

Our liturgy presumes that those who gather for Eucharist, as members of the Body of Christ, are already familiar with the word that they hear proclaimed every Sunday. *Living the Word* is designed to assist individuals, homilists, catechumens, candidates, discussion groups, religious education classes, and similar gatherings to deepen that familiarity with the Sunday scriptures.

Inside this book you will find the readings for each Sunday and holy day from Year C of the liturgical cycle. Each day's readings are preceded by a brief passage intended to suggest a focus or approach to consider while reading these particular scriptures. The readings are followed by a commentary that provides a context for understanding them, making use of biblical scholarship and the Church's longstanding traditions. Then a reflection is offered that expands upon the initial focus and incorporates the fuller understanding from the commentary section. The discussion questions and suggestions for responses that follow are provided as helps to move from reflection to action, inviting those who use this volume to go about truly "living the word."

When reflecting on the scriptures in a group setting or individually, it is best to do so in the context of prayer. Users of this book are encouraged to create an atmosphere that will foster prayerful reflection: in a quiet space, perhaps with lit candle and simple seasonal decoration (incense or soft music may also be appropriate), begin with a prayer and reading of the scriptures aloud for that day, even if you are alone. In a group, encourage members to focus on one word or idea that especially strikes them. Continue with each reading the same way, perhaps taking time to share these ideas with one another.

After you spend some quiet time with the readings, ask yourself how they have changed you, enlightened you, moved you. Move on to the commentary, reflection, and prayer response. Allow the discussion questions to shape your conversation, and try the prayer response on for size. Will you rise to its challenge? Does it give you an idea of something to try in your own life? Share your ideas with someone else, even if you have been preparing alone.

Once you have spent a suitable time in reflection or discussion, you may wish to make a prayerful response to the readings by means of a song or a blessing of someone or something. Pray spontaneously as you think about the texts' meaning for you, or invite people in the group to offer prayers informally.

Finally, challenge yourself, or each other in your group, to take action this week based on your understanding of the readings. You may propose your own prayer for help to undertake this mission or simply stand in a circle and pray the Lord's Prayer. If you are in a group, offer one another a sign of peace before departing. If alone, surprise someone with a sign of peace, either in person, by making a phone call, or offering a simple prayer.

As you repeat this pattern over time, your prayerful reflection can deepen your appreciation of God's word and enable you to live it more fully every day.

Repeating this pattern over time can help your prayerful reflection to deepen your appreciation for and commitment to God's word every day of your life.

## Individual Prayers Before and After Reading Scripture

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Speak to me as I read your word, O Lord,  
and send your Spirit into my heart.  
Guide me today and each day in your service,  
for you are the way, the truth, and the life. *Amen!*

*or*

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart  
be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. *Amen!*



God of all graciousness,  
I thank you for speaking to me  
through your holy word.

Let me put your word into action  
today and every day. *Amen!*

*or*

Blessed are you, Lord God,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
for sending your Holy Spirit today  
to teach me your truth. *Amen!*

## Group Prayers Before and After Reading Scripture

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Blessed are you, Lord God,  
you teach your people by your word.  
Open our hearts to your Spirit,  
and lead us in the ways of Christ your Son.  
All praise and glory be yours for ever. *Amen!*

*or*

Speak, Lord,  
your servants are listening:  
You alone have the words of everlasting life. *Amen!*



We praise you, loving God, for sending us your word today.  
Grant that we may continue to think and pray on these words,  
and to share them with others throughout this day. *Amen!*

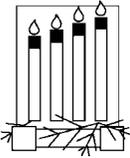
*or*

May this word of life  
fill our hearts, be on our lips,  
and guide our every thought and deed. *Amen!*

Christmas looms large in our religious imagination, overshadowing the four weeks of Advent as if they were mere signposts counting down the days to the real event. Such a myopic view sells Advent short and misses the spiritual opportunity to be had. If Advent had a campaign slogan it would be “Good things come to those who wait.” The prophetic readings recount Israel’s ardent belief that a shoot from David would rise up (Jeremiah 33:14–16), and its shepherd would stand firm (Micah 5:1–4a). Israel had reason to rejoice, for God had removed the judgment against it (Zephaniah 3:14–18a). Jerusalem could remove her cloak of mourning for God was leading her children home (Baruch 5:1–9). While the historical context of these prophetic authors spans the eighth through sixth centuries B.C., they share a confidence that God is faithful to God’s word.

While the first readings look forward to the fulfillment of God’s promises, the second readings look back on the promise fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. But the process isn’t over, as the reading from First Thessalonians assures. We are to remain pure and blameless, anticipating Jesus’ return, or *parousia* (1 Thessalonians 3:12 — 4:2). The sections from Philippians read on the Second and Third Sundays of Advent continue this theme of preparedness. “The one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). Our efforts to remain holy are founded on our understanding that we have been “consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ” (Hebrews 10:10). Both the first and second readings for Advent confirm God’s faithfulness and acknowledge that “The Lord is near” (Philippians 4:5).

For the earliest Christians, Jesus’ return was very near, but that didn’t necessarily mean a pretty picture. The apocalyptic scene that Jesus describes in the first Gospel reading of Advent will lead “people to die of fright . . . For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth” (Luke 21:26, 35). The Gospels for the following Advent Sundays are less frightening but no less dramatic. John the Baptist is introduced as a precursor of Jesus. John baptizes with water, but one mightier than he is coming who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire. The Gospel for the final Sunday of Advent returns to the theme of hope. The joy of “God with us” is personified in the meeting of two women pregnant with new life. This is the feeling of expectancy and joy that we are to carry into the Christmas season. “Blessed are you who believed” (Luke 1:45).



December 2, 2018

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Today's Focus: Look to the Heavens

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*Though the followers of Jesus were told at his ascension not to stare uselessly up at the sky, faithful disciples will keep focused—with their hearts—on the power of heaven for guidance and comfort.*

**FIRST  
READING**

*Jeremiah  
33:14–16*

The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah. In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the land. In those days Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure; this is what they shall call her: “The LORD our justice.”

**PSALM  
RESPONSE**

*Psalm 25:1b*

To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

**SECOND  
READING**

*1 Thessalonians  
3:12 — 4:2*

Brothers and sisters: May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you, so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. Amen.

Finally, brothers and sisters, we earnestly ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that, as you received from us how you should conduct yourselves to please God—and as you are conducting yourselves—you do so even more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

**GOSPEL**

*Luke 21:25–28,  
34–36*

Jesus said to his disciples: “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.

“Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.”

## ❖ Understanding the Word

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The book of Jeremiah has a complex compositional history. The section of Jeremiah 33:14–26, from which our verses are taken, may have come from a postexilic writer who envisions an eternal Davidic dynasty in keeping with the prophecy of Nathan (2 Samuel 7:11–16). Found within Jeremiah's oracle of the restoration of Jerusalem, this reading continues the theme of hope that God will shepherd the people anew (Jeremiah 33:13).

Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians is the earliest extant Pauline letter we have. Written in the early 50s, the letter addresses the Thessalonians' concern that their loved ones are dying before Jesus has returned (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). The delay in the *parousia* (Jesus' second coming) left some wavering in their conviction (1 Thessalonians 3:5). In today's reading, Paul urges that all strive to be "blameless in holiness" in order to ensure a good judgment upon Jesus' return. Paul has given ethical instructions to make sure that the Thessalonians remain pleasing to God. The majority of this community were Gentiles, so they were faced with a new moral paradigm that immediately affected their social relations (1 Thessalonians 4:3–6).

All three of the Synoptic Gospels include an apocalyptic scene in which Jesus warns his disciples of the coming end-times (Matthew 24:1–44; Mark 13; Luke 21:5–36), but Luke's has significant alterations. Most notably, Luke doesn't indicate that the historical destruction of Jerusalem is evidence that the end-times have begun (see Mark 13:14ff). Rather, the coming of the Son of Man must await the fulfillment of "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). Only after that period will there be signs in the celestial heavens (Luke 21:25). The delay of the *parousia* had to be reinterpreted for a new generation, but believers still needed to remain alert and "be vigilant at all times" (Luke 21:36).

## ❖ Reflecting on the Word

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The skies were dark, the clouds heavy, and the rains poured down. We looked for signs that things might change. Then we saw it, a small break in the clouds and a small ray of light pointing to a sliver of blue sky. We smiled because the storm's end was near. Sun and dry skies were close at hand. I imagine that's what it will be like for those who stand erect and raise their heads, able to see the Son of Man when the scene Luke depicts in today's Gospel comes to pass. We saw the storm coming to an end because we looked, as Jesus asks us to do' "Be vigilant at all times." Let nothing or no one keep us from believing that God is with us. That's how we can have what we need to face any trial or tribulation with hope and trust.

Lately I seem to need a reminder to live our faith more strongly in the changing situations of life. I need to remember that God is Lord and we must conduct ourselves to please God, as Paul tells the Thessalonians. God will make us increase and abound in love so that our world can see God with us. God continues to be made flesh in us. So look for signs that Jesus, the just shoot of the house of David, is in our midst. He promises to do what is just and right in every land, so look. You and I just might be the signs to which others look.

Whether your skies are dark or bright, your clouds heavy or light, stand erect, raise your head, and see God near. Many storms plague our world. Do what you already know to do and make Christ's coming more evident this Advent.

❖❖ *Consider/Discuss*

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- What helps you to look for the light of Christ when life feels dark and heavy?
- How do you conduct yourself to please God, to show Christ in your daily life?

❖❖ *Living and Praying with the Word*

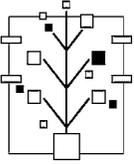
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O Sun of Justice, Jesus Christ, refresh your light and truth within us this Advent Season. Increase in us and help us abound in love for all, that we may help our world see you in every life situation that we face.

The first readings for Ordinary Time describe the calls of the prophets. For the sake of Zion (Second Sunday), the prophet must not remain silent until Jerusalem is vindicated by God, and no longer desolate or forsaken. The reading from the book of Nehemiah (Third Sunday) is a narrative example of Isaiah's poetic description. The people gather to hear the words of Torah and renew their commitment, for "Today is holy to the Lord your God!" The call of Jeremiah (Fourth Sunday) and the call of Isaiah (Fifth Sunday) remind us of the costs of hearing and responding to God's invitation.

During the first five weeks of Ordinary Time, the last few chapters of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians are read almost continuously. Paul attempts to dissuade the Corinthians from their fractious behavior. They are fighting over whose spiritual gift is greater (Second Sunday), and are failing to recognize that they are all part of the same body (Third Sunday). As an antidote to the schisms dividing the community, Paul proposes that they strive for the greatest gift: love. The gospel that Paul preaches (Fifth Sunday) has been handed down to him and so he passes it on to the Corinthians.

For most of the Sundays of Ordinary Time Year C, the Gospel read is Luke, which traces the ministry of Jesus from Nazareth throughout Galilee and finally to Jerusalem. Since the main source for Luke's Gospel is that of Mark, we are familiar with this narrative framework. However, Luke introduces various sayings from what biblical scholars refer to as "Q" (from the German *Quelle*, which means "source") as well as his own unique materials. One of the more striking differences between Mark and Luke is the latter's extensive use of parables. Mark includes only four parables (Mark 4:3–9; 26–29; 30–32; Mark 12:1–11), while Luke has twenty-four parables, eighteen of which are only found in his. The Gospel of Luke differs from both Mark and Matthew in its consistent theme of reversal. Beginning with Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55), we hear how God will lift up the lowly, fill the hungry with good things, and remember the promise of mercy. Jesus will echo this sentiment in his augural sermon in Nazareth (Third Sunday). Whereas Matthew lists "poor in spirit," in Luke's Beatitudes, it is the poor themselves who are blessed (Sixth Sunday). It is the Gentile Centurion of Capernaum in whom Jesus finds faith (Ninth Sunday). The parable of taking seats of honor (Twenty-Second Sunday), the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Twenty-Sixth Sunday), and the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector (Thirtieth Sunday) witness to this theme of reversal.



January 20, 2019

## SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Today's Focus: What's Your Gift?

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*It's tempting to think that knowing and naming the gifts God has given us shows a lack of humility. In truth, doing so actually helps focus on how we might be most effective at sharing the Good News of Jesus!*

**FIRST  
READING**  
*Isaiah 62:1-5*

For Zion's sake I will not be silent,  
for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,  
until her vindication shines forth like the dawn  
and her victory like a burning torch.

Nations shall behold your vindication,  
and all the kings your glory;  
you shall be called by a new name  
pronounced by the mouth of the LORD.  
You shall be a glorious crown in the hand of the LORD,  
a royal diadem held by your God.  
No more shall people call you "Forsaken,"  
or your land "Desolate,"  
but you shall be called "My Delight,"  
and your land "Espoused."

For the LORD delights in you  
and makes your land his spouse.  
As a young man marries a virgin,  
your Builder shall marry you;  
and as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride  
so shall your God rejoice in you.

**PSALM  
RESPONSE**  
*Psalms 96:3*

Proclaim his marvelous deeds to all the nations.

**SECOND  
READING**  
*1 Corinthians 12:  
4-11*

Brothers and sisters: There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another, the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another, faith by the same Spirit; to another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another, mighty deeds; to another, prophecy; to another, discernment of spirits; to another, varieties of tongues; to another, interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes.

**GOSPEL**  
*John 2:1–11*

There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servers, “Do whatever he tells you.” Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, “Fill the jars with water.” So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, “Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter.” So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from—although the servers who had drawn the water knew—the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, “Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now.” Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs at Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.

### ❖ Understanding the Word

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Jerusalem had been laid waste and her children taken into exile, but the oracles found in Isaiah 56–66 have a jubilant, hopeful tone. Writing soon after the return from exile, the prophet known as Third Isaiah sees only good fortune to come. Not only has Zion been vindicated, she will be known by a new name, “My Delight.” The imagery used is that of a young couple in love. “As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you” (Isaiah 62:5). Despite Jerusalem’s ruined appearance, she is nonetheless the delight of God. The wedding metaphor is frequent among prophetic texts (Hosea 2:19; Jeremiah 32:41; Zephaniah 3:17).

Paul carried on a lengthy correspondence with the Corinthians, and often visited or sent emissaries to the church there. The community struggled with a certain hubris arising from their “spiritual gifts.” The rivalry over spiritual gifts may have resulted from the Corinthians’ excessive focus on the ecstatic nature of the spiritual phenomena. Paul reminds them that these are “gifts” (*charismata*) that are each expressed in specific activities (*energemata*). In First Corinthians, Paul repeatedly reminds them that these gifts are for the building up of the community and not for personal gain (1 Corinthians 14:12). In fact, the gifts, though varied, result from the “one and same Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:11).

In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus’ first miracle is set in a synagogue, where Jesus casts out an unclean spirit (Mark 1:21–26). But in John, Jesus’ first “sign” (John’s term for miracles) is less public. As we hear in today’s reading, Jesus and his family are attending a wedding when his mother notices a potentially damaging social gaffe—the wine is running short. Though Jesus seemingly rebuffs his mother, her confidence in his ability and his obedience are unwavering. “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5). Jesus’ hesitation stems from timing: “My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4). Nonetheless, he will begin to demonstrate his identity through the signs he performs. “And his disciples began to believe in him” (John 2:11).

## ❖ Reflecting on the Word

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Each of us has different gifts, given by the same Spirit. What are your gifts? I have gifts for preaching, teaching, leading worship, and making music. I lived with a brother who had gifts for cooking, sewing, and making our community a home. I ministered to a woman who could no longer work and felt useless. I invited her to see her gift as calling us to pay attention to her need for companionship and prayer. She helped us value being as much as doing. A friend recovering from serious surgery discovered the gift of patience, a gift she would rather not have needed to find that way.

What are your gifts? Some gifts bring us great joy. Others are a challenge to accept. Today's Gospel reveals Jesus' gift for miraculous deeds, like changing water into wine. He shares this gift quietly, in response to a need, although he wondered if it was time to share it. Mary was confident he would respond. That is also an important gift to name.

Jerusalem offers the gift of being home to the Israelites after a time of exile. God's delight is witnessed in the gift of the name, Espoused. Do we miss our gifts because we are too focused on those of others? A student in our campus ministry program said that "Comparison is a thief of joy." Jealousy often robs us of delighting in the gifts God gives each of us. Name the gifts God has given you. Unsure what they are? Ask people you trust. Create a litany of thanksgiving to God for these gifts. If tempted to jealousy, add those people and their gifts to your litany. Thank God by sharing your gifts, because "the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit" (1 Corinthians 12:7).

## ❖ Consider/Discuss

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- Begin a litany of thanksgiving by naming your gifts.
- How can you use one of the gifts to manifest the Spirit for the common good?

## ❖ Living and Praying with the Word

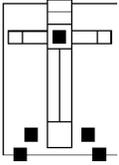
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Giver of all that is good, I thank you for the gifts you have given me and for those of my sisters and brothers. I know that gratitude can be a miracle in itself. Let me drink in your goodness and free me to use my gifts for the good of others, so that all people might delight in you.

The earliest Christians turned to the Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures to understand and interpret the Paschal Mystery. Throughout our readings for Lent, we see this intentional rereading and reinterpretation of God's promises in light of Jesus Christ. In Paul's Letter to the Romans (Lent 1), he carefully weaves Old Testament verses into his statement of faith. In this Paul was following a long line of Jewish hermeneutical (interpretive) practices. As we see in the readings from the Old Testament, these writers also reinterpreted their earlier traditions in light of new ones. The book of Deuteronomy looks back to the Exodus and the experience of slavery and redemption as the origin of the practice of giving God the first fruits (Lent 1). Luke continues this tradition of using the Jewish scriptures to explain the actions of Jesus. For example, when Jesus is tempted in the desert, both he and the devil defend their actions by quoting from the Old Testament (Lent 1).

The editors of the Lectionary follow similar principles, choosing the first readings to accent the message of the Sunday Gospel reading. So while Abram's covenant with God (Lent 2) may not at first glance seem to relate topically to Jesus's transfiguration (Lent 2), a closer reading reveals the connection. The God who promised Abram descendants as numerous as the stars is the same God who announces, "This is my chosen Son." Occasionally, the second reading serves as a bridge between the first reading and the Gospel. The call of Moses (Lent 3) seems unrelated to Jesus' parable of the unproductive fig tree (Lent 3), until one reads the passage from the First Letter to the Corinthians in which Paul draws the connection clearly. The actions of Moses foreshadowed Jesus: "They drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4).

The readings of Lent are designed to remind, encourage, and reprove believers so that we might be prepared to enter into the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. To that end, we are reminded of God's providence and care (Lent 4) and Paul's invitation to us to become "ambassadors for Christ" (Lent 4). As God brought the Israelites into the Promised Land, so Jesus welcomes the lost and sinners into the reign of God (Lent 4). Ironically, despite the early Christian practice of turning to scripture, we hear in the first reading from the last Sunday of Lent, "Remember not the events of the past" (Isaiah 43:18). Paul adds that he considers "everything as a loss" (Philippians 3:8). Jesus is more than the fulfillment of scripture. Jesus is the one who can forgive sins (John 8), and as the Gospel of John will demonstrate, Jesus and God are one.



March 10, 2019

## FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Today's Focus: Choosing to Remember and Not Forget

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*How much we want all of life to be easy and pain-free! Yet our experience of life teaches otherwise, and our faith shows us how the pain of the past can lead us to hopeful futures.*

**FIRST  
READING**

*Deuteronomy 26:  
4-10*

Moses spoke to the people, saying: "The priest shall receive the basket from you and shall set it in front of the altar of the LORD, your God. Then you shall declare before the LORD, your God, 'My father was a wandering Aramean who went down to Egypt with a small household and lived there as an alien. But there he became a nation great, strong, and numerous. When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us, imposing hard labor upon us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and he heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. He brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying power, with signs and wonders; and bringing us into this country, he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey. Therefore, I have now brought you the firstfruits of the products of the soil which you, O LORD, have given me.' And having set them before the Lord, your God, you shall bow down in his presence."

**PSALM  
RESPONSE**

*Psalm 91:15b*

Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.

**SECOND  
READING**

*Romans 10:  
8-13*

Brothers and sisters: What does Scripture say?

*The word is near you,  
in your mouth and in your heart*

—that is, the word of faith that we preach—, for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. For the Scripture says,

*No one who believes in him will be put to shame.*

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

**GOSPEL**  
*Luke 4:1-13*

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, *One does not live on bread alone.*"

Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. The devil said to him, "I shall give to you all this power and glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me." Jesus said to him in reply, "It is written:

*You shall worship the Lord, your God,  
and him alone shall you serve."*

Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written:

*He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,  
and:*

*With their hands they will support you,  
lest you dash your foot against a stone."*

Jesus said to him in reply, "It also says,

*You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test."*

When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

## ❖ Understanding the Word

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In the first reading from the book of Deuteronomy, Moses directs the Israelites in a ritual offering that connects the firstfruits and the experience of the Passover in Egypt. "You shall declare . . . 'My father was a wandering Aramean' " (Deuteronomy 26:5). By retelling the story of oppression in Egypt and God's compassionate response, the Israelites place themselves back into the experience. "He brought us out of Egypt" (26:8) connects the present community of Israel with its ancestors, reaffirming their communal identity. But as the passage continues, this corporate identity has implications for behavior. Once the offerings have been brought to the sanctuary, the community is to celebrate and include "the resident aliens who live among you" (26:11).

In the Letter to the Romans, Paul interprets the Jewish scriptures to demonstrate that belief leads to justification and salvation. Citing Israel's prophets (Isaiah 28:16 and Joel 3:5), Paul argues that the promises that had formerly been for Jews are now extended to Gentiles. Any who "confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead . . . will be saved" (Romans 10:9). The Gentiles are now co-heirs to the promise of salvation, grafted onto the branch of faith (11:17).

The Gospel reading also uses citations from the Jewish scriptures, but to different effect. Where Paul demonstrated that scripture supported the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's plan of salvation, Jesus uses God's word to defend himself against the temptations of the devil. All three synoptic Gospels contain the story of the tempting in the desert, but Matthew and Luke insert Q material into Mark's brief framework. Whereas Mark's passage highlights the cosmic elements, both Matthew and Luke insert more mundane concerns. Jesus is challenged by hunger, power, and authority. In each challenge, Jesus bests the devil. The passage closes on an ominous note: "When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time" (Luke 4:13).

### ❖ *Reflecting on the Word*

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Do you remember the song "The Way We Were"? Its lyrics reminded us that memories too painful to recall are those we choose to forget. Today's readings take the opposite viewpoint: painful things must be remembered. The pain of exile, division, and temptation is remembered in the light of scripture to offer homecoming, reconciliation, and healing.

Moses leads the people in a liturgy that recalls their oppression and Passover to freedom by God's hand. Remember to worship the Lord by doing the same for others.

Paul proclaims Jesus as Lord of all. The division between Gentile and Jew is changed by following Jesus, who is as near as our hearts and mouths. Remember your pain and invite God to change our minds and hearts to see as God, the Creator of all, sees.

Jesus is tempted by the devil to relieve human hungers for food, power, and presumption by focusing on them, not God. The devil misuses scripture to sway Jesus. Jesus does not fall for these interpretations and quotes scripture to focus on God. Only God can satisfy the hungry heart and give real strength. Trusting in God's merciful love, not presuming it, offers real freedom.

On National Immigrants Day 2018, many people shared their stories. A Haitian immigrant shed tears of joy upon graduation from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Dominican Sisters from Germany, Cuba, and Haiti recalled their mistreatment as young immigrants and their parents' hopes for a better life. Our parents in faith were wandering Arameans. Our family history includes travel from a foreign land. At times we wander from God. Choose to recall what's too painful to remember this Lent. Invite God to bring homecoming, reconciliation, and healing by entering your pain and changing your mind and heart.

## ❖ Consider/Discuss

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- When has recalling a painful memory freed you to find hope and healing?
- What needs to change in your life to worship only God this Lent?

## ❖ *Living and Praying with the Word*

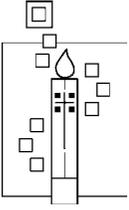
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We do not live on bread alone, O God, but on every word that comes from your mouth. Your Word, Jesus, is close. Open our ears to hear his voice. Open our eyes to see his presence. Open our hearts to worship you by offering unconditional, merciful love to others, the same love that you first offer us.

Our first readings are taken from Acts of the Apostles, the second volume by the evangelist tradition names as Luke. The twenty-eight chapters narrate the experiences of the early apostles after the resurrection of Jesus and his ascension, and the coming of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost). In the name of Jesus, the apostles, led by Peter, are able to heal and cast out demons (Easter 2). The actions and preaching of the apostles anger the religious authorities (Easter 3 and 4), who stone Stephen (Easter 7). Another theme found in the first readings for Easter is the question of whether to evangelize the Gentiles. Peter baptizes the Roman centurion Cornelius (Easter), and Paul preaches to the God-fearers on his first missionary journey (Easter 5), which leads to the Jerusalem Council (Easter 6) and its approbation of the Gentile mission.

Most of the texts for the second readings are taken from the book of Revelation. Written by John (not the evangelist) on the island of Patmos, Revelation is a series of visions described in symbolic language and images. Jesus is envisioned as the victorious Lamb (Easter 3), and faithful believers stand before the throne of God, having been washed in the blood of the Lamb (Easter 4). The visions culminate with the images of a new heaven and a new earth (Easter 5) and a new Jerusalem (Easter 6). Revelation closes with the warning and the hope: Jesus will return (Easter 7)!

During the Easter season, we hear from the Gospel according to John, likely the last canonical Gospel to be written. The evangelist shares with the synoptic authors that Mary discovered the empty tomb (Easter), but he includes other unique post-Resurrection appearances. On the Second Sunday of Easter, we hear of the encounter between Jesus and Thomas. Peter is reconciled with Jesus and told to “feed my sheep” (Easter 3). The Johannine Jesus uses the imagery of sheep and shepherd to describe his own care of the disciples (Easter 4). In John’s Gospel, Jesus gives one commandment: love one another (Easter 5). Those who heed this command will dwell in God and receive the Advocate (Easter 6). On the final Sunday before Pentecost, Jesus prays for those who will come to belief through the preaching of his disciples.



April 21, 2019

## EASTER SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD

Today's Focus: Alive in Christ

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*Just as the Easter season celebrates Christ arisen, our own lives must be celebrations in which the life of Christ arises from our daily living.*

**FIRST  
READING**

*Acts 10:34a,  
37-43*

Peter proceeded to speak and said: "You know what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree. This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name.

**PSALM  
RESPONSE**

*Psalms 118:24*

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.

**SECOND  
READING**

*Colossians 3:  
1-4*

Brothers and sisters: If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.

— or —

*1 Corinthians 5:  
6b-8*

Brothers and sisters: Do you not know that a little yeast leavens all the dough? Clear out the old yeast, so that you may become a fresh batch of dough, inasmuch as you are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the feast, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

**GOSPEL** On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

### ❖ *Understanding the Word*

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Throughout the Acts of the Apostles, speeches serve two functions. First, they are used to inform the narrative audience about the good news of Jesus Christ. Second, they remind the reader of the content of the faith. In today's reading, Peter begins his speech by recounting the story of Jesus' public life and assures Cornelius's household that Peter and the apostles are witnesses of all that Jesus said and did, and that Peter had been commissioned by Jesus to preach to the people. Luke's audience recognizes in this encounter that the proclamation of the gospel to a Gentile fulfills the prophecy of Simeon that Jesus will be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32).

The alternate choices for the second reading share the same theme: being a member of the body of Christ makes all things new. In Colossians, we are reminded that our focus should be on the things of heaven, since our life is now in Christ and Christ is seated at God's right hand. In First Corinthians, we are to be fresh dough without old yeast. The imagery of old yeast draws on the Jewish preparation for Passover, when all leaven is removed from the home. As Paul explains, Christ is the Passover who was sacrificed and we are to respond with the bread of sincerity and truth.

Though all four of our Gospels acknowledged that Mary discovered the empty tomb, Cephas (Peter) is the one credited with seeing the risen Jesus first (1 Corinthians 15:5). Today's Gospel highlights the important roles of both parties. Mary visits the tomb of Jesus, but we are not told why, for Jesus was anointed before his burial (John 19:40). When she discovers the empty tomb, she runs to Simon Peter and the beloved disciple. The men hasten to the tomb and verify what Mary has told them. In Greco-Roman law, two male witnesses were needed to corroborate a fact. Nonetheless, the evangelist does then narrate the encounter between the Risen Jesus and Mary (John 20:11–18).

## ❖ Reflecting on the Word

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The clever and fascinating technique called *autostereogram* creates a two-dimensional (2D) image, within which a 3D image “pops out” when someone stares at it long enough. The 3D image is “hidden” within the 2D image. Paul proclaims that our lives are hidden with Christ in God. So, think of and focus on what is above, the Risen Christ, seated at God’s right hand. When our lives make our faith in Christ clear, people see him in us. It’s as though Christ pops out into our midst when our entire being makes Christ known.

To make Christ known we need a relationship with him, like that of Mary of Magdala, Simon Peter, and John the beloved disciple, our Resurrection witnesses. We have not been to Christ’s empty tomb and seen the burial cloths lying there. Nor have we seen that the cloth that covered his head was separate from the rest, which is important. It tells us that his body was not stolen. But we did put on Christ in Baptism. We were sealed with his Spirit in Confirmation. We eat his Body and drink his Blood in Communion. We read the Gospels to make his story ours. And we take time to pray, alone and with others. We have a relationship with Jesus Christ. Having died with him in baptism, we rose with him and he lives in us.

Focus on the Risen Christ today. Take a long look at your life in light of his life, death, and resurrection. Then give thanks to the good Lord, by living Jesus in ways that make clear that your faith in him makes a difference in your life. Why? Because you and I are the living *autostereograms* through which the image of Jesus clearly appears to others.

## ❖ Consider/Discuss

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- Name the ways that you deepen your relationship with the Risen Christ.
- Give some examples of how people see Jesus in you each day.

## ❖ Living and Praying with the Word

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Christ, you are indeed risen from the dead and have opened up the possibility of new life for all creation. Fill me with an awareness that you dwell in me so that I reveal your presence on this Resurrection Day.

## INTRODUCTION TO ORDINARY TIME II

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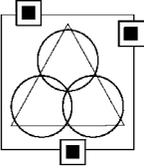
In this segment of Ordinary Time, we celebrate three feasts significant in the life of Jesus: the Most Holy Trinity, the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, and Christ the King. The readings for Trinity Sunday reveal the ongoing relationship evident in the Triune God. Wisdom, personified as a woman, stands as a mediator between God and humanity (Proverbs 8:22–31), while Paul confirms that faith in God through Jesus Christ is strengthened by the presence of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:1–5). The Gospel of John highlights the intimacy shared between God and Jesus (John 16:12–15). On Corpus Christi, we remember that the use of bread and wine to symbolize covenant and relationship is rooted in ancient tradition. The encounter between the Canaanite priest and king, Melchizedek, and Abram (Genesis 14:18–20), Paul's recounting the tradition of the institution of Eucharist (1 Corinthians 11:23–26), and Jesus' feeding of the multitudes (Luke 9:11–17) are readings that help us deepen our understanding of the Body and Blood of Christ.

Marking the end of Ordinary Time, the readings for the feast of Christ the King present images of divine kingship. In the first reading, God selects the least-likely to be shepherd and commander of God's people (2 Samuel 5:1–3). In the second reading, Christ is presented as the image of God possessing dominion over all principalities (Colossians 12–20). In the Gospel, the humiliation of Jesus on the cross is exacerbated by the mocking inscription "This is the king of the Jews" (Luke 23:35–43). These readings demonstrate that divine kingship is wholly unlike the reign of earthly rulers.

The passages selected for the first readings during this period of Ordinary Time come from a variety of Old Testament books. The readings from the Pentateuch (Fifteenth, Twenty-fourth, Twenty-ninth Sundays) remind the reader that the commandments and statutes of God reside in one's heart, and that hospitality toward strangers leads to blessings (Sixteenth and Seventeenth Sundays). The prophetic Books demonstrate God's power and authority (Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Twentieth, Twenty-first, Twenty-fifth through Twenty-seventh and Thirty-third Sundays). Having an appropriate attitude toward life are the recommendations of Ecclesiastes (Eighteenth Sunday), Wisdom (Nineteenth, Twenty-third, Thirty-first Sundays) and Sirach (Twenty-second and Thirtieth Sundays).

The second readings trace major portions of Paul's Letter to the Galatians (Thirteenth and Fourteenth Sundays), the Letter to the Colossians (Fifteenth through Eighteenth Sundays), and the Pastoral Epistles (Twenty-fourth through Twenty-seventh Sundays). The readings for the Nineteenth through Twenty-second Sundays are taken from Hebrews, an extended sermon in letter format. We also hear from Philemon (Twenty-third Sunday) and 2 Thessalonians (Thirty-first through Thirty-third Sundays).

The Gospel readings are taken from the central part of Luke's Gospel and follow Jesus' teaching and preaching in Galilee and along his journey to Jerusalem. Along the way, Jesus outlines the expectations and costs of discipleship. Prayer not only brings you closer to God, it also directs you outward toward those in need (Seventeenth Sunday). The Gospel of Luke contains more parables than Matthew and Luke. Some of those Lucan parables are read on the Nineteenth and Twenty-fourth through Twenty-sixth Sundays. When Jesus enters Jerusalem, the tone of the narrative becomes more apocalyptic, focusing on the end-times.



June 16, 2019

## MOST HOLY TRINITY

Today's Focus: Relating before Understanding

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*We believe the Holy Trinity to be three Persons in one God. Of primary importance is their relationship to each other and to us, and our relationship with them.*

**FIRST  
READING**  
*Proverbs 8:  
22–31*

Thus says the wisdom of God:

“The LORD possessed me, the beginning of his ways,  
the forerunner of his prodigies of long ago;  
from of old I was poured forth,  
at the first, before the earth.

When there were no depths I was brought forth,  
when there were no fountains or springs of water;  
before the mountains were settled into place,  
before the hills, I was brought forth;  
while as yet the earth and fields were not made,  
nor the first clods of the world.

“When the Lord established the heavens I was there,  
when he marked out the vault over the face of the deep;  
when he made firm the skies above,  
when he fixed fast the foundations of the earth;  
when he set for the sea its limit,  
so that the waters should not transgress his command;  
then was I beside him as his craftsman,  
and I was his delight day by day,  
playing before him all the while,  
playing on the surface of his earth;  
and I found delight in the human race.”

**PSALM  
RESPONSE**  
*Psalm 8:2a*

O Lord, our God, how wonderful your name in all the earth!

**SECOND  
READING**  
*Romans 5:1–5*

Brothers and sisters: Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

**GOSPEL** Jesus said to his disciples: "I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming. He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you. Everything that the Father has is mine; for this reason I told you that he will take from what is mine and declare it to you."  
*John 16:12-15*

## ❖ Understanding the Word

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In the book of Proverbs, Chapters 1–9 are a group of extended metaphors and narrative poems personifying Wisdom, which serve as an introduction to the proverbial collection found in the following chapters. Wisdom (*hokmah* in the Hebrew or *sophia* in the Greek) is present with God in the beginning, companions God in the work of creation, and delights in the human race. The Prologue of John's Gospel echoes this wisdom theme, but where we would expect *sophia*, John uses *logos* as the pre-existent entity with God.

The second reading is taken from Paul's Letter to the Romans, an epistle written late in Paul's life and demonstrating a maturity in his theological thinking. While Paul would not use "trinity" as a term to describe the inter-relatedness of God, Christ, and Spirit, this passage clearly shows the distinct functions of all three. Jesus Christ gives believers access to faith, which leads to grace and peace with God. The Holy Spirit has been given as a testament to God's love. In Paul's developing theology, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ opened the way for justification with God, which would only be fully realized when Christ returned. Until that time, the Holy Spirit served as the conduit of God's grace.

The Book of Glory found in John Chapters 13–19 describes Jesus' return to God and the invitation to the disciples to join in the divine relationship. Since God has given all to the Son, and the Son freely shared it with the disciples, they now are one with God (John 14:17; 15:4, 9; 16:15). In today's reading, Jesus promises that the Spirit of truth will continue to guide the disciples after he has departed. The Father has shared everything with the Son, and now the Son through the Spirit declares all to the disciples. Thus, the trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit is expanded to include all believers. At the conclusion of the Gospel, the resurrected Jesus will appear to the disciples and breathe upon them, giving them the Holy Spirit (John 20:22), thus assuring his continued presence among them.

## ❖ *Reflecting on the Word*

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In an episode of the TV show *The Good Doctor*, twins conjoined at the head shared part of a brain. After separation, each still felt what the other experienced. I cannot imagine that kind of connection. An even greater connection exists in God. The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity proclaims God as one being with three distinct persons, a community that is simultaneously one and distinct. Romans says that we gain access to the Father by faith in Jesus Christ and God's love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. John says that the Spirit speaks what he hears from Father and Son, who share everything. Lady Wisdom, *sophia* in Greek, was with God from the very beginning, playing before the Lord and delighting in human beings. One name for Jesus is wisdom in flesh.

In a homily during the Easter season of 2017, Pope Francis described the mystery the Trinity, saying he could use the popular fidget spinner toy to make known the presence of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When the spinner spins faster, its three arms will seem to become one larger disc, but they are still three. Mysteries are experienced, not explained. God is a community of three intimately connected, distinct persons. They share everything, like those twins in the TV show, without being separated. Created in God's image and likeness, we are to be a community of persons, united by the love of God that is made visible in Jesus Christ and flows in us through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Each of us is unique. While distinct from God, God dwells within us. Don't try to understand it. Enter into and live the mystery. Pick up a fidget spinner and experience God's delight.

## ❖ *Consider/Discuss*

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- How do you describe the mystery of the Trinity?
- What difference does the doctrine of the Trinity make in daily life?

## ❖ *Living and Praying with the Word*

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O Most Holy Trinity, undivided unity, when we try to understand you, it can make our head spin. Deepen our relationship with you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Fill us with your delight and help us pour your love out into a world so in need of that love.