

Day 2, January 10, 2024 Wednesday of the First Week in Ordinary Time, Assisi 5:00pm

Reading I 1 Sm 3:1-10, 19-20

During the time young Samuel was minister to the LORD under Eli, a revelation of the LORD was uncommon and vision infrequent. One day Eli was asleep in his usual place. His eyes had lately grown so weak that he could not see. The lamp of God was not yet extinguished, and Samuel was sleeping in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God was. The LORD called to Samuel, who answered, "Here I am." Samuel ran to Eli and said, "Here I am. You called me." "I did not call you," Eli said. "Go back to sleep." So he went back to sleep. Again the LORD called Samuel, who rose and went to Eli. "Here I am," he said. "You called me." But Eli answered, "I did not call you, my son. Go back to sleep." At that time Samuel was not familiar with the LORD, because the LORD had not revealed anything to him as yet. The LORD called Samuel again, for the third time. Getting up and going to Eli, he said, "Here I am. You called me." Then Eli understood that the LORD was calling the youth. So Eli said to Samuel, "Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" When Samuel went to sleep in his place, the LORD came and revealed his presence, calling out as before, "Samuel, Samuel!" Samuel answered, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Samuel grew up, and the LORD was with him, not permitting any word of his to be without effect. Thus all Israel from Dan to Beersheba came to know that Samuel was an accredited prophet of the LORD.

Responsorial Psalm 40:2 and 5, 7-8a, 8b-9, 10

R. Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

I have waited, waited for the LORD, and he stooped toward me and heard my cry. Blessed the man who makes the LORD his trust; who turns not to idolatry or to those who stray after falsehood.

R. Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

Sacrifice or oblation you wished not, but ears open to obedience you gave me. Burnt offerings or sin-offerings you sought not; then said I, "Behold I come."

R. Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

"In the written scroll it is prescribed for me. To do your will, O my God, is my delight, and your law is within my heart!"

R. Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

I announced your justice in the vast assembly; I did not restrain my lips, as you, O LORD, know.

R. Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

Alleluia Jn 10:27

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

My sheep hear my voice, says the Lord. I know them, and they follow me.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 1:29-39

On leaving the synagogue Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever. They immediately told him about her. He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up. Then the fever left her and she waited on them. When it was evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons. The whole town was gathered at the door. He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he drove out many demons, not permitting them to speak because they knew him. Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed. Simon and those who were with him pursued him and on finding him said, "Everyone is looking for you." He told them, "Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come." So he went into their synagogues, preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee.

Day 3 January 11, 2024 Thursday of the First Week in Ordinary Time, Assisi, 12:00pm

Reading I 1 Sm 4:1-11

The Philistines gathered for an attack on Israel. Israel went out to engage them in battle and camped at Ebenezer, while the Philistines camped at Aphek. The Philistines then drew up in battle formation against Israel. After a fierce struggle Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who slew about four thousand men on the battlefield. When the troops retired to the camp, the elders of Israel said “Why has the LORD permitted us to be defeated today by the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the Lord from Shiloh that it may go into battle among us and save us from the grasp of our enemies.” So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned upon the cherubim. The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were with the ark of God. When the ark of the LORD arrived in the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth resounded. The Philistines, hearing the noise of shouting, asked, “What can this loud shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?” On learning that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp, the Philistines were frightened. They said, “Gods have come to their camp.” They said also, “Woe to us! This has never happened before. Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods that struck the Egyptians with various plagues and with pestilence. Take courage and be manly, Philistines; otherwise you will become slaves to the Hebrews, as they were your slaves. So fight manfully!” The Philistines fought and Israel was defeated; every man fled to his own tent. It was a disastrous defeat, in which Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. The ark of God was captured, and Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were among the dead.

Responsorial Psalm 44:10-11, 14-15, 24-25

R. Redeem us, Lord, because of your mercy.

Yet now you have cast us off and put us in disgrace, and you go not forth with our armies. You have let us be driven back by our foes; those who hated us plundered us at will.

R. Redeem us, Lord, because of your mercy.

You made us the reproach of our neighbors, the mockery and the scorn of those around us. You made us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples.

R. Redeem us, Lord, because of your mercy. Why do you hide your face, forgetting our woe and our oppression? For our souls are bowed down to the dust, our bodies are pressed to the earth.

R. Redeem us, Lord, because of your mercy.

Alleluia See Mt 4:23

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Jesus preached the Gospel of the Kingdom and cured every disease among the people.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 1:40-45

A leper came to him and kneeling down begged him and said, “If you wish, you can make me clean.” Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched the leper, and said to him, “I do will it. Be made clean.” The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean. Then, warning him sternly, he dismissed him at once. Then he said to him, “See that you tell no one anything, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them.” The man went away and began to publicize the whole matter. He spread the report abroad so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere.

Daily Readings and Homilies for the January 2024 Deaconate Pilgrimage to Italy and Greece
Day 4, January 12, 2024 Friday of the First Week in Ordinary Time, Lanciano, 3:00pm

Reading I 1 Sm 8:4-7, 10-22a

All the elders of Israel came in a body to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, “Now that you are old, and your sons do not follow your example, appoint a king over us, as other nations have, to judge us.” Samuel was displeased when they asked for a king to judge them. He prayed to the LORD, however, who said in answer: “Grant the people’s every request. It is not you they reject, they are rejecting me as their king.” Samuel delivered the message of the LORD in full to those who were asking him for a king. He told them: “The rights of the king who will rule you will be as follows: He will take your sons and assign them to his chariots and horses, and they will run before his chariot. He will also appoint from among them his commanders of groups of a thousand and of a hundred soldiers. He will set them to do his plowing and his harvesting, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will use your daughters as ointment makers, as cooks, and as bakers. He will take the best of your fields, vineyards, and olive groves, and give them to his officials. He will tithe your crops and your vineyards, and give the revenue to his eunuchs and his slaves. He will take your male and female servants, as well as your best oxen and your asses, and use them to do his work. He will tithe your flocks and you yourselves will become his slaves. When this takes place, you will complain against the king whom you have chosen, but on that day the LORD will not answer you.” The people, however, refused to listen to Samuel’s warning and said, “Not so! There must be a king over us. We too must be like other nations, with a king to rule us and to lead us in warfare and fight our battles.” When Samuel had listened to all the people had to say, he repeated it to the LORD, who then said to him, “Grant their request and appoint a king to rule them.”

Responsorial Psalm 89:16-17, 18-19

R. For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

Blessed the people who know the joyful shout; in the light of your countenance, O LORD, they walk. At your name they rejoice all the day, and through your justice they are exalted.

R. For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

For you are the splendor of their strength, and by your favor our horn is exalted. For to the LORD belongs our shield, and to the Holy One of Israel, our King.

R. For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

Alleluia Lk 7:16

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

A great prophet has arisen in our midst and God has visited his people.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 2:1-12

When Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days, it became known that he was at home. Many gathered together so that there was no longer room for them, not even around the door, and he preached the word to them. They came bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. Unable to get near Jesus because of the crowd, they opened up the roof above him. After they had broken through, they let down the mat on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to him, “Child, your sins are forgiven.” Now some of the scribes were sitting there asking themselves, “Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming. Who but God alone can forgive sins?” Jesus immediately knew in his mind what they were thinking to themselves, so he said, “Why are you thinking such things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, pick up your mat and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth” —he said to the paralytic, “I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home.” He rose, picked up his mat at once, and went away in the sight of everyone. They were all astounded and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this.”

Day 5, January 13, 2024 Saturday of the First Week in Ordinary Time, San Giovanni Rotondo, 9:30am

Reading I 1 Sm 9:1-4, 17-19; 10:1

There was a stalwart man from Benjamin named Kish, who was the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite. He had a son named Saul, who was a handsome young man. There was no other child of Israel more handsome than Saul; he stood head and shoulders above the people. Now the asses of Saul's father, Kish, had wandered off. Kish said to his son Saul, "Take one of the servants with you and go out and hunt for the asses." Accordingly they went through the hill country of Ephraim, and through the land of Shalishah. Not finding them there, they continued through the land of Shaalim without success. They also went through the land of Benjamin, but they failed to find the animals. When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the LORD assured him, "This is the man of whom I told you; he is to govern my people." Saul met Samuel in the gateway and said, "Please tell me where the seer lives." Samuel answered Saul: "I am the seer. Go up ahead of me to the high place and eat with me today. In the morning, before dismissing you, I will tell you whatever you wish." Then, from a flask he had with him, Samuel poured oil on Saul's head; he also kissed him, saying: "The LORD anoints you commander over his heritage. You are to govern the LORD's people Israel, and to save them from the grasp of their enemies roundabout. "This will be the sign for you that the LORD has anointed you commander over his heritage."

Responsorial Psalm 21:2-3, 4-5, 6-7

R. Lord, in your strength the king is glad.

O LORD, in your strength the king is glad; in your victory how greatly he rejoices! You have granted him his heart's desire; you refused not the wish of his lips.

R. Lord, in your strength the king is glad.

For you welcomed him with goodly blessings, you placed on his head a crown of pure gold. He asked life of you: you gave him length of days forever and ever.

R. Lord, in your strength the king is glad.

Great is his glory in your victory; majesty and splendor you conferred upon him. For you made him a blessing forever; you gladdened him with the joy of your face.

R. Lord, in your strength the king is glad.

Alleluia Lk 4:18

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

The Lord sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor and to proclaim liberty to captives.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 2:13-17

Jesus went out along the sea. All the crowd came to him and he taught them. As he passed by, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting at the customs post. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed Jesus. While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners sat with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many who followed him. Some scribes who were Pharisees saw that Jesus was eating with sinners and tax collectors and said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus heard this and said to them, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

Day 6, January 14, 2024 Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Montecassino, 2:30PM

Reading I 1 Sm 3:3b-10, 19

Samuel was sleeping in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God was. The LORD called to Samuel, who answered, "Here I am." Samuel ran to Eli and said, "Here I am. You called me." "I did not call you," Eli said. "Go back to sleep." So he went back to sleep. Again the LORD called Samuel, who rose and went to Eli. "Here I am," he said. "You called me." But Eli answered, "I did not call you, my son. Go back to sleep." At that time Samuel was not familiar with the LORD, because the LORD had not revealed anything to him as yet. The LORD called Samuel again, for the third time. Getting up and going to Eli, he said, "Here I am. You called me." Then Eli understood that the LORD was calling the youth. So he said to Samuel, "Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." When Samuel went to sleep in his place, the LORD came and revealed his presence, calling out as before, "Samuel, Samuel!" Samuel answered, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Samuel grew up, and the LORD was with him, not permitting any word of his to be without effect.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 40:2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10

R. Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

I have waited, waited for the LORD, and he stooped toward me and heard my cry. And he put a new song into my mouth, a hymn to our God.

R. Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

Sacrifice or offering you wished not, but ears open to obedience you gave me. Holocausts or sin-offerings you sought not; then said I, "Behold I come."

R. Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

"In the written scroll it is prescribed for me, to do your will, O my God, is my delight, and your law is within my heart!"

R. Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

I announced your justice in the vast assembly; I did not restrain my lips, as you, O LORD, know.

R. Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

Reading II 1 Cor 6:13c-15a, 17-20

Brothers and sisters: The body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body; God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? But whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one Spirit with him. Avoid immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the immoral person sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body.

Alleluia Jn 1:41, 17b

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

We have found the Messiah: Jesus Christ, who brings us truth and grace.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Jn 1:35-42

John was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" — which translated means Teacher —, "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see." So they went and saw where Jesus was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, the brother of Simon

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Peter, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. He first found his own brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah" — which is translated Christ —. Then he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Cephas" — which is translated Peter.

Daily Readings and Homilies for the January 2024 Deaconate Pilgrimage to Italy and Greece
Day 7, January 15, 2024 Monday of the Second Week in Ordinary Time, Rome, 9:00am

Reading 1 1 Sm 15:16-23

Samuel said to Saul: “Stop! Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night.” Saul replied, “Speak!” Samuel then said: “Though little in your own esteem, are you not leader of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king of Israel and sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and put the sinful Amalekites under a ban of destruction. Fight against them until you have exterminated them.’ Why then have you disobeyed the LORD? You have pounced on the spoil, thus displeasing the LORD.” Saul answered Samuel: “I did indeed obey the LORD and fulfill the mission on which the LORD sent me. I have brought back Agag, and I have destroyed Amalek under the ban. But from the spoil the men took sheep and oxen, the best of what had been banned, to sacrifice to the LORD their God in Gilgal.” But Samuel said: “Does the LORD so delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obedience to the command of the LORD? Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission than the fat of rams. For a sin like divination is rebellion, and presumption is the crime of idolatry. Because you have rejected the command of the LORD, he, too, has rejected you as ruler.”

Responsorial Psalm 50:8-9, 16bc-17, 21 and 23

R. To the upright I will show the saving power of God.

“Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you, for your burnt offerings are before me always. I take from your house no bullock, no goats out of your fold.”

R. To the upright I will show the saving power of God.

“Why do you recite my statutes, and profess my covenant with your mouth, Though you hate discipline and cast my words behind you?”

R. To the upright I will show the saving power of God.

“When you do these things, shall I be deaf to it? Or do you think that I am like yourself? I will correct you by drawing them up before your eyes. He that offers praise as a sacrifice glorifies me; and to him that goes the right way I will show the salvation of God.”

R. To the upright I will show the saving power of God.

Alleluia Hb 4:12

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

The word of God is living and effective, able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 2:18-22

The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were accustomed to fast. People came to Jesus and objected, “Why do the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” Jesus answered them, “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak. If he does, its fullness pulls away, the new from the old, and the tear gets worse. Likewise, no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skins are ruined. Rather, new wine is poured into fresh wineskins.”

Reading I 1 Sm 16:1-13

The LORD said to Samuel: “How long will you grieve for Saul, whom I have rejected as king of Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and be on your way. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have chosen my king from among his sons.” But Samuel replied: “How can I go? Saul will hear of it and kill me.” To this the LORD answered: “Take a heifer along and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I myself will tell you what to do; you are to anoint for me the one I point out to you.” Samuel did as the LORD had commanded him. When he entered Bethlehem, the elders of the city came trembling to meet him and inquired, “Is your visit peaceful, O seer?” He replied: “Yes! I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. So cleanse yourselves and join me today for the banquet.” He also had Jesse and his sons cleanse themselves and invited them to the sacrifice. As they came, he looked at Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is here before him.” But the LORD said to Samuel: “Do not judge from his appearance or from his lofty stature, because I have rejected him. Not as man sees does God see, because he sees the appearance but the LORD looks into the heart.” Then Jesse called Abinadab and presented him before Samuel, who said, “The LORD has not chosen him.” Next Jesse presented Shammah, but Samuel said, “The LORD has not chosen this one either.” In the same way Jesse presented seven sons before Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen any one of these.” Then Samuel asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?” Jesse replied, “There is still the youngest, who is tending the sheep.” Samuel said to Jesse, “Send for him; we will not begin the sacrificial banquet until he arrives here.” Jesse sent and had the young man brought to them. He was ruddy, a youth handsome to behold and making a splendid appearance. The LORD said, “There—anoint him, for this is he!” Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand, anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and from that day on, the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David. When Samuel took his leave, he went to Ramah.

Responsorial Psalm 89:20, 21-22, 27-28

R. I have found David, my servant.

Once you spoke in a vision, and to your faithful ones you said: “On a champion I have placed a crown; over the people I have set a youth.”

R. I have found David, my servant.

“I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him, That my hand may be always with him, and that my arm may make him strong.”

R. I have found David, my servant.

“He shall say of me, ‘You are my father, my God, the Rock, my savior.’ And I will make him the first-born, highest of the kings of the earth.”

R. I have found David, my servant.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our hearts, that we may know what is the hope that belongs to our call.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 2:23-28

As Jesus was passing through a field of grain on the sabbath, his disciples began to make a path while picking the heads of grain. At this the Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the sabbath?” He said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions were hungry? How he went into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of offering that only the priests could lawfully eat, and shared it with his companions?” Then he said to them, “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath. That is why the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.”

Day 9, January 17, 2024 Memorial of Saint Anthony, Abbot, Rome to Thessaloniki,

Reading 1 1 Sm 17:32-33, 37, 40-51

David spoke to Saul: "Let your majesty not lose courage. I am at your service to go and fight this Philistine." But Saul answered David, "You cannot go up against this Philistine and fight with him, for you are only a youth, while he has been a warrior from his youth." David continued: "The LORD, who delivered me from the claws of the lion and the bear, will also keep me safe from the clutches of this Philistine." Saul answered David, "Go! the LORD will be with you." Then, staff in hand, David selected five smooth stones from the wadi and put them in the pocket of his shepherd's bag. With his sling also ready to hand, he approached the Philistine. With his shield bearer marching before him, the Philistine also advanced closer and closer to David. When he had sized David up, and seen that he was youthful, and ruddy, and handsome in appearance, the Philistine held David in contempt. The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog that you come against me with a staff?" Then the Philistine cursed David by his gods and said to him, "Come here to me, and I will leave your flesh for the birds of the air and the beasts of the field." David answered him: "You come against me with sword and spear and scimitar, but I come against you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel that you have insulted. Today the LORD shall deliver you into my hand; I will strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will leave your corpse and the corpses of the Philistine army for the birds of the air and the beasts of the field; thus the whole land shall learn that Israel has a God. All this multitude, too, shall learn that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves. For the battle is the LORD's and he shall deliver you into our hands." The Philistine then moved to meet David at close quarters, while David ran quickly toward the battle line in the direction of the Philistine. David put his hand into the bag and took out a stone, hurled it with the sling, and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone embedded itself in his brow, and he fell prostrate on the ground. Thus David overcame the Philistine with sling and stone; he struck the Philistine mortally, and did it without a sword. Then David ran and stood over him; with the Philistine's own sword which he drew from its sheath he dispatched him and cut off his head.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 144:1b, 2, 9-10

R. Blessed be the Lord, my Rock!

Blessed be the LORD, my rock, who trains my hands for battle, my fingers for war.

R. Blessed be the Lord, my Rock!

My refuge and my fortress, my stronghold, my deliverer, My shield, in whom I trust, who subdues my people under me.

R. Blessed be the Lord, my Rock!

O God, I will sing a new song to you; with a ten-stringed lyre I will chant your praise, You who give victory to kings, and deliver David, your servant from the evil sword.

R. Blessed be the Lord, my Rock!

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Jesus preached the Gospel of the Kingdom and cured every disease among the people.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 3:1-6

Jesus entered the synagogue. There was a man there who had a withered hand. They watched Jesus closely to see if he would cure him on the sabbath so that they might accuse him. He said to the man with the withered hand, "Come up here before us." Then he said to the Pharisees, "Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?" But they remained silent. Looking around at them with anger and grieved at their hardness of heart, Jesus said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out

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and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately took counsel with the Herodians against him to put him to death.

Reading 1 1 Sm 18:6-9; 19:1-7

When David and Saul approached (on David's return after slaying the Philistine), women came out from each of the cities of Israel to meet King Saul, singing and dancing, with tambourines, joyful songs, and sistrums. The women played and sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Saul was very angry and resentful of the song, for he thought: "They give David ten thousands, but only thousands to me. All that remains for him is the kingship." And from that day on, Saul was jealous of David. Saul discussed his intention of killing David with his son Jonathan and with all his servants. But Saul's son Jonathan, who was very fond of David, told him: "My father Saul is trying to kill you. Therefore, please be on your guard tomorrow morning; get out of sight and remain in hiding. I, however, will go out and stand beside my father in the countryside where you are, and will speak to him about you. If I learn anything, I will let you know." Jonathan then spoke well of David to his father Saul, saying to him: "Let not your majesty sin against his servant David, for he has committed no offense against you, but has helped you very much by his deeds. When he took his life in his hands and slew the Philistine, and the LORD brought about a great victory for all Israel through him, you were glad to see it. Why, then, should you become guilty of shedding innocent blood by killing David without cause?" Saul heeded Jonathan's plea and swore, "As the LORD lives, he shall not be killed." So Jonathan summoned David and repeated the whole conversation to him. Jonathan then brought David to Saul, and David served him as before.

Responsorial Psalm 56:2-3, 9-10a, 10b-11, 12-13

R. In God I trust; I shall not fear.

Have mercy on me, O God, for men trample upon me; all the day they press their attack against me. My adversaries trample upon me all the day; yes, many fight against me.

R. In God I trust; I shall not fear.

My wanderings you have counted; my tears are stored in your flask; are they not recorded in your book? Then do my enemies turn back, when I call upon you.

R. In God I trust; I shall not fear.

Now I know that God is with me. In God, in whose promise I glory, in God I trust without fear; what can flesh do against me?

R. In God I trust; I shall not fear.

I am bound, O God, by vows to you; your thank offerings I will fulfill. For you have rescued me from death, my feet, too, from stumbling; that I may walk before God in the light of the living.

R. In God I trust; I shall not fear.

Alleluia 2 Tm 1:10

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Our Savior Jesus Christ has destroyed death and brought life to light through the Gospel.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 3:7-12

Jesus withdrew toward the sea with his disciples. A large number of people followed from Galilee and from Judea. Hearing what he was doing, a large number of people came to him also from Jerusalem, from Idumea, from beyond the Jordan, and from the neighborhood of Tyre and Sidon. He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him. He had cured many and, as a result, those who had diseases were pressing upon him to touch him. And whenever unclean spirits saw him they would fall down before him and shout, "You are the Son of God." He warned them sternly not to make him known.

Day 11, January 19, 2024 Friday of the Second Week in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 1 Sm 24:3-21

Saul took three thousand picked men from all Israel and went in search of David and his men in the direction of the wild goat crags. When he came to the sheepfolds along the way, he found a cave, which he entered to relieve himself. David and his men were occupying the inmost recesses of the cave. David's servants said to him, "This is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'I will deliver your enemy into your grasp; do with him as you see fit.'" So David moved up and stealthily cut off an end of Saul's mantle. Afterward, however, David regretted that he had cut off an end of Saul's mantle. He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, as to lay a hand on him, for he is the LORD's anointed." With these words David restrained his men and would not permit them to attack Saul. Saul then left the cave and went on his way. David also stepped out of the cave, calling to Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked back, David bowed to the ground in homage and asked Saul: "Why do you listen to those who say, 'David is trying to harm you'? You see for yourself today that the LORD just now delivered you into my grasp in the cave. I had some thought of killing you, but I took pity on you instead. I decided, 'I will not raise a hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed and a father to me.' Look here at this end of your mantle which I hold. Since I cut off an end of your mantle and did not kill you, see and be convinced that I plan no harm and no rebellion. I have done you no wrong, though you are hunting me down to take my life. The LORD will judge between me and you, and the LORD will exact justice from you in my case. I shall not touch you. The old proverb says, 'From the wicked comes forth wickedness.' So I will take no action against you. Against whom are you on campaign, O king of Israel? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog, or a single flea! The LORD will be the judge; he will decide between me and you. May he see this, and take my part, and grant me justice beyond your reach!" When David finished saying these things to Saul, Saul answered, "Is that your voice, my son David?" And Saul wept aloud. Saul then said to David: "You are in the right rather than I; you have treated me generously, while I have done you harm. Great is the generosity you showed me today, when the LORD delivered me into your grasp and you did not kill me. For if a man meets his enemy, does he send him away unharmed? May the LORD reward you generously for what you have done this day. And now, I know that you shall surely be king and that sovereignty over Israel shall come into your possession."

Responsorial Psalm PS 57:2, 3-4, 6 and 11

R. Have mercy on me, God, have mercy.

Have mercy on me, O God; have mercy on me, for in you I take refuge. In the shadow of your wings I take refuge, till harm pass by.

R. Have mercy on me, God, have mercy.

I call to God the Most High, to God, my benefactor. May he send from heaven and save me; may he make those a reproach who trample upon me; may God send his mercy and his faithfulness.

R. Have mercy on me, God, have mercy.

Be exalted above the heavens, O God; above all the earth be your glory! For your mercy towers to the heavens, and your faithfulness to the skies.

R. Have mercy on me, God, have mercy.

Alleluia 2 Cor 5:19

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 3:13-19

Jesus went up the mountain and summoned those whom he wanted and they came to him. He appointed Twelve, whom he also named Apostles, that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach and to have authority to drive out demons: He appointed the Twelve: Simon, whom he named Peter; James, son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James, whom he named Boanerges, that is, sons of thunder; Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus; Thaddeus, Simon the Cananean, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed him.

Reading 1 2 Sm 1:1-4, 11-12, 19, 23-27

David returned from his defeat of the Amalekites and spent two days in Ziklag. On the third day a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. Going to David, he fell to the ground in homage. David asked him, "Where do you come from?" He replied, "I have escaped from the camp of the children of Israel." "Tell me what happened," David bade him. He answered that many of the soldiers had fled the battle and that many of them had fallen and were dead, among them Saul and his son Jonathan. David seized his garments and rent them, and all the men who were with him did likewise. They mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the soldiers of the LORD of the clans of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. "Alas! the glory of Israel, Saul, slain upon your heights; how can the warriors have fallen! "Saul and Jonathan, beloved and cherished, separated neither in life nor in death, swifter than eagles, stronger than lions! Women of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and in finery, who decked your attire with ornaments of gold. "How can the warriors have fallen— in the thick of the battle, slain upon your heights! "I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother! most dear have you been to me; more precious have I held love for you than love for women. "How can the warriors have fallen, the weapons of war have perished!"

Responsorial Psalm PS 80:2-3, 5-7

R. Let us see your face, Lord, and we shall be saved.

O shepherd of Israel, hearken, O guide of the flock of Joseph! From your throne upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Rouse your power, and come to save us.

R. Let us see your face, Lord, and we shall be saved.

O LORD of hosts, how long will you burn with anger while your people pray? You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in ample measure. You have left us to be fought over by our neighbors, and our enemies mock us.

R. Let us see your face, Lord, and we shall be saved.

Alleluia See Acts 16:14b

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Open our hearts, O Lord, to listen to the words of your Son.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 3:20-21

Jesus came with his disciples into the house. Again the crowd gathered, making it impossible for them even to eat. When his relatives heard of this they set out to seize him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

Day 13, January 21, 2024 Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 Jon 3:1-5, 10

The word of the LORD came to Jonah, saying: "Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and announce to it the message that I will tell you." So Jonah made ready and went to Nineveh, according to the LORD'S bidding. Now Nineveh was an enormously large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began his journey through the city, and had gone but a single day's walk announcing, "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed, " when the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth. When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

R. Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; teach me your paths, Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior.

R. Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Remember that your compassion, O LORD, and your love are from of old. In your kindness remember me, because of your goodness, O LORD.

R. Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Good and upright is the LORD; thus he shows sinners the way. He guides the humble to justice and teaches the humble his way.

R. Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Reading 2 1 Cor 7:29-31

I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out. From now on, let those having wives act as not having them, those weeping as not weeping, those rejoicing as not rejoicing, those buying as not owning, those using the world as not using it fully. For the world in its present form is passing away.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 1:14-20

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." Then they abandoned their nets and followed him. He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him.

Daily Readings and Homilies for the January 2024 Deaconate Pilgrimage to Italy and Greece
Day 14, January 22, 2024 Monday, Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children

Reading 1 2 Sm 5:1-7, 10

All the tribes of Israel came to David in Hebron and said: "Here we are, your bone and your flesh. In days past, when Saul was our king, it was you who led the children of Israel out and brought them back. And the LORD said to you, 'You shall shepherd my people Israel and shall be commander of Israel.'" When all the elders of Israel came to David in Hebron, King David made an agreement with them there before the LORD, and they anointed him king of Israel. David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned for forty years: seven years and six months in Hebron over Judah, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem over all Israel and Judah. Then the king and his men set out for Jerusalem against the Jebusites who inhabited the region. David was told, "You cannot enter here: the blind and the lame will drive you away!" which was their way of saying, "David cannot enter here." But David did take the stronghold of Zion, which is the City of David. David grew steadily more powerful, for the LORD of hosts was with him.

Responsorial Psalm PS 89:20, 21-22, 25-26

R. My faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him. Once you spoke in a vision, and to your faithful ones you said: "On a champion I have placed a crown; over the people I have set a youth."

R. My faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him.

"I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him, That my hand may be always with him, and that my arm may make him strong."

R. My faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him.

"My faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him, and through my name shall his horn be exalted. I will set his hand upon the sea, his right hand upon the rivers."

R. My faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Our Savior Jesus Christ has destroyed death and brought life to light through the Gospel.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mk 3:22-30

The scribes who had come from Jerusalem said of Jesus, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "By the prince of demons he drives out demons." Summoning them, he began to speak to them in parables, "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand; that is the end of him. But no one can enter a strong man's house to plunder his property unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can plunder his house. Amen, I say to you, all sins and all blasphemies that people utter will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an everlasting sin." For they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

HOMILY FOR ITALY

I decided to prepare two homilies for our pilgrimage...one about St. Peter's relationship with Christ for Italy and one about St. Paul's relationship with Christ for Greece.

Being here in Italy visiting St. Peter's Basilica, which is believed to be built on the site of St. Peter's burial near where he died, and visiting the Church of Domine Quo Vadis where St. Peter had a vision of Jesus, I couldn't help but remember my first visit to Rome in 2004 when my son and daughter-in-law were married. It truly was a transforming trip for me.

I have been a Catholic since I was 20 years old and for most of those years my mantra, my constant prayer, has been "I love you Jesus." When I was discerning to become a Deacon, one day I heard the question, "do you love Jesus?" Immediately, I responded to myself saying, "Well, yes, of course I do"...I continued, "Then Fraser, put your money where your mouth is!"...I said yes to the Deaconate. A couple of years later I was about half way through formation, and I distinctly remember hearing John's Gospel where Jesus asked Peter three times, "*Do you love me?*" I couldn't help but put myself in Peter's shoes..."*Yes Lord, you know that I love you!*" And, I couldn't help but be affirmed that I was on the mission that He wanted me on.

In John chapter 21, Jesus' spoke with his leading apostle, Peter, "the coward"... "the denier". Many say this dialogue is Peter being forgiven by the Lord for denying him three times. But Peter never asked for forgiveness and Jesus never forgives him. These verses are not about dealing with forgiveness as we know it when we say, "I'm sorry, please forgive me." It's not that. It's something much deeper.

Jesus takes Peter aside and he says to him three times, "*do you love me?*" And he responds, "*Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.*" So the key, you see is not in forgiveness...The key is in the love.

Each of us are born into this world with a deep and lasting hunger at the center of our hearts, and that hunger can only be satisfied by the love of God. There is more to forgiveness than

Daily Readings and Homilies for the January 2024 Deaconate Pilgrimage to Italy and Greece asking for forgiveness or even saying I'm sorry. Jesus reached down into Peter's inability to ask for forgiveness. And rightfully so. Peter was the leader, he was the one who was going to lead His Church and yet, Peter denied Him and swore and cursed. What he did was unforgivable. Peter had no right to ask for forgiveness because he had overstepped the boundary of betraying God Himself, viciously and out of fear and distress. So what exactly then makes this such a lovely Gospel?

Well, it's Jesus reaching down into that basic yearning of every human being...He meets us right where we are...our sin doesn't define us in His eyes. God reaches down...into the deepest part of our hearts, into our souls where the yearning for His love is born and stays with us no matter how many sins, no matter how many betrayals, no matter what we do. Jesus, in his great generosity, forgets everything else and reaches down and says to Peter...and to us: *"Feed my sheep"*...*I love you, I trust you and now I ask you to take care of them for me.* And when Peter hears that, three times, he knows that there is something here more than forgiveness. It is that Jesus loves us and forgets everything except his love for us...and, He has a mission for us! God wants Peter to continue to be the one who would lead His church...and, Peter is transformed to be a great witness of how a life of faith is lived for Jesus Christ, despite its trials.

And that's the lovely thing about John's Gospel. God tells us every day, "you don't have to cry out for my forgiveness, for I have loved you from the beginning, and I will be faithful and true to that love...forever."

John's Gospel also included an ominous prediction of Peter's future death which reminded me that on my previous trip I had learned how St. Peter trusted God's will in his life and embraced God's love. On a tour of Christian Rome, we had visited four of the great Basilicas and were on our way to the catacombs. I asked our guide if we could visit the "Quo Vadis" church. He said it wasn't much of a church to see, but immediately understood when I explained that I was a Deacon in the Catholic Church. The site of the small chapel-size church is on the Old Appian Way outside of Rome, near the catacombs where St. Sebastian is buried. The ancient church is built on the spot where legend has it that when Peter was fleeing for his life from Nero, he had a

vision of Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, “*domine, quo vadis?*” or “*Lord, where are you going?*” Jesus replied, “*I am returning to Rome to be crucified again.*” With that Peter knew what he had to do...he embraced God’s love...he stopped running from death and returned to Rome himself... to lead...*to be led where he did not want to go.* In the church there are paintings on either side of the altar. On the right a painting of Christ crucified. On the left, one of St. Peter crucified upside down. St. Jerome said that Peter demanded to be crucified this way because he didn’t feel worthy to be crucified the same way as Jesus.

Today’s Scriptures are all about God’s unconditional love. He doesn’t want us to just go through the motions of faith. He wants us to be obedient to His saving power of love. In response, let’s commit with gratitude, “Dear Lord, we too, will feed your sheep. We too, will serve others. We too, will follow you and reach out to all the people around us so they will experience your unconditional love, as well.”

“I love you Jesus.” Alleluia! Alleluia!

HOMILY FOR GREECE

I decided to prepare two homilies for our pilgrimage...one about St. Peter's relationship with Christ for Italy and this one about St. Paul's relationship with Christ for Greece.

During last Advent, the Third week's Gospel was about John the Baptist clearing the path for the coming of the anointed one born into this world. But, what if that was all that happened? What if Jesus was born, grew up, prayed, preached, performed miracles, was arrested, suffered, died and was resurrected, and then He did nothing else as He waited to return at the end of time? He probably would have gone down in history as a great prophet, a splendid orator, a mystical religious figure. And that would be wonderful. But the world has had plenty of people like that. If that was all that happened, then how did Jesus change the world so dramatically?

Well, in fact, Jesus brought together word and deed unlike anyone else before or since—he comforted souls and healed bodies. He made His preaching credible with His love in action. And then the Risen Christ continued to come into our lives. When people joined themselves to Christ, they were transformed into His hands and feet throughout the world.... and, the world changed for the better. Since Jesus' death and resurrection it has been through our human experiences of Christ truly present in our lives that became the pathway through which Jesus has continued to enter the world. And, I'm not just talking about Catholics or Christians ...I'm talking about everyone's experience of Christ in their lives. That shouldn't surprise us, but, I think it does. As John testified, *"there is one among you whom you do not recognize..."* Many saw and experienced Christ, even immediately after His death, Jews and Gentiles...and even St. Paul heard about the Jesus who people were saying was the Christ. But they didn't recognize Him until they experienced a conversion of heart...a transformation. Those in the garden...those in the locked room...those on the road to Emmaus...those on the road to Damascus...and, all were transformed.

We may not have an encounter with Jesus like St. Paul had, but maybe, just maybe we can recognize and be transformed to experience the Risen Christ like he did. For the last 2000 years

we Catholics have experienced the Risen Christ's loving presence many ways: yes, in the Sacred Word of God, in the Holy Eucharist, in the other Sacraments, in prayer, but maybe most of all, in each other...especially the poor and suffering. But, do we always recognize Him? All of these personal experiences are empowered by the Holy Spirit, and that's why right now is the perfect time to pray for our hearts to be transformed. Until we are, we have to wonder if we will ever recognize, if we will ever encounter Jesus in our lives?...will we will ever become the Body of Christ?

Our recent Advent Scriptures told us that God loves us so much that He sent Jesus to bring all mankind the promised gifts of justice, glad tidings, healing, liberty, and God's peace and love. And when our hearts are open to His promise, we can help deliver those gifts. We must respond to Him with praise and gratitude and action every day of our lives like St. Paul did. It was not easy for St. Paul, and he didn't always feel comfortable ...but he surely was transformed into the kind of person Jesus wanted him to be.

Today, we can embrace His promised gifts if we call to Jesus with an attitude of transformation ...with our hearts open to be converted. That is the way that we can be awakened to encounter the Risen Christ like St. Paul did in the Sacred Word of God, in the Holy Eucharist, in the other Sacraments, in our prayers, and in everyone we meet...but only if our hearts are open to Him. In other words, if we let Him, Jesus will teach us what kind of person He wants us to be. Every day that we are the Body of Christ, the world changes for the better!

Let me share what happened yesterday. After our late lunch when we boarded the bus, I noticed there were 3 voicemails waiting for me: two from neighbors and one from the Forsyth County water department. A pipe had burst and water was leaking down the driveway into the street. Thankfully, my neighbor walks his dog early in the morning, saw the water and shut off the valve at the street. Well, my imagination immediately went wild: will our Pilgrimage be done? Will we have to go home to fix it? Is there water in the house? Will insurance cover the leak or pay for our early return? I prayed, "Dear Lord, I'm going to need some help here." Then I

Daily Readings and Homilies for the January 2024 Deaconate Pilgrimage to Italy and Greece realized He already had 3 people call me! After 4 more calls I had a plumber on the way to my house to assess the situation and a friend to enter our home to see if there was any water...the leak was near the curb...no water was in the house. Within 7 hours of my voicemails I had an approved quote and the plumber would fix the leak the next day! Now if that isn't God's love in our lives and an encounter with the Risen Christ, I don't know what is!

So, *“Brothers and sisters: Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. ... retain what is good...Refrain from every kind of evil.”*

I thank the Lord, there's people out there like you! Because of you, I know God loves us...I know He loves me! Amen