man's change for the worse and gave him the grace of a return to better things. The purple signified his kingly power; the reed suggested the weakness and fragility of the devil's power; the blow announced our

freedom. In all this he bore the insults, punishments and blows that we had deserved.

His side, like Adam's, was opened, not to reveal the woman who by her error brought death into the world, but to reveal the fountain of life, bringing life into the world with its double stream. One stream gives us new life in the baptistery and clothes us with the robe of immortality, while the other feeds those who have been reborn at the divine table, like infants being fed with milk.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Is. 53: 5; 1 Pet. 2: 24*

R: He has been pierced through for our crimes; the punishment that gives us salvation has fallen on him. * By his wounds we have been healed.

V: He bore our sins in his body on the wood of the cross, so that dead to sin, we could live through justice.

R: By his wounds we have been healed.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Bar. 1:14 – 2:5; 3: 1 – 8*

Plea of the repentant people.

From the prophet Baruch.

And you shall read this book that we are sending you, to make your confession in the house of the Lord on the days of the feasts and at appointed seasons. "And you shall say: `Righteousness belongs to the Lord our God, but confusion of face, as at this day, to us, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to our kings and our princes and our priests and our prophets and our fathers, because we have sinned before the Lord, and have disobeyed him, and have not heeded the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in the statutes of the Lord which he set before us. From the day when the Lord brought our fathers out of the land of Egypt until today, we have been disobedient to the Lord our God, and we have been negligent, in not heeding his voice. So to this day there have clung to us the calamities and the curse which the Lord declared through Moses his servant at the time when he brought our fathers out of the land of Egypt to give to us a land flowing with milk and honey. We did not heed the voice of the

Lord our God in all the words of the prophets whom he sent to us, but we each followed the intent of his own wicked heart by serving other gods and doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord our God.

"So the Lord confirmed his word, which he spoke against us, and against our judges who judged Israel, and against our kings and against our princes and against the men of Israel and Judah. Under the whole heaven there has not been done the like of what he has done in Jerusalem, in accordance with what is written in the law of Moses, that we should eat, one the flesh of his son and another the flesh of his daughter. And he gave them into subjection to all the kingdoms around us, to be a reproach and desolation among all the surrounding peoples, where the Lord has scattered them. They were brought low and not raised up, because we sinned against the Lord our God, in not heeding his voice.

"O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, the soul in anguish and the wearied spirit cry out to you. Hear, O Lord, and have mercy, for we have sinned before you. For you are enthroned forever, and we are perishing forever. O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, hear now the prayer of the dead of Israel and of the sons of those who sinned before you, who did not heed the voice of the Lord their God, so that calamities have clung to us. Remember not the iniquities of our fathers, but in this crisis remember your power and your name. For you are the Lord our God, and you, O Lord, will we praise. For you have put the fear of you in our hearts in order that we should call upon your name; and we will praise you in our exile, for we have put away from our hearts all the iniquity of our fathers who sinned before you. Behold, we are today in our exile where you have scattered us, to be reproached and cursed and punished for all the iniquities of our fathers who forsook the Lord our God."

Responsorial. *Cfr. Ep. 2: 4 – 5; Bar. 2: 12*

R: God, rich in mercy, for the great love with which you have loved us, * from dead that we were because of sin, you have made us alive in Christ.

V: We have sinned, O Lord our God, we have transgressed your commandments;

R: from dead that we were because of sin, you have made us alive in Christ.

Second Reading. *Lett. 130: 14, 27 – 15, 28*

The Spirit intercedes for us.

From the “Letter to Proba” of St. Augustine, bishop.

Whoever asks that one thing of the Lord, and seeks for this, is asking with assurance and confidence, and has no fear that it may perhaps harm him if he receives it; since without this whatever he duly receives is of no benefit. For this is the one true and only blessed life, that we should contemplate the delightfulness of the Lord forever, immortal and incorruptible in body and spirit. It is for this one thing that all else is sought, and not improperly requested. Whoever has this will have all that he wishes, and will be unable to want, because unable to have, anything improper.

There indeed is the spring of life, which we must now thirst for in prayer, so long as we live in hope and do not as yet see what we hope for ‘in the shelter of his wings’, before whom is ‘all our desire’, that we may be gladdened by ‘the richness of his house’ and drink from ‘the torrent of his delights’; for ‘with him is the spring of life, and in his light we see light’, when our desire will be satisfied in good things, and there will be nothing further to request with groaning, but only what we shall hold fast rejoicing.

However, since that is the peace which surpasses understanding, even when we ask for it in our prayer we do not know how to pray as we ought. For we certainly do not know what we cannot think of as it really is. Whatever comes into our thoughts we reject and find fault with it: we know this is not what we are seeking, even though we do not know as yet the nature of that reality.

So there is in us a kind of learned ignorance, so to speak, taught by the Spirit of God who helps our weakness. When the apostle had said, ‘If we hope for what we do not see, we await it with patience’, he then added, ‘Likewise the Spirit helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with ineffable groaning. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God’.

This is not to be understood in the sense that the Holy Spirit of God, who in the Trinity is unchanging God with the Father and the Son, intercedes for the saints like someone who is not God. It is said, ‘He intercedes for the saints’, because he makes the saints intercede; as is said, ‘The Lord your God tries you, to know if you love him’: that is, to make

you know. Thus he makes the saints intercede with sighs too deep for words, inspiring in them the desire also of the great, still unknown reality, which we await with patience. How can the object of desire be spoken of when it is not known? If it were entirely unknown certainly it would not be desired; and again if it were seen it would not be desired and sought with sighs.

Responsorial. *cfr. Rm. 8: 26; Zec. 12: 10*

R: We do not know what is suitable to ask for. * The Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible groans.

V: In that day, says the Lord, I will pour out over the house of David and over the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and of consolation.

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

Gospel. *Lk. 8:1 – 3*

*There were some women with Him
Who assisted Him with their goods.*

From the Gospel of St. Luke.

Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

SATURDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *2 Kings 15:1 – 5, 32 – 35; 16: 1 – 8*

The reigns of Azariah, Jotham and Ahaz in Judah.

From the Second Book of Kings.

In the twenty-seventh year of Jerobo'am king of Israel Azari'ah the son of Amazi'ah, king of Judah, began to reign. He was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoli'ah of Jerusalem. And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his father Amazi'ah had done. Nevertheless the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. And the LORD smote the king, so that he was a leper to the day of his death, and he dwelt in a separate house. And Jotham the king's son was over the household, governing the people of the land.

In the second year of Pekah the son of Remali'ah, king of Israel, Jotham the son of Uzzi'ah, king of Judah, began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jeru'sha the daughter of Zadok. And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his father Uzzi'ah had done. Nevertheless the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. He built the upper gate of the house of the LORD.

In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remali'ah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, began to reign. Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God, as his father David had done, but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even burned his son as an offering, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.

Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remali'ah, king of Israel, came up to wage war on Jerusalem, and they besieged Ahaz but could not conquer him. At that time the king of Edom recovered Elath for

Edom, and drove the men of Judah from Elath; and the E'domites came to Elath, where they dwell to this day. So Ahaz sent messengers to Tig'lath-pile'ser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son. Come up, and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me." Ahaz also took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent a present to the king of Assyria.

Responsorial. *Wis. 6: 1, 21; Prv. 1: 7*

R: Listen, O king, and try to understand; learn, governors of all the earth. * Sovereigns of the nations, honour wisdom.

V: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

R: Sovereigns of the nations, honour wisdom.

Second Reading. *On advent.*

The whole earth is full of the glory of the Lord.

From the “Discourses” of St. Aelred, abbot.

“In the year in which king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a high and elevated throne. All the earth was full of his glory” (Is. 6: 1, 3). O desirable time, favourable time, time that every saint desires asking for it every day in prayer: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6: 10). The whole earth is full of his glory. I see this earth that I walk on, I feel this earth which is me: in one and in the other, I strive, in one and in the other I groan, in one and the other I see anger rather than the majesty of God. The prince of this world still reigns in the children of disbelief. Every day he rises against the believers and with difficulty finds someone of the saints who does not feel his force. Yet the whole earth is full of his glory. I know in fact that this earth that I walk on will be freed from the slavery of corruption and there will be a new earth and new heavens, and he who will sit on the throne says: “Behold, I make everything new” (Ap. 21: 5). But also the earth that I bear will be full of the glory of God. For now, the earth cursed in Adam produces for me thorns and brambles. It is sick and ill, lazy and heavy, subject to many passions, subjected to many sicknesses. But “why are you sad my soul, why do you groan within me?” (Ps. 41: 6). All the earth will be full of his glory.

But when will this happen? After that “seated on the high and elevated throne”, “he will transfigure our miserable bodies in order to conform them to his glorious body” (Phil. 3: 21); when that glory which appears in the body of the Lord transfigured on the mountain, will appear on our earth, received after the resurrection in the eternal immortality. Then we will sing a new song, and the voice of happiness and exultation will be heard in the tents of the just: “Behold, the winter has passed, the rain has ceased, it has gone away, the flowers have appeared in the fields” (Sg. of Sgs. 2: 11-12).

Then we will know how that transformation will be; now instead our flesh is mortal, in fact dead: “The body”, as the Apostle says, “is dead because of sin” (Rm. 8: 10). Therefore it is dead, impure, sick, despicable, perishable. But it will be full of the glory of the Lord, who will vivify our dead flesh, purify the impure, heal the sick, make the perishable eternal. And if the future happiness of the body will be so great, I ask myself what will be the joy of the soul.

The contemplation of the Creator in the creature will be the reason of our joy, the love of the Creator in himself, the praise of the Creator in himself and in the creature. “The border of his cloak filled the temple” (Is. 6: 1). Which temple? Holy is the temple of God and you are that temple” (1 Cor. 3: 17) says the Apostle. If then also our bodies are the temples of God through the soul, yet the soul is particularly the temple of God. It is exactly this which is the temple in which, while the present life is lived, we offer to God the sacrifice that he does not despise; a contrite and humble heart. This is the temple in which, once the corruption of this flesh is terminated and it is transferred into the kingdom of eternal splendour, when God will wipe away every tear from our eyes, we will offer a sacrifice of praise to God, as he himself says through the prophet: “The sacrifice of praise honours me” (Ps. 49: 23). In the present time, O Lord, may the sacrifice of our contrition appease you, so that, when you will sit on your high and elevated throne, the sacrifice of praise will honour you.

Responsorial. *Ps. 71: 18, 19*

R: Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, he alone does prodigies. * And blessed is his glorious name forever.

V: The whole earth is full of his glory. Amen. Amen.

R: And blessed is his glorious name forever.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Bar. 3: 9 – 15, 24 – 4:4*

The salvation of Israel is in wisdom.

From the prophet Baruch.

Hear the commandments of life, O Israel; give ear, and learn wisdom! Why is it, O Israel, why is it that you are in the land of your enemies, that you are growing old in a foreign country, that you are defiled with the dead, that you are counted among those in Hades?

You have forsaken the fountain of wisdom. If you had walked in the way of God, you would be dwelling in peace forever. Learn where there is wisdom, where there is strength, where there is understanding, that you may at the same time discern where there is length of days, and life, where there is light for the eyes, and peace. Who has found her place? And who has entered her storehouses? O Israel, how great is the house of God! And how vast the territory that he possesses! It is great and has no bounds; it is high and immeasurable. The giants were born there, who were famous of old, great in stature, expert in war. God did not choose them, nor give them the way to knowledge; so they perished because they had no wisdom, they perished through their folly.

Who has gone up into heaven, and taken her, and brought her down from the clouds? Who has gone over the sea, and found her, and will buy her for pure gold? No one knows the way to her, or is concerned about the path to her.

But he who knows all things knows her, he found her by his understanding. He who prepared the earth for all time filled it with four-footed creatures; he who sends forth the light, and it goes, called it, and it obeyed him in fear; the stars shone in their watches, and were glad; he called them, and they said, "Here we are!" They shone with gladness for him who made them. This is our God; no other can be compared to him! He found the whole way to knowledge, and gave her to Jacob his servant and to Israel whom he loved.

Afterward she appeared upon earth and lived among men. She is the book of the commandments of God, and the law that endures forever. All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die. Turn, O

Jacob, and take her; walk toward the shining of her light. Do not give your glory to another, or your advantages to an alien people. Happy are we, O Israel, for we know what is pleasing to God.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Rm. 11: 33; Bar. 3: 32, 37*

R: O depth of riches, of wisdom and of the science of God! * How inscrutable are your judgements and how inaccessible are your ways!

V: He who knows everything, possesses wisdom and he has given it as a gift to Israel, the people whom he loves.

R: How inscrutable are your judgements and how inaccessible are your ways!

Second Reading. *Disc. 3: 19 – 21*

We guard the word of God in the shadow.

From the “Commentary on psalm 118” of St. Ambrose, bishop.

Down here we live in the shadow and therefore we keep the word of God in the shadow. In order to give an example: as before, when we observed the new moons and the Sabbaths which are the shadow of the future realities, we were in the shadow of the law, now that we live according to the gospel we follow the shadow of the word of God. Nathaniel was seen under the fig tree, David affirmed his hope under the wings of the Lord Jesus (cfr. Ps. 56: 2) and Zaccheus climbed up the sycamore tree in order to see Christ.

Even to us Jesus stretches out his hands in order to cover the entire world with his shadow. And how can we not be inside the shadow, from the moment that we are protected by the veil of his cross? How can we not be in the shadow, from the moment that the crucified defends us from the iniquity of the world and from the concupiscence of the body?

We know that the Word of God, when he came into this world, did not come as the Word that he was in the beginning with God, but he emptied himself, assuming the condition of a servant. He came in a light cloud and, being the power of the Most High, he extended his shadow over Mary in order to transfigure our miserable body, conforming it to his glorious body (cfr. Phil. 3: 21). As therefore, when he was born of the Virgin the divine Word changed condition, in this way the words of God seem to be transfigured for us, when we read them in the gospel. In fact their image is

seen in the Scriptures as in a mirror, because down here the entire truth cannot be comprehended.

The Apostle has said: “He is the image of the invisible God, generated before every creature; since through him all things have been created, those in the heavens and those on the earth. All things have been created through him and in him” (Col. 1: 15-16). Only one thing therefore is the word that operates in each one and, since it operates in each one, it operates everything and in everything. This unique Word with the Father diffuses itself in every thing, because “from his fullness all of us have received” (Jn. 1: 16). Therefore, if you consider in her each one of the created things, you will see that in each one of them the Word, of whom we are participants according to our capacity of comprehension, is only one. In me it is a human word, in another it is heavenly, in many it is angelic; there are then those who have the word of domination and of power. There is the word of justice, of chastity, of prudence, of piety and also of strength.

Thus in a Word only there are many and these many are only one. And it is truly not arduous to think like this, when it is read that the spirit of wisdom can do everything. Thus there should not be any difficulty, if to some is given the apostolic word, and to others the prophetic word, and to others the angelic word and finally to others a word of operating miracles, while only one is the Word that is divided into each one of us according to our capacity or our munificence. Therefore, down here I see as in a mirror this Word which is the beginning of everything, and therefore I cannot keep all the words of God; but when I will have seen his glory with an uncovered face, then I will live and, living of the life of God, I will also keep his words.

Responsorial. *Jer. 15: 16; Ps. 118: 99*

R: When your words came to meet me, I devoured them with avidity. *
Your word is the joy and happiness of my heart.

V: I am wiser than all my masters, because I meditate your teachings.

R: Your word is the joy and happiness of my heart.

Gospel. Lk. 8: 4 – 15

*The seed that falls on the good soil are those
Who after having listened to the word,
produce fruit with their perseverance.*

From the Gospel of St. Luke.

And when a great crowd came together and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell along the path, and was trodden under foot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew, and yielded a hundredfold." As he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy; but these have no root, they believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. And as for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience.