



“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instructions for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17
Good News Bible

Sunday Gospel Readings
with *Lectio Divina*

Year B: Year of Mark



Canadian Bible Society

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INTRODUCTION

These weekly outlines combine the Liturgy's Sunday Gospel readings with the *lectio divina* approach to Holy Scripture.

Lectio divina is a dynamic, life-oriented approach to reading Holy Scriptures encouraged by both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. It provides a framework for a faithful and respectful reading of the Bible that is sincere and authentic.

Lectio divina is a blessing for the entire Church as it opens up the rich truths of Scripture for every Christian. Through it believers are invited to read, understand and deepen their appreciation of the Scriptures and to seek guidance for their lives in the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

Our real goal is to meet our Lord as we read his Word and allow him to transform our lives to be more like him through the work of the Holy Spirit.

All the information necessary for you to have a meaningful encounter with God's Word is included in this booklet. These outlines can be used individually or in groups.

The following pages introduce the four steps of *lectio divina* with some extra tips for using these outlines in groups.



ABOUT LECTIO DIVINA

History

Lectio divina dates back to the early Church Fathers around 300 AD. The four steps were first recorded by a monk, Guigo Cartujo, in 1173. These steps Lectio (Reading), Meditatio (Meditation), Oratio (Prayer) and Contemplatio (Contemplation) remain central today although methods differ.

Overview

In essence *lectio divina* is a simple way to meet with the Lord through reflection and prayer based on Holy Scripture. It is not a study method. Background knowledge can be helpful but is not essential.

Used in groups a structure is necessary but for individuals the steps need not be followed rigidly. Our aim is meeting God, not just completing the steps themselves. So when the Lord impresses something on us we need to stop and wait. We can always come back to the steps another time. We don't want to lose what God is saying to us.

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LECTIO – READING

Reading the Scripture passage humbly and prayerfully is the foundation for everything else that follows and cannot be rushed. So begin with a prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to 'lead you into all the truth' (John 16:13).

Read the passage slowly and carefully. Avoid being tempted to look at the Lectio comments or any of the other steps at this stage.

Have a notebook and pencil ready. Underline, or make a note of, any words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down any questions that occur to you. Read the passage several times and read it aloud. Give yourself time to understand and appreciate what is being said.

Now read the Lectio comments and reflect on the ways they are similar or different to your first thoughts.

MEDITATIO – MEDITATION

Meditation deepens our appreciation of the passage and helps us to explore its riches. We read in 2 Timothy 3:16 that 'All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instructions for right living...' So approach Scripture in faith expecting God to speak to you. He may reveal something of himself to you. He might highlight an attitude or behaviour of yours that needs to change. He might show you a promise to encourage and strengthen you.

Here are some suggested approaches you may find helpful.

Use your imagination. Picture the passage; put yourself into the scene and become part of the story. See things through the eyes of the other characters, listen to what they say, watch their reactions, imagine how they feel. Keep coming back to Jesus. Get to know him; delight yourself and become fascinated by him, his words, his actions, the way he responds – everything about him.

Ask questions. Use your own questions and the questions given to think more deeply about the passage and what God wants to say to you. Ask Jesus why he did and said what he did. Try to understand his reasons and intentions. Allow time to be quiet, to listen and hear his answer.

Let the Word be a mirror for you. As we read the Bible it shows us more of what the Christian life looks like and where ours needs to change. We see how God's Word applies to our daily life, as an individual, and as part of our community and society. We will find promises and encouragement, challenges and demands. If we are willing God will nurture and free us to be more fully human and fully alive.

ORATIO – PRAYER

Prayer opens up a conversation between God and us. In the Psalms we see how the writers pour out their feelings to God, often mixing hopes and fears side by side. God values our honesty. We can't hide anything from him anyway. Using the words of the responsorial psalm can help us but we can also use our own words to have a heart-to-heart conversation with a very special friend.

Through prayer we make our response to the light God's Word has shed on how we are living our lives. Now we can bring what is happening in our own life and in our community before God. We speak and listen, listen and reflect – it is a conversation with God.

CONTEMPLATIO – CONTEMPLATION

To help us interpret the Gospel reading the Liturgy provides two further Scripture readings. Reflecting on these can both enrich our understanding of the text and bring into focus a response we may need to make to the Lord.

Contemplation gives us the opportunity for an intimate time of communion with God. Be still before God and invite him in. Few words, if any, are necessary here. Enjoy time in his presence. Just be with him and let him love you. Let him refresh your soul.

Review

After you have finished your time of reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation you may want to jot down in a notebook any experiences or thoughts that particularly impressed you. You may find it helpful to look back at these later.



USING THESE OUTLINES IN GROUPS

When *lectio divina* is used in a group a little preparation is needed.

LECTIO:

Try one or more of the following ways of reading the passage. See what works best for your particular group.

Individual reading. To start with give everyone time to read through the passage silently.

Proclamation of the Word. One person reads (proclaims) the Word. This is the traditional manner of reading in the liturgical celebration.

Two readers. Two people read the text aloud alternately.

Each person reads a verse. This is a way of involving each participant, inviting each to read from his own Bible, so that the reading is attentive and dynamic.

Audio version. If you have access to a recorded version of the text you could also use that. You may notice different words are stressed.

With different characters. Approach the text somewhat like a drama, in which one person is the narrator/reader, another takes the part of Jesus, a third takes another character. This can be the most dynamic or engaging method and helps us to identify just what the different characters in the passage are saying.

MEDITATIO:

- In the group setting, it is important that everyone is given time to participate, to share what the Lord has been saying to them. While the Lord speaks through his Word, he also speaks to us through our brothers and sisters. So as we listen to others we need to open our hearts to hear the Lord's voice speaking through them.
- It is important that everyone in the group understands that this sharing is to build one another up and enrich our experience. It is not necessary that everyone agrees about what is shared. You need to be careful to avoid this time turning into a debate or argument. The Lord knows us each as individuals so will have different things to say to us personally at this specific point in our lives.
- You can start with a simple question like "What catches your attention in this passage?" and use the printed questions. The aim is to help everyone feel comfortable to speak and share how the text has inspired them. Gently keep the group focused on the text and what God is saying.

PORATIO:

We suggest you give people time for personal silent prayer before God. You can also give opportunity for people to pray out loud in their own words and use verses from the responsorial prayer. The aim should be to help each person make a personal response to the Lord during this time.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Contemplation by its very nature is an individual exercise and silence is necessary. If you have room it may be helpful to suggest people move so they have their own 'personal space'.

**The Scripture references for the Psalms follow the Hebrew numbering used in many recent Bibles including the Jerusalem Bible but some Bibles use different numbering. If Psalm 23 The Good Shepherd is numbered as Psalm 22 in your Bible, please refer to your church lectionary for all the correct Psalm references for your Bible.*

REMAIN FAITHFUL

Mark 13:33-37

³³ Be on watch, be alert, for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It will be like a man who goes away from home on a trip and leaves his servants in charge, after giving to each one his own work to do and after telling the doorkeeper to keep watch. ³⁵ Watch, then, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming—it might be in the evening or at midnight or before dawn or at sunrise. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, he must not find you asleep. ³⁷ What I say to you, then, I say to all: Watch!”

*Other Readings: Isaiah 63:16-17, 64:1, 3-8; *Psalm 80:1-2, 14-15, 17-18;
1 Corinthians 1:3-9*

LECTIO:

We start our preparation for this great season of Advent not with Jesus’ birth but by looking forward, to our Lord’s Second Coming.

In the preceding verses of Mark 13, Jesus teaches important truths about what will happen before he returns to earth at the end of history. While we are given some clues about what will unfold, it is clear that Jesus wants to divert our attention from fruitless and divisive speculation about dates, towards faithful service.

So Jesus concludes this teaching on his Second Coming with these few verses focusing on the need to stay alert and remain faithful to the task he has given us to do. Jesus uses the parable of a master leaving his servants to do their duties while he goes on a journey to help us understand this point. No one knows exactly when the master will return.

MEDITATIO:

- What is the main message of today’s parable? Is it that Jesus expects to find us doing the work he asked us to do when he returns?
- In the parable each of the servants had been given ‘his own work to do’ (verse 34). What ‘work’ has Jesus given to all Christians to do? What things has he given you to do personally?
- Consider what can happen when debating with other Christians about when Jesus will return. Compare this to our responsibility towards our fellow servants in Jesus’ parable. Which is more constructive?
- Mark 13 reminds us this world will one day come to an end. Are we spending too much time investing in temporary things?

ORATIO:

Praise God – one day Jesus will return again in great power and glory and the end of history lies under his direct control.

Pray for those who haven’t accepted God’s forgiveness yet. Pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal Jesus to them and they will respond to his grace and mercy.

Ask God to give you the grace and strength you need to serve him and do his will. Pray that God will keep you from becoming weary or discouraged.

CONTEMPLATIO:

The two additional readings from today’s liturgy come from Isaiah and Corinthians. The first, from Isaiah 63 and 64 is a passionate plea of confession to restore a broken relationship with God. Despite knowing God’s special love and faithfulness, the children of Israel repeatedly went astray. We can all identify with them at different times in our lives. The reason Jesus came to earth was to provide a way back. Repentance restores our relationship with God. Praise God!

1 Corinthians 1:3-9 offers us such encouragement. It reminds us we’re not left alone to try and live the Christian life on our own. We can draw on the spiritual riches we have been given in Christ. Jesus is at work in our lives to help us remain faithful until the day he returns again.

THE GOOD NEWS GIFT

Mark 1:1-8

¹This is the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ²It began as the prophet Isaiah had written:

“God said, ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you to open the way for you.’

³Someone is shouting in the desert,

‘Get the road ready for the Lord; make a straight path for him to travel!’”

⁴So John appeared in the desert, baptizing and preaching. “Turn away from your sins and be baptized,” he told the people, “and God will forgive your sins.” ⁵Many people from the province of Judea and the city of Jerusalem went out to hear John. They confessed their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan River.

⁶John wore clothes made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁷He announced to the people, “The man who will come after me is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to bend down and untie his sandals. ⁸I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Other Readings: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; Psalm 85:8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-14

LECTIO:

Mark wastes no time with introductions. In the very first sentence he sets out the main focus – Jesus Christ. He boldly declares that Jesus is the Son of God - the Good News ‘euangelion’, the word from which we get ‘Gospel’.

Mark then sets the scene for the story that is about to unfold. The main characters are God and his son Jesus, John the Baptist and the people of Judea and Jerusalem. He reminds us this story had its beginning within the Godhead. Hundreds of years earlier God revealed insights about what would take place through the Old Testament prophets. Mark only mentions Isaiah, but it is plain from the words we find in verse 2 that he is also drawing on Malachi 3:1 as well as Isaiah 40:3 for the rest of the prophecy in verse 3.

From the heavenly court the narrator jumps straight down to earth and the dusty Judean desert. He reveals a man called John preaching ‘a baptism of repentance’. John’s ministry is very successful. People flock into the desert to hear him preach. Many respond and demonstrate their sincere repentance by being publicly baptised in the river Jordan.

Exciting though this is Mark wants to get the focus back to the main subject - Jesus. So the second part of John’s message returns to the fulfilment of the prophetic words. John clearly proclaims that he is only preparing the way for someone else. Someone who has not yet come into public life. Someone who is far greater than even John. Someone who will bring a greater baptism. Someone who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.

MEDITATIO:

- Think about all the reasons Jesus is Good News. Why not start making a list? During this advent season every time you see or hear something connected with Christmas spend a moment reflecting on one of these reasons.
- What is so compelling about John’s ministry that people abandon city life, however briefly, to spend time with John in the desert?

ORATIO:

Ask Jesus to give you the Holy Spirit to guide you in your life each day. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you follow Jesus more closely.

CONTEMPLATIO:

The other readings this Sunday invite us to wait patiently for the second coming of Jesus. In the first reading the comforting words of God in Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11 tell the people of Jerusalem their sins are forgiven. The second reading, which is from 2 Peter 3:8-14, urges us to live more hopeful lives as we wait for the second coming of Jesus.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

John 1:6-8, 19-28

⁶ God sent his messenger, a man named John, ⁷ who came to tell people about the light, so that all should hear the message and believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came to tell about the light...

¹⁹ The Jewish authorities in Jerusalem sent some priests and Levites to John to ask him, "Who are you?"

²⁰ John did not refuse to answer, but spoke out openly and clearly, saying: "I am not the Messiah."

²¹ "Who are you, then?" they asked. "Are you Elijah?"

"No, I am not," John answered.

"Are you the Prophet?" they asked.

"No," he replied.

²² "Then tell us who you are," they said. "We have to take an answer back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

²³ John answered by quoting the prophet Isaiah:

"I am 'the voice of someone shouting in the desert:

Make a straight path for the Lord to travel!"

²⁴ The messengers, who had been sent by the Pharisees, ²⁵ then asked John, "If you are not the Messiah nor Elijah nor the Prophet, why do you baptize?"

²⁶ John answered, "I baptize with water, but among you stands the one you do not know. ²⁷ He is coming after me, but I am not good enough even to untie his sandals."

²⁸ All this happened in Bethany on the east side of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing.

Other Readings: Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11; Luke 1:46-55, 53-54; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

LECTIO:

This week we look at the beginning of the Gospel of John. Verses 6-8, which introduce John the Baptist, are actually a short note inserted into the prologue of this Gospel (John 1:1-18). This is a hymn about Jesus seen as the Word (logos).

John the Baptist is described as a 'messenger' of God sent 'to tell people about the light so that all should hear the message and believe'. The Gospel writer makes it clear that John is not the light. Jesus is the light.

In verses 19-28 we hear of an encounter between John and some messengers from the Pharisees, Jewish religious authorities. It would appear that rumours had been circulating that John was the Prophet, Elijah or even the Messiah. So the Pharisees dispatched some priests and Levites to find out who John really was and why he was baptising people.

John answers clearly that he is none of these people. He quotes from a prophecy in Isaiah 40:3 to explain his role which is to prepare the way for the Lord. John himself is preaching in the desert. So he too is 'a voice' shouting in the desert just as Isaiah describes.

Yet while John makes it clear he is not the Messiah he makes the very intriguing comment in verses 26-27 'among you stands the one you do not know... but I am not good enough even to untie his sandals'. Nothing further is recorded at this point and the narrative moves on. We are not told what the messengers reported back to the Pharisees.

MEDITATIO:

- Jesus is described as being 'the Light'. In our noisy, over busy world consider how Jesus can be 'the Light' for people today.
- John the Baptist was sent by God to 'tell about' Jesus. The Greek word for 'tell about' is 'witnessing', so John was a witness. How necessary is witnessing in our modern world? What can you say or do to witness to Jesus?

ORATIO:

Mary's song of praise rings out at the very heart of our reading (Luke 1:46-55). Try making her song your own joyful prayer, pausing at the end of each verse for your own moment of thanksgiving.

CONTEMPLATIO:

'Among you stands the one you do not know'. Contemplate this phrase for a minute or two. Ask God to speak to you about it. You may feel prompted to pray for specific people, or yourself, that you may know Jesus more deeply.

In today's Old Testament reading from Isaiah 61:1-2 we have the wonderful proclamation about the Messiah being filled with the Spirit of God and bringing good news and freedom. Who does he sound like to you?

Paul counsels us in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 on how to be good disciples. Applying these principles will help us be better witnesses to Jesus.

GOD'S CHOSEN ONE

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee named Nazareth. ²⁷He had a message for a young woman promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. Her name was Mary. ²⁸The angel came to her and said, "Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!"

²⁹Mary was deeply troubled by the angel's message, and she wondered what his words meant. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. ³¹You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, ³³and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end!"

³⁴Mary said to the angel, "I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?"

³⁵The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God. ³⁶Remember your relative Elizabeth. It is said that she cannot have children, but she herself is now six months pregnant, even though she is very old. ³⁷For there is nothing that God cannot do."

³⁸"I am the Lord's servant," said Mary; "may it happen to me as you have said." And the angel left her.

Other Readings: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14,16; Psalm 89:1-4, 27, 29; Romans 16:25-27

LECTIO:

God's messenger in this week's reading is the angel Gabriel. His dramatic conversation with a young woman from Nazareth, Mary, leaps out from the beginning of Luke's Gospel.

Understandably Mary is initially afraid and troubled by this encounter. Gabriel announces that she will become pregnant and give birth to the Son of God. From her question in verse 34, Mary appears to understand that this will happen soon – before her planned marriage to her fiancé, Joseph.

Gabriel explains that this pregnancy will be no ordinary one. It will be a miraculous event, achieved by God's presence in her life. As a sign that nothing is impossible for God, the angel tells her that her cousin Elizabeth, who has been barren for many years, is now six months pregnant.

Mary realises God is calling her for a special purpose. Her response says it all, 'I am the Lord's servant; may it happen to me as you have said'. She puts her trust completely in God.

MEDITATIO:

- God has a unique calling for Mary and uses an angel to speak to her. What ways does God usually speak to us? When did you last hear from God and what action did you take?
- Mary believes God's promise to her and trusts God to make it happen. What lessons can we learn from her response?
- Accepting God's message has a profound effect on Mary's life. How has God's message to you changed your life?
- Some people find it hard to accept the gospel account of the virgin birth. How does verse 37 help us respond to this?

ORATIO:

In today's Psalm 89:1-4 we find a wonderful song of praise about God's love and faithfulness. Think about how God demonstrates his love to you. Think about how God has shown you his faithfulness during your life. The promise of verse 4 speaks about Jesus but is also true for everyone who accepts him as Lord. Respond to God in thanks and ask God to deepen your faith and trust in him.

CONTEMPLATIO:

The other two readings today throw light on Gabriel's announcement. In 2 Samuel 7 the promises God made to David, through Nathan the prophet hundreds of years earlier, are fulfilled in the son promised to Mary.

The second reading comes from the very last verses of Paul's Letter to the Romans. It is a prayer of praise to God for revealing the Good News and being the Lord of human history. Make these words your own hymn of praise to glorify God.

A SAVIOUR IS BORN FOR US

Luke 2:1-14

¹At that time Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire. ²When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria. ³Everyone, then, went to register himself, each to his own hometown.

⁴Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, the birthplace of King David. Joseph went there because he was a descendant of David. ⁵He went to register with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant, ⁶and while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. ⁷She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger—there was no room for them to stay in the inn.

⁸There were some shepherds in that part of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks. ⁹An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid, ¹⁰but the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. ¹¹This very day in David’s town your Savior was born—Christ the Lord! ¹²And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³Suddenly a great army of heaven’s angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God:

¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!”

Other Readings: Isaiah 9:1-7; Psalm 96:1-3, 11-13; Titus 2:11-14

LECTIO:

The story of Jesus’ birth is described in two scenes. In the first scene, verses 1-7, Luke explains how Jesus came to be born in Bethlehem, in the south of Palestine when Mary and Joseph were living in Nazareth, in the north.

Joseph was required to attend a census. As a descendant of King David that meant returning to Bethlehem. It is here that Mary gives birth to Jesus. God’s promise that he would send the Messiah, a descendant of King David, is fulfilled. Even the place of Jesus’ birth was foretold by the prophets.

In scene two, verses 8-14, we hear how the news of Jesus’ birth reaches the outside world. Shepherds are the surprised recipients of the amazing news. God sends an angel

to reveal the birth and real identity of this baby. The baby is born in a lowly stable, with the animals, because there was nowhere else for Mary and Joseph to stay.

It’s almost as if the angels can’t contain their excitement at the birth of this child. For then suddenly a great army of angels join the first angel and sing their praise to God.

Our Scripture reading finishes here, but the story continues. The shepherds believe the news the angel tells them and go to Bethlehem to see for themselves. They find Jesus and tell Mary and Joseph everything the angel told them. They are the very first people to announce that Jesus is the long-awaited Saviour.

MEDITATIO:

- Today is one of the most joyful in the entire Christian calendar. Join with millions around the world in adoration of Jesus.
- Marvel that God the Father should send his Son into the world in this way.
- Marvel too that Jesus was prepared to leave the glory of heaven to be born as a baby in an animals’ stable.
- Reflect on the amazing love the Father and Son have for us to be prepared to do this.
- Consider Jesus as your Saviour and Lord. What does this mean for you?

ORATIO:

Why not echo the words of the angelic army on that very first Christmas day: ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven’? Repeat this great proclamation of praise several times.

Thank God for sending Jesus as your Saviour. Remember those who can still find no room for Jesus

CONTEMPLATIO:

To aid our understanding of today’s gospel reading, the liturgy offers us Isaiah 9:1-7 and Titus 2:11-14. Both speak about salvation.

Spend a few minutes contemplating the four titles given to our Saviour in Isaiah 9:6: ‘Wonderful Counsellor’, ‘Mighty God’, ‘Eternal Father’, ‘Prince of Peace’.

The passage in Titus shows us clearly that God revealed his grace so that mankind could be free from sin and wickedness. Sin enslaves us but Jesus sets us free. So now, by grace, we can receive salvation and live a life pleasing to God.

GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES

Luke 2:22-40

²²The time came for Joseph and Mary to perform the ceremony of purification, as the Law of Moses commanded. So they took the child to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, ²³as it is written in the law of the Lord: "Every firstborn male is to be dedicated to the Lord." ²⁴They also went to offer a sacrifice of a pair of doves or two young pigeons, as required by the law of the Lord.

²⁵At that time there was a man named Simeon living in Jerusalem. He was a good, God-fearing man and was waiting for Israel to be saved. The Holy Spirit was with him ²⁶and had assured him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's promised Messiah. ²⁷Led by the Spirit, Simeon went into the Temple. When the parents brought the child Jesus into the Temple to do for him what the Law required, ²⁸Simeon took the child in his arms and gave thanks to God:

²⁹"Now, Lord, you have kept your promise,
and you may let your servant go in peace.

³⁰With my own eyes I have seen your salvation,

³¹which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples:

³²A light to reveal your will to the Gentiles
and bring glory to your people Israel."

³³The child's father and mother were amazed at the things Simeon said about him.

³⁴Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "This child is chosen by God for the destruction and the salvation of many in Israel. He will be a sign from God which many people will speak against ³⁵and so reveal their secret thoughts. And sorrow, like a sharp sword, will break your own heart." ³⁶⁻³⁷There was a very old prophet, a widow named Anna, daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She had been married for only seven years and was now 84 years old. She never left the Temple; day and night she worshipped God, fasting and praying. ³⁸That very same hour she arrived and gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to set Jerusalem free.

³⁹When Joseph and Mary had finished doing all that was required by the law of the Lord, they returned to their home town of Nazareth in Galilee. ⁴⁰The child grew and became strong; he was full of wisdom, and God's blessings were upon him.

Other Readings: Genesis 15:1-6, 21:1-3; Psalm 105:1-6, 8-9; Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19

LECTIO:

Joseph and Mary take Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to present him, as their first born son, to God in accordance with the Law of Moses. While at the Temple they encounter two prophets, Simeon and Anna. The Holy Spirit promised Simeon that he

would not die before he saw the Messiah. The Spirit leads him to the Temple so this promise can be fulfilled. This encounter takes on far greater significance when Simeon prophesies over Jesus. Firstly he echoes what the angel told the shepherds, that Jesus is the Saviour, or Messiah, prepared by God for all people. Simeon makes it clear that salvation is now available for the Gentiles, as well as the Jews. He also tells us the way people respond to Jesus will lead either to their salvation or their destruction.

Anna meets them shortly afterwards. We are simply told that she gives thanks to God and then tells everyone who is looking for the Messiah about Jesus.

Lastly we learn that Joseph and Mary return to Nazareth. Here Jesus grows up. He is full of wisdom and God's blessing is on him.

MEDITATIO:

- What can we learn from Simeon and Anna and their relationship with God?
- Consider the description of Jesus as 'a light'. What does this mean for you and for people you know?
- What does this passage teach us about the role of the Holy Spirit revealing things to us and guiding us?

ORATIO:

Ask God to deepen your faith in him. Repeat the first verse from Psalm 105 throughout the day.

'Give thanks to the Lord, proclaim his greatness;
tell the nations what he has done.'

CONTEMPLATIO:

God keeps his promises. He is completely trustworthy. Faith in God, in seemingly impossible circumstances, is the theme for our other readings. In Genesis 15: 1-6 we hear about Abram and Sarai who believe God's promise despite their old age and years of barrenness. They are blessed with a son Isaac (Genesis 21:1-3). Hebrews 11 lists many great examples of faith. Our reading focuses on three specific steps of faith and obedience in Abraham's life. God's answers won't necessarily come quickly or easily. But in testing times we can draw strength from these words so we keep trusting God.

FAITHFUL SERVANT

Luke 2:16-21

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and saw the baby lying in the manger.

¹⁷ When the shepherds saw him, they told them what the angel had said about the child.

¹⁸ All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said. ¹⁹ Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them. ²⁰ The shepherds went back, singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen; it had been just as the angel had told them.

²¹ A week later, when the time came for the baby to be circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name which the angel had given him before he had been conceived.

Other Readings: Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 67:1-2, 4-5, 7; Galatians 4:4-7

LECTIO:

We continue to meditate on our Saviour's birth and today the Catholic church particularly remembers the role Mary played in God's salvation plan.

On Christmas Day we read Luke's account of the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-14). The angel has given some very surprised shepherds some incredible news – that very day a baby has been born in Bethlehem who is God's chosen one, the Saviour, the Christ. The proof that this remarkable news is true will be when they find this special baby – in the most unlikely of places - an animal's feeding trough, a manger!

The shepherds hurry to Bethlehem and when they see the baby in the feeding trough they know what the angel has told them is true. They tell Mary and Joseph what the angel said to them about the identity of their new born son. Not surprisingly, it seems as though the shepherds couldn't contain their excitement and tell others about their encounter with the angels and the birth of this special baby (verse 18). We are not told whether others came to check out the shepherd's story for themselves, so perhaps most just thought they were making it up. The shepherds themselves however are utterly convinced and leave praising God for sending the Christ.

For Mary and Joseph the report from the shepherds gives them confirmation of their individual angelic visits nine months earlier (Luke 1:26-38, Matthew 1:18-25). The spotlight moves briefly to Mary alone who treasured these things and thought about them deeply.

The text concludes with Mary and Joseph taking their son to be circumcised on the eighth day as required by the Jewish law (Leviticus 12:3). They name him Jesus as they were each told by the angel (Matthew 1:21, Luke 1:31). In doing this Joseph identifies himself as Jesus' legal father.

MEDITATIO:

- God chose Mary (and Joseph) for a unique calling. Read Luke 1:26-56 and consider the qualities Mary shows in response to God's call. What can we learn from this?
- 'I am the Lord's servant...' This was Mary's response to the news that God had chosen her. Meditate on these words and consider how God wants us to serve him.
- Mary treasured the promises God had made to her. Take some time to think about the promises God has made to you. These may be general promises, made to all Christians, and specific ones for you.

ORATIO:

Psalm 128 commends us to fear and obey God. This fear is not about being terrified but rather a respect and holy awe for who God is. Bring some of the large and small decisions you have to make to God so he can lead you. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you act on what God tells you.

Spend some time praying for members of your family today.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Think about these verses in the letter to the Galatians 4:4-7. What do they mean to you?

'But when the right time finally came, God sent his own Son. He came as the son of a human mother and lived under the Jewish Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might become God's sons and daughters. To show that you are his sons and daughters, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who cries out, "Father, my Father." So then, you are no longer a slave but a son or daughter. And since that is what you, God will give you all that he has for his heirs.'

A KING FOR EVERYONE

Matthew 2:1-12

¹Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterwards, some men who studied the stars came from the east to Jerusalem ²and asked, "Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him."

³When King Herod heard about this, he was very upset, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. ⁴He called together all the chief priests and the teachers of the Law and asked them, "Where will the Messiah be born?"

⁵"In the town of Bethlehem in Judea," they answered. "For this is what the prophet wrote:

⁶"Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
you are by no means the least of the leading cities of Judah;
for from you will come a leader
who will guide my people Israel.'"

⁷So Herod called the visitors from the east to a secret meeting and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem with these instructions: "Go and make a careful search for the child, and when you find him, let me know, so that I too may go and worship him."

⁹⁻¹⁰And so they left, and on their way they saw the same star they had seen in the east. When they saw it, how happy they were, what joy was theirs! It went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹¹They went into the house, and when they saw the child with his mother Mary, they knelt down and worshipped him. They brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and presented them to him.

¹²Then they returned to their country by another road, since God had warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod.

Other Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13; Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

LECTIO:

Today's narrative focuses on Jesus, Herod, and 'some men who studied the stars,' or Magi, after the term in the Greek text. The fact that these men came from a distant country was another indication of the worldwide significance of Jesus' birth.

The Magi follow a new star that had appeared in the sky and arrive in Jerusalem, the seat of power for the Jews in Israel. They must have been disappointed not to find the new king here.

As they make their enquiries about this new king, people are upset. Every Jew knew that Herod would deal ruthlessly with any threat to his rule.

Herod is anxious about the Magi's search too. He takes advice from the religious leaders. The scriptures pointed towards the Messiah, a descendant of King David, being born in David's home town, Bethlehem (Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2).

Herod invites the Magi to a secret meeting so he can learn more about the threat and tells them to report back to him after they have found the young child.

Once the Magi set out on the last stage of their journey, the star guides them again. They are full of joy. The star leads them right to Jesus, where they kneel down, worship him and present their gifts.

God knows Herod's true intentions so warns the Magi not to return to Herod but to go home by another route.

MEDITATIO:

- How did you find Jesus? What helped guide you to him? Did God use other people that you didn't expect?
- In what ways is Jesus your leader and guide?
- Think about the different ways you can worship Jesus. What 'gifts' can you offer him today?

ORATIO:

God made use of the Magi's study of the stars to lead them to Jesus. Look back at the ways God led you to Jesus and how he has guided you through your life. Thank him for each step. Now ask God about the year ahead. What priorities does he want you to set? Lay your plans and hopes before him in prayer. Ask him to guide you to do what pleases him.

CONTEMPLATIO:

The liturgy comments upon the mystery of the incarnation in Isaiah 60:1-6 and Ephesians 3:2-6. Spend some time reflecting on these texts and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal Jesus to you.

GOD REVEALS HIS SON

Mark 1:7-11

⁷He announced to the people, “The man who will come after me is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to bend down and untie his sandals.

⁸I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

⁹Not long afterwards Jesus came from Nazareth in the province of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰As soon as Jesus came up out of the water, he saw heaven opening and the Spirit coming down on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, “You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you.”

Other Readings: Isaiah 55:1-11, Isaiah 12:2-6, 1 John 5:1-9

1 LECTIO:

Jesus’ ministry as a preacher of the Kingdom of God begins with perhaps a surprising event, his baptism. John the Baptist knows Jesus is far greater than him, and without sin.

From Matthew 3:13-15 we learn that John tried to persuade Jesus he didn’t need to be baptised. However when Jesus tells him that God requires it, John agrees to baptise him.

God the Father responds immediately by revealing Jesus’ divine identity. God declares Jesus to be his own dear Son and affirms that he is pleased with him. The Father also gives Jesus a vision of heaven and the Holy Spirit coming down on him like a dove. Jesus’ ministry is ready to begin and his deep unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit is confirmed.

John also tells us that while he baptised with water, Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit.

2 MEDITATIO:

- Consider why God wanted Jesus to be baptised. What would the people watching have thought about this? Jesus is both Son of God and Son of Man. Could it be that by submitting to John’s baptism Jesus identifies himself fully with sinful man? In God’s unfolding plan of salvation, Jesus will ultimately be called upon to lay down his life for sinners.
- Give thanks for Jesus’ obedience to God’s will.
- Jesus and John show us very clearly that we need to obey God even when others may misunderstand our actions. Think about the ways you could please God today. Are the opinions of others hindering you in any way? How far are you prepared to trust and obey God?
- God tells Jesus he is pleased with him. Consider today whether there is anyone you could give a word of encouragement to.
- Take a few moments to meditate on God’s love for you and the grace you have received. Use this to spend some time in thanksgiving.

3 ORATIO:

Consider these words from Isaiah 12, “God is my saviour; I will trust in him and not be afraid. The Lord gives me power and strength; he is my saviour.”

These words echo the confidence Jesus had in his Father. Can you make this response your own prayer?

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

To help us understand the richness of the Gospel reading, the liturgy includes two other Scriptures. The first is the beautiful poem in Isaiah 55:1-11 which tells us about the blessings that God will give us with the Messiah. The second is from 1 John 5:1-9. The writer insists upon the need to believe in Jesus. Whoever believes in Jesus as Messiah believes God, but whoever refuses Jesus refuses God himself.

MEET JESUS AND TELL OTHERS

John 1:35-42

³⁵The next day John was standing there again with two of his disciples, ³⁶when he saw Jesus walking by. "There is the Lamb of God!" he said.

³⁷The two disciples heard him say this and went with Jesus. ³⁸Jesus turned, saw them following him, and asked, "What are you looking for?"

They answered, "Where do you live, Rabbi?" (This word means "Teacher.")

³⁹"Come and see," he answered. (It was then about four o'clock in the afternoon.) So they went with him and saw where he lived, and spent the rest of that day with him.

⁴⁰One of them was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹At once he found his brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah." (This word means "Christ.") ⁴²Then he took Simon to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "Your name is Simon son of John, but you will be called Cephas." (This is the same as Peter and means "a rock.")

*Other Readings: 1 Samuel 3:3-10, 19; Psalm 40:1, 3, 6-9;
1 Corinthians 6:13-15, 17-20*

LECTIO:

The Gospels are not biographies of Jesus, nor do they tell us everything about him. The evangelists wrote these accounts so we can meet and learn about the Jesus they knew. In today's reading John relates how Jesus met his first disciples.

First John the Baptist describes Jesus as 'the Lamb of God' to two of his disciples.

They are clearly interested to see what he meant by this because they then follow after Jesus. Jesus speaks to them and invites them to see the place where he is staying. We are told that this encounter takes place at four o'clock in the afternoon. They then spend the rest of the day getting to know more about him and his teaching.

Andrew was clearly impressed because he loses no time in telling his brother Simon that they have found the Messiah. Andrew then takes Simon to meet Jesus.

Simon's encounter with Jesus is dramatic. Jesus takes one look at him, tells him who he is and then gives him a new name – Cephas or Peter. In Jesus' time, as today, a new name means a new identity. Peter was changed by his first meeting with Jesus and immediately left his job as a fisherman behind (Matthew 4:18-22). But it was to take years of growing, loving and serving Jesus before he really became the rock on which Jesus was able to build his church.

MEDITATIO:

- What can we learn from this passage about how people meet Jesus and become his disciples?
- John the Baptist and Andrew both knew who Jesus was and then introduced their friends to Jesus. How did you find Jesus? Was it through the help of other Christians? Can you describe it in a few words? Ask God to show you ways you can help your friends meet Jesus.
- Consider the description of Jesus as 'the Lamb of God'. Meditate on the significance of this title. (See Exodus 12:1-14, Leviticus 16:5-10, 20-22, Isaiah 53:7)

ORATIO:

Lord, please help me to understand more fully what it means to be your disciple. Help me to deepen my relationship with you and help me to do all that you ask me to.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Each of us is called in a different way. The first reading from 1 Samuel 3:3-10, 19 explains how the prophet Samuel was called. God gave him a special role and the freedom to fulfil it.

We often hear that Jesus sets us free, but not free to do anything as Paul explains in the second reading 1 Corinthians 6:13-15, 17-20. In belonging to God we are called to be fully human and fully alive, revealing Jesus in our words and actions.

FISHERS OF MEN

Mark 1:14-20

¹⁴ After John had been put in prison, Jesus went to Galilee and preached the Good News from God. ¹⁵ “The right time has come,” he said, “and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News!”

¹⁶ As Jesus walked along the shore of Lake Galilee, he saw two fishermen, Simon and his brother Andrew, catching fish with a net. ¹⁷ Jesus said to them, “Come with me, and I will teach you to catch people.” ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and went with him.

¹⁹ He went a little farther on and saw two other brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in their boat getting their nets ready. ²⁰ As soon as Jesus saw them, he called them; they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and went with Jesus.

Other Readings: Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 25:4-9; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

LECTIO:

This week Mark tells us about the call of the first disciples. Although similar to last week’s reading, Mark’s shows Jesus calling four men. He also reveals the scope of Jesus’ plans for them: not only his disciples but also his co-workers.

In John’s narrative, Jesus calls the disciples to stay with him, to be his friends and listen to his teachings. In Mark’s we learn that Jesus plans to train them to do his work of teaching people God’s message for the world.

The four men obey his call and follow Jesus there and then. They leave their work as fishermen and, it seems, their families.

Jesus teaches these first disciples as they share their lives with him, as the rest of the gospels show us. Jesus teaches them about his relationship with the Father and his great love for people individually.

They had a great deal to learn from him about this new way of living with God, what Jesus called ‘the kingdom of God’. Three years later Jesus left them, trusting all his preparations would be a sufficient foundation for them to become ‘apostles’, ‘people who were sent’ on a mission.

MEDITATIO:

- What is the ‘Good News’ Jesus speaks about? What does it mean for you? Try and sum it up in a few words.
- What does it mean to follow Jesus and be his disciple today?
- Can you be a ‘fisher of men’? You don’t have to be a priest. You just have to introduce your friends to Jesus, as we heard last week.

ORATIO:

Pray today’s responsorial Psalm ‘Lord, make me know your ways’ (Psalm 25:4).

Ask God to show you how he wants you to be his disciple.

Ask him whether there is anything you need to ‘leave behind’ in your busy life so you can serve him more fully.

CONTEMPLATIO:

This week we are also invited to read the story of Jonah. This is the prophet’s second calling (Jonah 3) because the first time round he refused to obey God (Jonah 1-2). But God gives him another opportunity and the people listen to what he says. They repent, turn to God and change their way of living.

In the second reading Paul breathes urgency into his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7:29-31). The time is short, he reminds them, let go of everything that holds you back from carrying out God’s plan. This sheds light on today’s Gospel reading where we see four people being called by Jesus for a special mission. Like the first disciples we need to be single minded as we follow Jesus. We need to be careful that other things in our lives do not hold us back from doing what God asks us to do.

TRUE AUTHORITY

Mark 1:21-28

²¹ Jesus and his disciples came to the town of Capernaum, and on the next Sabbath Jesus went to the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people who heard him were amazed at the way he taught, for he wasn't like the teachers of the Law; instead, he taught with authority.

²³ Just then a man with an evil spirit came into the synagogue and screamed, ²⁴ "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Are you here to destroy us? I know who you are—you are God's holy messenger!"

²⁵ Jesus ordered the spirit, "Be quiet, and come out of the man!"

²⁶ The evil spirit shook the man hard, gave a loud scream, and came out of him. ²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they started saying to one another, "What is this? Is it some kind of new teaching? This man has authority to give orders to the evil spirits, and they obey him!"

²⁸ And so the news about Jesus spread quickly everywhere in the province of Galilee.

Other Readings: Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9; 1 Corinthians 7:32-35



LECTIO:

The evangelist Mark likes telling stories about Jesus to shed light on who he is. Usually each story contains one main message. Jesus has true authority; this is the message which comes out loud and clear from today's reading.

Jesus had come to Capernaum, an important city in the north of Palestine. As a good Jew he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath where he started teaching. The people in the synagogue were amazed. He spoke with an authority quite unlike the teachers of the law.

Then a man controlled by an evil spirit screams at Jesus, "Are you here to destroy us? I know who you are—you are God's holy messenger!" Jesus demonstrates his authority again. He commands the evil spirit to be quiet and to come out of the man. The evil spirit has to obey, but before leaving it shakes the man hard and screams again.

The people now regard Jesus even more highly. Not only does he teach with authority but even evil spirits obey him. News about what happened spreads quickly throughout the whole region.



MEDITATIO:

- Consider why the people noticed a difference when Jesus spoke.
- Can you think of a reason why the evil spirit said Jesus was 'God's Holy Messenger'? Was the intention to cause confusion and undermine Jesus' ministry? Why did Jesus command the evil spirit to be quiet? Jesus didn't deny what was said about him. But he did not want his identity to be revealed in this way.
- Consider how the man is treated by Jesus and the evil spirit. What does this tell us about how God treats people and how the devil treats people? In what way did the evil spirit's outburst backfire?



ORATIO:

Repeat the words of today's responsorial Psalm 95 verses 6-7

"Come, let us bow down and worship him;
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
He is our God; we are the people he cares for,
the flock for which he provides.
Listen today to what he says:"

Thank God that he cares and provides for us. Ask him to help you hear his voice in the midst of life's busyness.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Today we can contemplate who Jesus is. The first reading presents part of Moses' speech in Deuteronomy 18:15-20. Moses promises that God will raise a prophet who will only tell them what God wants to say to them. Moses contrasts this prophet to the many magicians and false teachers who pretend to be God's messengers.

In the second reading, 1 Corinthians 7:32-35, Paul's concern is that we give ourselves completely to the Lord's service without any reservation – just like Jesus. Paul comments that this can be difficult for married people because they also want to please their husband or wife.

HEALER AND PREACHER

Mark 1:29-39

²⁹Jesus and his disciples, including James and John, left the synagogue and went straight to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a fever, and as soon as Jesus arrived, he was told about her. ³¹He went to her, took her by the hand, and helped her up. The fever left her, and she began to wait on them.

³²After the sun had set and evening had come, people brought to Jesus all the sick and those who had demons. ³³All the people of the town gathered in front of the house. ³⁴Jesus healed many who were sick with all kinds of diseases and drove out many demons. He would not let the demons say anything, because they knew who he was.

³⁵Very early the next morning, long before daylight, Jesus got up and left the house. He went out of town to a lonely place, where he prayed. ³⁶But Simon and his companions went out searching for him, ³⁷and when they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you."

³⁸But Jesus answered, "We must go on to the other villages around here. I have to preach in them also, because that is why I came."

³⁹So he traveled all over Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and driving out demons.

Other Readings: Job 7:1-4, 6-7; Psalm 147:1-6; 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

LECTIO:

Today's Gospel reading continues the story where we left it last week. After his authoritative preaching and the dramatic deliverance of a man with an evil spirit (Mark 1:21-28), Jesus went with his disciples to Simon Peter's house.

We are not told much about Peter's family but learn he is married because he has a mother-in-law. She is in bed with a fever. When Jesus is told this he takes her hand, helps her up and she is instantly healed.

News about what happened at the synagogue in the morning, and this healing, appears to have electrified the whole town. Imagine the excitement and impatience as people have to wait until evening, when the Sabbath rest ends. But as soon as they can, the whole town gathers in front of Peter's house. They bring with them all the sick and those who have demons. It must have been an incredible evening. Many people were healed and many set free from demons. Jesus stayed the night in Peter's home.

In the morning, while everybody was still asleep, Jesus left the house and went 'to a lonely place' to pray. Eventually Peter and his friends found him and told him that everyone was looking for him. But instead of returning, Jesus insists they move on to other towns and villages so he could preach to them too.

MEDITATIO:

- Why was it so important for Jesus to get alone to pray? What can we learn from Jesus' example about the priority he places on spending time alone with God?
- Peter wanted Jesus to capitalise on the 'success' of his ministry in Capernaum. But God had other plans. How can we ensure we please God rather than others, however well meaning they may be?

ORATIO:

Read Psalm 147 aloud as a prayer, alone or with friends. It sums up many of the good things about Jesus which we find in today's Gospel reading. It also reminds us that Jesus is the Lord.

Ask God to help you give the same priority to spending time with him as Jesus did.

CONTEMPLATIO:

The liturgy tries to capture some of the suffering of sick people in the first reading, Job 7:1-4, 6-7. Jesus' healing of the sick shows that God is not insensitive to their suffering.

Jesus' mission to preach the gospel is echoed in 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23 by the Apostle Paul, where he speaks of his duty to keep preaching God's Word so as many people as possible might be saved.

BE CLEAN

Mark 1:40-45

⁴⁰ A man suffering from a dreaded skin disease came to Jesus, knelt down, and begged him for help. "If you want to," he said, "you can make me clean."

⁴¹ Jesus was filled with pity, and reached out and touched him. "I do want to," he answered. "Be clean!" ⁴² At once the disease left the man, and he was clean. ⁴³ Then Jesus spoke sternly to him and sent him away at once, ⁴⁴ after saying to him, "Listen, don't tell anyone about this. But go straight to the priest and let him examine you; then in order to prove to everyone that you are cured, offer the sacrifice that Moses ordered."

⁴⁵ But the man went away and began to spread the news everywhere. Indeed, he talked so much that Jesus could not go into a town publicly. Instead, he stayed out in lonely places, and people came to him from everywhere.

Other Readings: Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46; Psalm 32:1-2, 5, 11; 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1



LECTIO:

Leprosy is curable today. But in Jesus' day there was no medicine and no cure, leprosy brought with it a life sentence for the sufferer.

Anyone appearing to have leprosy was considered infectious and cast out from family, friends, home and work. They were obliged to live in isolated places and this social problem caused great suffering for the lepers and their families.

People with this serious skin disease could no longer participate in religious activities at the temple or synagogue because they were ritually unclean. Effectively you were dead to your family and society. Only the priest's declaration of freedom from disease opened the door back into the community.

We do not know whether Jesus went to this man on purpose; it would appear that they were alone when they met. The leper made a touching plea and an act of faith: 'You can heal me if you want'.

Jesus didn't hesitate. He touched him and said, 'Be clean.' Instantly the man was cured. As a pious Jew, Jesus told the man to do what the Law of Moses required in such circumstances, to go and see the priest (Leviticus 14:2-32). He also told him not to tell anyone about his healing.

But the leper could not contain himself, he disregarded what Jesus said and told everyone about his healing. As a result the crowds sought Jesus to such an extent that he could no longer enter a town publicly. He had to stay out in the countryside.

MEDITATIO:

- The man had faith, was miraculously healed but then disobeyed Jesus. Why do you think he did that?
- Jesus has a message for the leper and for us here – what do you think it is?
- Everything about the leper revealed him as an outcast. He even had to shout, 'Unclean' if other people were around. How do you respond to those who are considered 'outcasts' in your church or town?

ORATIO:

The leper wasn't afraid to ask for what seemed impossible. Faith moved him towards Jesus. Luke 1:37 says 'there is nothing that God cannot do'. Repeat this phrase to yourself several times. Ask God to increase your faith in him.

Jesus was moved with pity and it caused him to act. Ask God to show you how to respond to those in need.

CONTEMPLATIO:

The first reading spells out the law about skin diseases (Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46). The future for those with 'a dreaded skin disease' was very bleak. Faith with action led this man to reach out to Jesus with a simple prayer. How do you put your faith into action?

In the second reading (1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1) Paul encourages us to model ourselves on Jesus. This means thinking about others with different beliefs so they too can encounter Jesus.

BEATING TEMPTATION

Mark 1:12-15

¹²At once the Spirit made him go into the desert, ¹³where he stayed forty days, being tempted by Satan. Wild animals were there also, but angels came and helped him.

¹⁴After John had been put in prison, Jesus went to Galilee and preached the Good News from God. ¹⁵"The right time has come," he said, "and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News!"

Other Readings: Genesis 9:8-15; Psalm 25:4-9; 1 Peter 3:18-22

LECTIO:

Temptation – we all experience it – so did Jesus. Mark sums up Jesus' desert testing in just one sentence. Luke and Matthew tell us about the same event, but they give us the in-depth versions of the Devil, called Satan here, trying to tempt Jesus to sin (Luke 4:1-13; Matthew 4:1-11).

Mark's account only really gives us the headlines. Immediately after Jesus was baptised (Mark 1:9-11) the same Holy Spirit that came down on him as a dove now leads him out into the desert, apparently for Satan to tempt him.

From Genesis 2-3 we learn that being tempted by the Devil in whatever form, is part of being human. Jesus' temptations were another way in which he shared the human experience.

In the New Testament we find ideas and characters we may already have discovered in the Old Testament. Jesus' forty days in the desert is something like the forty years spent by the Israelites journeying in the desert after their escape from Egypt, or Exodus. The Israelites suffered temptations and dangers, but always had God's help. The Book of Numbers describes some of the events.

In the Book of Job, Satan accuses Job in front of God. But God has a plan for Job, despite appearances to the contrary.

In both cases God promises and is faithful. Jesus too learns that God is faithful to his promises. Mark does not elaborate. But he seems to be saying that temptations are part of life for the Christian. The good news for us is that they can be overcome with God's faithful and loving help.

MEDITATIO:

- Why do you think Jesus had to suffer these temptations? Does Hebrews 4:15 shed any light on this?
- How do you deal with temptations? Do you expect help from God?

PORATIO:

Jesus used Scripture to help him overcome the temptations he faced (Matthew 4:1-11). We can do the same. Speaking the words of the Bible aloud can strengthen the will and remind us of God's help. Find a verse from today's readings and make it your own prayer. You could write the words on a piece of paper and keep them beside your kettle. Pray them every time you make a drink.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Let us consider today's other readings. In Genesis 9:8-15 God makes a covenant with Noah and all living creatures; he will never again send a flood to destroy the earth. When God set the flood in Noah's day it rained for 40 days. We are reminded of this covenant every time we see a rainbow.

1 Peter 3:18-22 reminds us that Jesus was innocent and without sin. Not only did he withstand Satan's temptations in the desert but also throughout the rest of his life on earth. Yet he died in our place so sinners like us could come to God.

LISTEN TO HIM

Mark 9:2-10

²Six days later Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain, where they were alone. As they looked on, a change came over Jesus, ³and his clothes became shining white—whiter than anyone in the world could wash them. ⁴Then the three disciples saw Elijah and Moses talking with Jesus. ⁵Peter spoke up and said to Jesus, “Teacher, how good it is that we are here! We will make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶He and the others were so frightened that he did not know what to say.

⁷Then a cloud appeared and covered them with its shadow, and a voice came from the cloud, “This is my own dear Son—listen to him!” ⁸They took a quick look around but did not see anyone else; only Jesus was with them.

⁹As they came down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has risen from death.”

¹⁰They obeyed his order, but among themselves they started discussing the matter, “What does this ‘rising from death’ mean?”

Other Readings: Genesis 22:1-18; Psalm 116:10, 15-19; Romans 8:31-34

LECTIO:

Jesus chooses just three of his disciples to share a very special event with him. It happens on top of a mountain - Jesus is transfigured, right there in front of them. There are four moments to look out for: a marked change in Jesus’ appearance; Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus; the cloud that came down and the voice.

Mark says that Jesus and his clothes became brilliantly white and shone. He notes how the cloud covered the group and the mountain. Then there was the voice. It came from the cloud and declared Jesus, is ‘my own dear Son’ and added a command ‘listen to him’.

Christian tradition tells us the cloud is the Holy Spirit. The voice, speaking of ‘my Son’, is the Father. This episode is a revelation of the Triune God: one God in three persons.

Here on the mountain Jesus is revealed as the Son of God. Peter voices the awe he and his friends feel in the presence of God. It is something Old Testament stories reveal again and again when people encounter God (see Exodus 3, Isaiah 6).

MEDITATIO:

- What is Jesus’ purpose in allowing the disciples to share this incredible experience? Why does Mark tell us about it?
- What do you think the disciples would have made of Jesus’ order not to discuss this event with anyone until after he had risen from the dead?
- In what ways can we ‘listen to him’ as God told the disciples to do?

ORATIO:

Today’s responsorial Psalm is a hymn of thanksgiving from a man saved by God from death. Join the Psalmist in giving thanks to God for saving you for eternal life.

Ask the Holy Spirit to overshadow you. To transform you so that people around you see something special in the way you live your life. Ask God to help you reflect more of Jesus to others.

Give thanks that we have the awesome privilege of saying ‘...I will walk in the presence of the Lord in the land of the living’ Psalm 116:9. Ask God’s help so that this becomes a daily reality for you.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Two famous texts accompany today’s reading. In Genesis 22:1-18, God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham acts in complete faith and obedience. God intervenes at the very last moment to save Isaac and provides another sacrifice.

The second, Romans 8:31-34, reminds us that God’s love for us is so great that he did not spare his own Son, Jesus. Through Christ’s sacrificial death we can now be declared ‘not guilty’. This is ‘good news’ indeed! What a song of thanksgiving we can sing!

GOD'S WISDOM

John 2:13-25

¹³ It was almost time for the Passover Festival, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ There in the Temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and pigeons, and also the moneychangers sitting at their tables. ¹⁵ So he made a whip from cords and drove all the animals out of the Temple, both the sheep and the cattle; he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and scattered their coins; ¹⁶ and he ordered those who sold the pigeons, "Take them out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that the scripture says, "My devotion to your house, O God, burns in me like a fire."

¹⁸ The Jewish authorities came back at him with a question, "What miracle can you perform to show us that you have the right to do this?"

¹⁹ Jesus answered, "Tear down this Temple, and in three days I will build it again."

²⁰ "Are you going to build it again in three days?" they asked him. "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple!"

²¹ But the temple Jesus was speaking about was his body. ²² So when he was raised from death, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and what Jesus had said.

²³ While Jesus was in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival, many believed in him as they saw the miracles he performed. ²⁴ But Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew them all. ²⁵ There was no need for anyone to tell him about them, because he himself knew what was in their hearts.

Other Readings: Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19:7-10; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

LECTIO:

The key question today is: 'Why should we believe in Jesus?' John the evangelist shows why a number of different people, including the disciples, believed or refused to believe in Jesus.

Jews from all over the world came to offer sacrifices in the Temple. They purchased animals for sacrifice in the Temple grounds. But Jesus saw past the convenience to the stall holder's money-grabbing attitude; they turned a holy place into a market place.

The disciples believed Jesus' actions in the Temple revealed a deep concern for God to be honoured. They interpreted Jesus' words in the light of Psalm 69:9 'My devotion to your Temple burns in me like a fire;' and they believed he came from God.

The Jewish authorities, however, saw Jesus' behaviour as a very serious offence. They demanded he show them a miracle to prove he came from God and with his authority. Jesus answered with a prophecy which no one understood at that time. The prophecy was that he would rise from the dead (verse 19).

This mysterious prophecy made a deep impression on his disciples. They remembered it and when Jesus' resurrection took place, they understood these words as the prophecy they were. The Jewish authorities on the other hand ridiculed his words, refusing to consider they had any other meaning than the obvious one.



MEDITATIO:

- What light does Mark's account (Mark 11:15-17) shed on our understanding of this event?
- The stallholders and the Temple authorities seem to have lost sight of, or certainly misunderstood, whom they were serving. How can we guard against this happening to us?
- Consider the attitude of the Jewish authorities compared to the disciples? What is their attitude to Jesus' words and actions? What can we learn from this?



ORATIO:

Jesus wanted to honour God in all things. Think about the week ahead and the TV programmes you watch or the jokes you tell. Do they honour God? Ask God to show you gently any area he might want to change over the coming weeks.



CONTEMPLATIO:

In the first reading, Exodus 20:1-17, God gives Moses the ten commandments, or Law, to the Israelites. Jesus' actions reflect his desire to honour God and respect the house of God. Our gospel reading shows that Jesus remained a mystery for many people and this is still true today.

In 1 Corinthians 1:22-23 Paul underlines this. The Jews want miracles, the Greeks want wisdom. The crucified Christ is offensive to the former and makes no sense to the latter. This reminds us that we must approach God with faith and a humble attitude for him to reveal himself to us.

GOD SENDS A SAVIOUR

John 3:14-21

¹⁴ As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its savior.

¹⁸ Those who believe in the Son are not judged; but those who do not believe have already been judged, because they have not believed in God's only Son. ¹⁹ This is how the judgment works: the light has come into the world, but people love the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds are evil. ²⁰ Those who do evil things hate the light and will not come to the light, because they do not want their evil deeds to be shown up. ²¹ But those who do what is true come to the light in order that the light may show that what they did was in obedience to God.

Other Readings: 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23; Psalm 137:1-6; Ephesians 2:4-10

LECTIO:

Today's passage is set in the context of an encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus, a prominent religious leader.

John has a different style to Mark and often provides more detail. John tells us about encounters Jesus had with various individuals. Through these exchanges we have insights into Jesus' personality and his mission.

Here Jesus draws a parallel between the reason he came to earth and an event from the time of Moses. As an expert in the scriptures, Nicodemus would have understood the story. You can read the full account in Numbers 21:4-9. The Israelites sinned and God sent poisonous snakes among them. They repented and called out for help. God told Moses to put a bronze snake on a pole. When they looked at this snake they were healed.

In the same way Jesus was lifted up and put on a pole, the cross. For the Israelites that had been bitten, the sight of the bronze snake may still have been frightening. Certainly for the Jews the sight of a man on a cross was appalling.

Now Jesus on the cross is a sign of salvation. Whoever believes in him can be healed of their sin and forgiven. Dying on the cross Jesus offered himself to the Father as the sin bearer. He and the Father want everyone to receive forgiveness for their sins and to be given the grace and joy of life that flows from God, the Holy Trinity. Jesus won this victory for us when he died on the cross and rose again. God sent his son Jesus because he loves us.

MEDITATIO:

- We suggest you read our text within the wider context of John 3. Is there any link between Jesus and Nicodemus' discussion about the need to be born again and the love of God for people? Do you feel like Nicodemus and need more explanation? Or have you already received spiritual new life in Jesus?

ORATIO:

John 3:16 is one of the most quoted verses in the Bible. Read this verse over several times. Ask God to deepen your understanding of what this promise means for you and people you know. Listen in case God wants to speak to you in a special way.

CONTEMPLATIO:

What insights do today's two readings, 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23 and Ephesians 2:4-10 add to the Gospel reading when we apply them to Jesus? In Chronicles we see that then, as today, some people will make fun of God's servants and ignore his words. The writer to the Ephesians makes it clear that while our salvation is based solely on God's grace – not our efforts or deeds – God has created us for a lifetime of good deeds which he has prepared for us in advance.

DRAWN TO JESUS

John 12:20-33

²⁰Some Greeks were among those who had gone to Jerusalem to worship during the festival. ²¹They went to Philip (he was from Bethsaida in Galilee) and said, "Sir, we want to see Jesus."

²²Philip went and told Andrew, and the two of them went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, "The hour has now come for the Son of Man to receive great glory. ²⁴I am telling you the truth: a grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces many grains. ²⁵Those who love their own life will lose it; those who hate their own life in this world will keep it for life eternal. ²⁶Whoever wants to serve me must follow me, so that my servant will be with me where I am. And my Father will honor anyone who serves me.

²⁷"Now my heart is troubled—and what shall I say? Shall I say, 'Father, do not let this hour come upon me'? But that is why I came—so that I might go through this hour of suffering. ²⁸Father, bring glory to your name!"

Then a voice spoke from heaven, "I have brought glory to it, and I will do so again."

²⁹The crowd standing there heard the voice, and some of them said it was thunder, while others said, "An angel spoke to him!"

³⁰But Jesus said to them, "It was not for my sake that this voice spoke, but for yours. ³¹Now is the time for this world to be judged; now the ruler of this world will be overthrown. ³²When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me." (³³In saying this he indicated the kind of death he was going to suffer.)

Other Readings: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-2, 10-13; Hebrews 5:7-9

LECTIO:

Only John tells us this story about the Greek visitors. In John's Gospel, Jesus entered Jerusalem accompanied by a huge crowd who honoured him as he entered the city.

Among the crowds were some Greeks and they asked Philip if he could arrange for them to meet Jesus. This encounter with these 'foreigners' stirs Jesus' compassion. He recalls once again that his mission is for people of all nations.

On the face of it Jesus was the celebrity of the day. But Jesus knew this hour of seeming triumph would soon crumble into an hour of bitter humiliation and unbearable pain. Within days these very same crowds would be calling for his crucifixion and even his closest friends would desert him. You can read John's full description in John 17-19.

Jesus drops a hint to his disciples about his inner turmoil, which they remember after his death. While Jesus is speaking about his 'hour of suffering' God intervenes with an audible voice from heaven, verse 28. It appears some people hear the voice and others think it is thunder, but Jesus makes it clear (verse 30) that God's words are for the peoples' benefit rather than to reassure him.

MEDITATIO:

- How does Jesus hint at his death on the cross in this reading? Jesus also mentions the great principle that guided him in life. What is this principle?
- Who is Jesus referring to when he speaks about the ruler of this world being overthrown (verse 31)?
- In what ways do you serve and follow Jesus?

ORATIO:

Jesus promises he will draw all men to himself when he is lifted up on the cross, verse 32. Have you experienced Jesus drawing you closer to him? Sometimes this sort of loving closeness can be scary. Ask Jesus to help you love and trust him as he so obviously loved and trusted his Father.

Use the words from today's Psalm, especially verse 10, every day this week as your own prayer, 'Create a pure heart in me, O God, and put a new and loyal spirit in me.'

CONTEMPLATIO:

Today's other readings throw more light on Jesus' mission to save humankind. In Jeremiah 31:31-34 God speaks of a new covenant with the Jewish people and, through them, all peoples so, 'all will know him' (verse 34).

In Hebrews 5 we hear of Jesus' willingness to suffer the humiliation of the cross because it is God's plan for him. Jesus accepted his suffering before it started. At the root of it all is God's passionate love for frail humanity including you and me. How does God's great love change your relationship with him?

TRUE SACRIFICE

Mark 14:1 – 15:47

Mark 14

¹It was now two days before the Festival of Passover and Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the teachers of the Law were looking for a way to arrest Jesus secretly and put him to death. ²“We must not do it during the festival,” they said, “or the people might riot.”

³Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon, a man who had suffered from a dreaded skin disease. While Jesus was eating, a woman came in with an alabaster jar full of a very expensive perfume made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on Jesus’ head. ⁴Some of the people there became angry and said to one another, “What was the use of wasting the perfume? ⁵It could have been sold for more than three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor!” And they criticized her harshly.

⁶But Jesus said, “Leave her alone! Why are you bothering her? She has done a fine and beautiful thing for me. ⁷You will always have poor people with you, and any time you want to, you can help them. But you will not always have me. ⁸She did what she could; she poured perfume on my body to prepare it ahead of time for burial. ⁹Now, I assure you that wherever the gospel is preached all over the world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”

¹⁰Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, went off to the chief priests in order to betray Jesus to them. ¹¹They were pleased to hear what he had to say, and promised to give him money. So Judas started looking for a good chance to hand Jesus over to them.

¹²On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the day the lambs for the Passover meal were killed, Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go and get the Passover meal ready for you?”

¹³Then Jesus sent two of them with these instructions: “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him ¹⁴to the house he enters, and say to the owner of the house: ‘The Teacher says, Where is the room where my disciples and I will eat the Passover meal?’ ¹⁵Then he will show you a large upstairs room, fixed up and furnished, where you will get everything ready for us.”

¹⁶The disciples left, went to the city, and found everything just as Jesus had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

¹⁷When it was evening, Jesus came with the twelve disciples. ¹⁸While they were at the table eating, Jesus said, “I tell you that one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.”

¹⁹The disciples were upset and began to ask him, one after the other, “Surely you don’t mean me, do you?”

²⁰Jesus answered, “It will be one of you twelve, one who dips his bread in the dish with me. ²¹The Son of Man will die as the Scriptures say he will; but how terrible for that man who will betray the Son of Man! It would have been better for that man if he had never been born!”

²²While they were eating, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. “Take it,” he said, “this is my body.”

²³Then he took a cup, gave thanks to God, and handed it to them; and they all drank from it. ²⁴Jesus said, “This is my blood which is poured out for many, my blood which seals God’s covenant. ²⁵I tell you, I will never again drink this wine until the day I drink the new wine in the Kingdom of God.”

²⁶Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.

²⁷Jesus said to them, “All of you will run away and leave me, for the scripture says, ‘God will kill the shepherd, and the sheep will all be scattered.’ ²⁸But after I am raised to life, I will go to Galilee ahead of you.”

²⁹Peter answered, “I will never leave you, even though all the rest do!”

³⁰Jesus said to Peter, “I tell you that before the rooster crows two times tonight, you will say three times that you do not know me.”

³¹Peter answered even more strongly, “I will never say that, even if I have to die with you!”

And all the other disciples said the same thing.

³²They came to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³He took Peter, James, and John with him. Distress and anguish came over him, ³⁴and he said to them, “The sorrow in my heart is so great that it almost crushes me. Stay here and keep watch.”

³⁵He went a little farther on, threw himself on the ground, and prayed that, if possible, he might not have to go through that time of suffering. ³⁶“Father,” he prayed, “my Father! All things are possible for you. Take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet not what I want, but what you want.”

³⁷Then he returned and found the three disciples asleep. He said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Weren’t you able to stay awake for even one hour?” ³⁸And he said to them, “Keep watch, and pray that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

³⁹He went away once more and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰Then he came back to the disciples and found them asleep; they could not keep their eyes open. And they did not know what to say to him.

⁴¹When he came back the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come! Look, the Son of Man is now being handed over to the power of sinners. ⁴²Get up, let us go. Look, here is the man who is betraying me!”

⁴³ Jesus was still speaking when Judas, one of the twelve disciples, arrived. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs and sent by the chief priests, the teachers of the Law, and the elders. ⁴⁴ The traitor had given the crowd a signal: “The man I kiss is the one you want. Arrest him and take him away under guard.”

⁴⁵ As soon as Judas arrived, he went up to Jesus and said, “Teacher!” and kissed him. ⁴⁶ So they arrested Jesus and held him tight. ⁴⁷ But one of those standing there drew his sword and struck at the High Priest’s slave, cutting off his ear. ⁴⁸ Then Jesus spoke up and said to them, “Did you have to come with swords and clubs to capture me, as though I were an outlaw? ⁴⁹ Day after day I was with you teaching in the Temple, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must come true.”

⁵⁰ Then all the disciples left him and ran away.

⁵¹ A certain young man, dressed only in a linen cloth, was following Jesus. They tried to arrest him, ⁵² but he ran away naked, leaving the cloth behind.

⁵³ Then Jesus was taken to the High Priest’s house, where all the chief priests, the elders, and the teachers of the Law were gathering. ⁵⁴ Peter followed from a distance and went into the courtyard of the High Priest’s house. There he sat down with the guards, keeping himself warm by the fire. ⁵⁵ The chief priests and the whole Council tried to find some evidence against Jesus in order to put him to death, but they could not find any. ⁵⁶ Many witnesses told lies against Jesus, but their stories did not agree.

⁵⁷ Then some men stood up and told this lie against Jesus: ⁵⁸ “We heard him say, ‘I will tear down this Temple which men have made, and after three days I will build one that is not made by men.’” ⁵⁹ Not even they, however, could make their stories agree.

⁶⁰ The High Priest stood up in front of them all and questioned Jesus, “Have you no answer to the accusation they bring against you?”

⁶¹ But Jesus kept quiet and would not say a word. Again the High Priest questioned him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed God?”

⁶² “I am,” answered Jesus, “and you will all see the Son of Man seated at the right side of the Almighty and coming with the clouds of heaven!”

⁶³ The High Priest tore his robes and said, “We don’t need any more witnesses! ⁶⁴ You heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?”

They all voted against him: he was guilty and should be put to death.

⁶⁵ Some of them began to spit on Jesus, and they blindfolded him and hit him. “Guess who hit you!” they said. And the guards took him and slapped him.

⁶⁶ Peter was still down in the courtyard when one of the High Priest’s servant women came by. ⁶⁷ When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked straight at him and said, “You, too, were with Jesus of Nazareth.”

⁶⁸ But he denied it. “I don’t know...I don’t understand what you are talking about,” he answered, and went out into the passageway. Just then a rooster crowed.

⁶⁹ The servant woman saw him there and began to repeat to the bystanders, “He is one of them!” ⁷⁰ But Peter denied it again.

A little while later the bystanders accused Peter again, “You can’t deny that you are one of them, because you, too, are from Galilee.”

⁷¹ Then Peter said, “I swear that I am telling the truth! May God punish me if I am not! I do not know the man you are talking about!”

⁷² Just then a rooster crowed a second time, and Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, “Before the rooster crows two times, you will say three times that you do not know me.” And he broke down and cried.

Mark 15

¹ Early in the morning the chief priests met hurriedly with the elders, the teachers of the Law, and the whole Council, and made their plans. They put Jesus in chains, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. ² Pilate questioned him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus answered, “So you say.”

³ The chief priests were accusing Jesus of many things, ⁴ so Pilate questioned him again, “Aren’t you going to answer? Listen to all their accusations!”

⁵ Again Jesus refused to say a word, and Pilate was amazed.

⁶ At every Passover Festival Pilate was in the habit of setting free any one prisoner the people asked for. ⁷ At that time a man named Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder in the riot. ⁸ When the crowd gathered and began to ask Pilate for the usual favor, ⁹ he asked them, “Do you want me to set free for you the king of the Jews?” ¹⁰ He knew very well that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him because they were jealous.

¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask, instead, that Pilate set Barabbas free for them. ¹² Pilate spoke again to the crowd, “What, then, do you want me to do with the one you call the king of the Jews?”

¹³ They shouted back, “Crucify him!”

¹⁴ “But what crime has he committed?” Pilate asked.

They shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

¹⁵ Pilate wanted to please the crowd, so he set Barabbas free for them. Then he had Jesus whipped and handed him over to be crucified.

¹⁶ The soldiers took Jesus inside to the courtyard of the governor’s palace and called together the rest of the company. ¹⁷ They put a purple robe on Jesus, made a crown out of thorny branches, and put it on his head. ¹⁸ Then they began to salute him: “Long live the King of the Jews!” ¹⁹ They beat him over the head with a stick, spat on him, fell on their knees, and bowed down to him. ²⁰ When they had finished making fun of him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes back on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

²¹ On the way they met a man named Simon, who was coming into the city from the country, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. (Simon was from Cyrene and was the father of Alexander and Rufus.) ²² They took Jesus to a place called Golgotha, which means "The Place of the Skull." ²³ There they tried to give him wine mixed with a drug called myrrh, but Jesus would not drink it. ²⁴ Then they crucified him and divided his clothes among themselves, throwing dice to see who would get which piece of clothing. ²⁵ It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The notice of the accusation against him said: "The King of the Jews." ²⁷ They also crucified two bandits with Jesus, one on his right and the other on his left.

²⁹ People passing by shook their heads and hurled insults at Jesus: "Aha! You were going to tear down the Temple and build it back up in three days!" ³⁰ Now come down from the cross and save yourself!"

³¹ In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the Law made fun of Jesus, saying to one another, "He saved others, but he cannot save himself." ³² Let us see the Messiah, the king of Israel, come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him!"

And the two who were crucified with Jesus insulted him also.

³³ At noon the whole country was covered with darkness, which lasted for three hours. ³⁴ At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud shout, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?"

³⁵ Some of the people there heard him and said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah!" ³⁶ One of them ran up with a sponge, soaked it in cheap wine, and put it on the end of a stick. Then he held it up to Jesus' lips and said, "Wait! Let us see if Elijah is coming to bring him down from the cross!"

³⁷ With a loud cry Jesus died.

³⁸ The curtain hanging in the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹ The army officer who was standing there in front of the cross saw how Jesus had died. "This man was really the Son of God!" he said.

⁴⁰ Some women were there, looking on from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of the younger James and of Joseph, and Salome. ⁴¹ They had followed Jesus while he was in Galilee and had helped him. Many other women who had come to Jerusalem with him were there also.

⁴²⁻⁴³ It was toward evening when Joseph of Arimathea arrived. He was a respected member of the Council, who was waiting for the coming of the Kingdom of God. It was Preparation day (that is, the day before the Sabbath), so Joseph went boldly into the presence of Pilate and asked him for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus was already dead. He called the army officer and asked him if Jesus had been dead a long time. ⁴⁵ After hearing the officer's report, Pilate told Joseph he could have the body. ⁴⁶ Joseph bought a linen sheet, took the body down, wrapped it in the sheet, and placed it in a tomb which had been dug out of solid rock. Then he rolled a large stone across the entrance to the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph were watching and saw where the body of Jesus was placed.



TRUE SACRIFICE

Mark 14:1 – 15:47

Other Readings: Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22:7-8, 16-19, 22-23; Philippians 2:6-11

1 LECTIO:

In our preparation for Holy Week today we read Mark's account from Holy Thursday right through to Jesus' crucifixion. This was probably the first gospel account written down. For Mark, the passion was all about what happened between Jesus and God whom he calls 'my Father'.

It's all very real. In 14:35-36 Jesus asks his Father to save him from the ordeal. In 15:34, Jesus dying on the cross complains to God for having abandoned him, using the words of Psalm 22:1.

Most of the characters appear petty, cruel, and irreverent. But Peter's experience is well reported: he is presented as generous and loving, but weak when the time comes for him to testify to his love of Jesus (14:66-72).

Mark uses very negative terms to sum up Judas' actions. Judas is offhand in the opening episode where Mary, Martha's sister (John 12:3), pours very expensive perfume on Jesus. Jesus sees her action not only as a generous act but also as a prophecy of his death (14:3-9).

The Jewish leaders remain detached and heartless throughout the process and maintain their doctrinal position despite the naked, dying man in front of them (14:43-65).

The Roman soldiers carry out the physical punishment of Jesus. During the flagellation session they make jokes and appear indifferent to human suffering. But their chief, the centurion, was the first to confess that Jesus was the Son of God (15:16-20, 39).

Indifference seems to be a key word. So many people did nothing; they just gawped at a dying man.

Jesus' female disciples show their concern practically. They are present at the crucifixion despite the obvious heartache this must have caused them. They are also present to witness to Jesus' burial place (15:40, 41, 47).

2 MEDITATIO:

- Choose three words to describe Jesus as he is depicted in the passion.
- Reflect on what it must have been like for Jesus to have experienced separation from his Father.
- Consider the amazing words of Philippians 2:6-11.

3 ORATIO:

The lady who poured the bottle of perfume over Jesus took a chance. She risked looking foolish in front of others, perhaps even Jesus himself. But she loved him and this was how she showed it. Perhaps you could create a 'bottle of perfume' yourself. Take a sheet of paper, write a love letter to Jesus and then offer it to him in prayer. Or offer him the words of a favourite Psalm or hymn that helps you express your worship.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

Through the first reading, Isaiah portrays Jesus as the faithful servant who puts up no resistance to God's will for him (Isaiah 50:4-7). The second reading also comments on Jesus who emptied himself to become man and undergo the humiliation of death (Philippians 2:6-11). To do this Jesus had to learn to know and trust his Father. What steps can you take towards loving obedience? How can you create some daily quality time with God?

SERVANT AND LORD

John 13:1-15

¹ It was now the day before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. He had always loved those in the world who were his own, and he loved them to the very end.

² Jesus and his disciples were at supper. The Devil had already put into the heart of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, the thought of betraying Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had given him complete power; he knew that he had come from God and was going to God. ⁴ So he rose from the table, took off his outer garment, and tied a towel round his waist. ⁵ Then he poured some water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel round his waist. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Are you going to wash my feet, Lord?"

⁷ Jesus answered him, "You do not understand now what I am doing, but you will understand later."

⁸ Peter declared, "Never at any time will you wash my feet!"

"If I do not wash your feet," Jesus answered, "you will no longer be my disciple."

⁹ Simon Peter answered, "Lord, do not wash only my feet, then! Wash my hands and head, too!"

¹⁰ Jesus said, "Those who have had a bath are completely clean and do not have to wash themselves, except for their feet. All of you are clean – all except one." ¹¹ (Jesus already knew who was going to betray him; that is why he said, "All of you, except one, are clean.")

¹² After Jesus had washed their feet, he put his outer garment back on and returned to his place at the table. "Do you understand what I have just done to you?" he asked. ¹³ "You call me Teacher and Lord, and it is right that you do so, because that is what I am. ¹⁴ I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet. You, then, should wash one another's feet.

¹⁵ I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you.

Other Readings: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Psalm 116: 12-13, 15-18; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

LECTIO:

The evangelist John is our guide to the first Eucharist meal and with him we have detail and stories we don't find in the other three Gospels at all.

John tells us how Jesus spent an intimate evening with his disciples before facing the testing events in the garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus opens his heart to his disciples. John is the only writer to lift the curtain on the private time they shared. He explains how Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and close friends.

To understand Jesus' thinking we need to consider two things. Washing someone's feet was a special courtesy given to a guest by the host. The shocking thing about Jesus' actions, however, was that this was usually done by house servants or slaves – not the master! This explains Peter's reaction when initially he refuses but Jesus insists Peter must allow him to perform this service.

Jesus needed to give his disciples a very important lesson - they must serve one another just as he serves them.

MEDITATIO:

- What did this gesture of washing the disciples' feet imply? Is Jesus' lesson about service still valid?
- Consider how can we apply this service of 'washing feet' in a practical way to the people around us today? Like Peter we also have to learn how to receive the gift of service.

ORATIO:

God has put us into communities with friends and neighbours. Ask him to show you someone you can offer a gift of service or act of kindness. It may even be for someone you don't know and may never see again. Listen to the Lord and let the Holy Spirit guide you. Ask God to show you some of the good deeds he has already prepared for you (Ephesians 2:10).

CONTEMPLATIO:

Exodus 12 is included today to help us understand the origin of the Passover evening. It takes us step-by-step through the directions the Israelites were to follow on that last night in Egypt if they wanted to leave their life of slavery for the Promised Land.

Jesus established what we call the Eucharist during his celebration of the Passover meal. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Paul includes the description from the other three Gospels about the same event. It seems Paul was repeating the text of some liturgies held in the Churches of his time.

A NEW WAY

John 18:1 – 19:42

John 18

¹ After Jesus had said this prayer, he left with his disciples and went across the brook called Kidron. There was a garden in that place, and Jesus and his disciples went in.

² Judas, the traitor, knew where it was, because many times Jesus had met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas went to the garden, taking with him a group of Roman soldiers, and some temple guards sent by the chief priests and the Pharisees; they were armed and carried lanterns and torches. ⁴ Jesus knew everything that was going to happen to him, so he stepped forward and asked them, “Who is it you are looking for?”

⁵ “Jesus of Nazareth,” they answered.

“I am he,” he said.

Judas, the traitor, was standing there with them. ⁶ When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they moved back and fell to the ground. ⁷ Again Jesus asked them, “Who is it you are looking for?”

“Jesus of Nazareth,” they said.

⁸ “I have already told you that I am he,” Jesus said. “If, then, you are looking for me, let these others go.” ⁹ (He said this so that what he had said might come true: “Father, I have not lost even one of those you gave me.”)

¹⁰ Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the High Priest’s slave, cutting off his right ear. The name of the slave was Malchus. ¹¹ Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword back in its place! Do you think that I will not drink the cup of suffering which my Father has given me?”

¹² Then the Roman soldiers with their commanding officer and the Jewish guards arrested Jesus, bound him, ¹³ and took him first to Annas. He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year. ¹⁴ It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jewish authorities that it was better that one man should die for all the people.

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. That other disciple was well known to the High Priest, so he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the High Priest’s house, ¹⁶ while Peter stayed outside by the gate. Then the other disciple went back out, spoke to the girl at the gate, and brought Peter inside. ¹⁷ The girl at the gate said to Peter, “Aren’t you also one of the disciples of that man?”

“No, I am not,” answered Peter.

¹⁸ It was cold, so the servants and guards had built a charcoal fire and were standing round it, warming themselves. So Peter went over and stood with them, warming himself.

¹⁹ The High Priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching.

²⁰ Jesus answered, “I have always spoken publicly to everyone; all my teaching was done in the synagogues and in the Temple, where all the people come together. I have never said anything in secret. ²¹ Why, then, do you question me? Question the people who heard me. Ask them what I told them – they know what I said.”

²² When Jesus said this, one of the guards there slapped him and said, “How dare you talk like that to the High Priest!”

²³ Jesus answered him, “If I have said anything wrong, tell everyone here what it was. But if I am right in what I have said, why do you hit me?”

²⁴ Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the High Priest.

²⁵ Peter was still standing there keeping himself warm. So the others said to him, “Aren’t you also one of the disciples of that man?”

But Peter denied it. “No, I am not,” he said.

²⁶ One of the High Priest’s slaves, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, spoke up. “Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?” he asked.

²⁷ Again Peter said “No” – and at once a cock crowed.

²⁸ Early in the morning Jesus was taken from Caiaphas’ house to the governor’s palace. The Jewish authorities did not go inside the palace, for they wanted to keep themselves ritually clean, in order to be able to eat the Passover meal. ²⁹ So Pilate went outside to them and asked, “What do you accuse this man of?”

³⁰ Their answer was, “We would not have brought him to you if he had not committed a crime.”

³¹ Pilate said to them, “Then you yourselves take him and try him according to your own law.”

They replied, “We are not allowed to put anyone to death.” ³² (This happened in order to make the words of Jesus come true, the words he used when he indicated the kind of death he would die.)

³³ Pilate went back into the palace and called Jesus. “Are you the King of the Jews?” he asked him.

³⁴ Jesus answered, “Does this question come from you or have others told you about me?”

³⁵ Pilate replied, “Do you think I am a Jew? It was your own people and the chief priests who handed you over to me. What have you done?”

³⁶ Jesus said, “My kingdom does not belong to this world; if my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish authorities. No, my kingdom does not belong here!”

³⁷ So Pilate asked him, “Are you a king, then?”

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this one purpose, to speak about the truth. Whoever belongs to the truth listens to me.”

³⁸ “And what is truth?” Pilate asked.

Then Pilate went back outside to the people and said to them, “I cannot find any reason to condemn him. ³⁹ But according to the custom you have, I always set free a prisoner for you during the Passover. Do you want me to set free for you the King of the Jews?”

⁴⁰They answered him with a shout, "No, not him! We want Barabbas!" (Barabbas was a bandit.)

John 19

¹Then Pilate took Jesus and had him whipped. ²The soldiers made a crown out of thorny branches and put it on his head; then they put a purple robe on him ³and came to him and said, "Long live the King of the Jews!" And they went up and slapped him.

⁴Pilate went out once more and said to the crowd, "Look, I will bring him out here to you to let you see that I cannot find any reason to condemn him." ⁵So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Look! Here is the man!"

⁶When the chief priests and the temple guards saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Pilate said to them, "You take him, then, and crucify him. I find no reason to condemn him."

⁷The crowd answered back, "We have a law that says he ought to die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."

⁸When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid. ⁹He went back into the palace and asked Jesus, "Where do you come from?"

But Jesus did not answer. ¹⁰Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Remember, I have the authority to set you free and also to have you crucified."

¹¹Jesus answered, "You have authority over me only because it was given to you by God. So the man who handed me over to you is guilty of a worse sin."

¹²When Pilate heard this, he tried to find a way to set Jesus free. But the crowd shouted back, "If you set him free, that means that you are not the Emperor's friend! Anyone who claims to be a king is a rebel against the Emperor!"

¹³When Pilate heard these words, he took Jesus outside and sat down on the judge's seat in the place called "The Stone Pavement". (In Hebrew the name is "Gabbatha".) ¹⁴It was then almost noon of the day before the Passover. Pilate said to the people, "Here is your king!"

¹⁵They shouted back, "Kill him! Kill him! Crucify him!"

Pilate asked them, "Do you want me to crucify your king?"

The chief priests answered, "The only king we have is the Emperor!"

¹⁶Then Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified.

So they took charge of Jesus. ¹⁷He went out, carrying his cross, and came to "The Place of the Skull", as it is called. (In Hebrew it is called "Golgotha".) ¹⁸There they crucified him; and they also crucified two other men, one on each side, with Jesus between them.

¹⁹Pilate wrote a notice and had it put on the cross. "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews", is what he wrote. ²⁰Many people read it, because the place where Jesus was crucified was not far from the city. The notice was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. ²¹The chief priests said to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews', but rather, 'This man said, I am the King of the Jews.'"

²²Pilate answered, "What I have written stays written."

²³After the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier. They also took the robe, which was made of one piece of woven cloth without any seams in it. ²⁴The soldiers said to one another, "Let's not tear it; let's throw dice to see who will get it." This happened in order to make the scripture come true:

"They divided my clothes among themselves and gambled for my robe."

And this is what the soldiers did.

²⁵Standing close to Jesus' cross were his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing there; so he said to his mother, "He is your son."

²⁷Then he said to the disciple, "She is your mother." From that time the disciple took her to live in his home.

²⁸Jesus knew that by now everything had been completed; and in order to make the scripture come true, he said, "I am thirsty."

²⁹A bowl was there, full of cheap wine; so a sponge was soaked in the wine, put on a stalk of hyssop, and lifted up to his lips. ³⁰Jesus drank the wine and said, "It is finished!"

Then he bowed his head and died.

³¹Then the Jewish authorities asked Pilate to allow them to break the legs of the men who had been crucified, and to take the bodies down from the crosses. They requested this because it was Friday, and they did not want the bodies to stay on the crosses on the Sabbath, since the coming Sabbath was especially holy. ³²So the soldiers went and broke the legs of the first man and then of the other man who had been crucified with Jesus.

³³But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead, so they did not break his legs. ³⁴One of the soldiers, however, plunged his spear into Jesus' side, and at once blood and water poured out. ³⁵(The one who saw this happen has spoken of it, so that you also may believe. What he said is true, and he knows that he speaks the truth.) ³⁶This was done to make the scripture come true: "Not one of his bones will be broken." ³⁷And there is another scripture that says, "People will look at him whom they pierced."

³⁸After this, Joseph, who was from the town of Arimathea, asked Pilate if he could take Jesus' body. (Joseph was a follower of Jesus, but in secret, because he was afraid of the Jewish authorities.) Pilate told him he could have the body, so Joseph went and took it away. ³⁹Nicodemus, who at first had gone to see Jesus at night, went with Joseph, taking with him about 30 kilogrammes of spices, a mixture of myrrh and aloes. ⁴⁰The two men took Jesus' body and wrapped it in linen with the spices according to the Jewish custom of preparing a body for burial.

⁴¹There was a garden in the place where Jesus had been put to death, and in it there was a new tomb where no one had ever been buried. ⁴²Since it was the day before the Sabbath and because the tomb was close by, they placed Jesus' body there.

A NEW WAY

John 18:1 – 19:42

Other Readings: Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 31:1, 5, 11-12, 14-16, 24; Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9

LECTIO:

John tells us about the passion in his own way. He offers us a different perspective to the other gospel writers.

He shows Jesus suffering punishment from the soldiers and Jews (18:13, 22; 19:1-3). But somehow Jesus is in charge of the situation. He is almost the judge of his judges.

John includes two people not specifically mentioned in the other passion narratives. John mentions Mary, Jesus' mother, and 'the disciple he loved', usually identified as John himself.

John also writes about seeing the soldier pierce Jesus' body with his spear to ensure he is dead (19:35). But he puts this in the third person, 'his testimony is true', so it is not so obvious that, according to tradition, he is writing about himself.

Then we meet Joseph of Arimathea, who asks Pilate for Jesus' body, and Nicodemus (19:38-40). The two men bury Jesus in a new tomb close to where he died. They were both important Jewish council members and also secret disciples of Jesus.

God the Father is not mentioned directly in this passion narrative. Yet we know he guided this holy story towards its tragic but glorious end. Or is it a beginning?

MEDITATIO:

- What is the role of Pilate in the passion narrative (19:1-6)? Why was the disciple who stood next to Mary, beneath the cross, not mentioned by name?
- What did Jesus mean when he said 'it is finished'? What did he achieve for us on the cross?
- Jesus fulfils over 18 major prophecies in the passion narratives. Why not consider a few of them? What does this tell us about God?

ORATIO:

When Jesus died on the cross the veil in the temple tore in two (Luke 24:45) symbolising the opening of the way into the presence of God. Hebrews 4:16 tells us we can now come boldly into God's presence. Take advantage of this incredible privilege right now. Thank Jesus for all he achieved for us at the cross.

CONTEMPLATIO:

As we reflect on Jesus' sacrificial death let us consider the message from today's other readings.

Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 paints an amazing portrait of the 'suffering servant'. Consider the ways Jesus fulfils this role and these wonderful promises. Use some of these verses to give thanks and ignite your prayers.

Hebrews (4:14-16 and 5:7-9) offer us great encouragement as well as a challenge. Firstly we can be encouraged that Jesus understands the temptations we face. He overcame every one. His grace and mercy are available to us 'just when we need it' (Hebrews 4:16). Jesus also provides us with a challenging example of complete obedience and humility even through suffering. Unlike priests in the Old Testament who repeatedly offered animal sacrifices, Jesus offers himself as the sacrifice once and for all time as the punishment for our sin.

SEE AND BELIEVE

John 20:1-9

¹ Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the entrance. ² She went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

³ Then Peter and the other disciple went to the tomb. ⁴ The two of them were running, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and saw the linen wrappings, but he did not go in. ⁶ Behind him came Simon Peter, and he went straight into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there ⁷ and the cloth which had been round Jesus' head. It was not lying with the linen wrappings but was rolled up by itself. ⁸ Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in; he saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand the scripture which said that he must rise from death.)

Other Readings: Acts 10:34, 37-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23; Colossians 3:1-4

LECTIO:

This is a compelling narrative – Jesus' body has disappeared. Mary Magdalene makes the discovery. You can read about her encounter with Jesus in the verses following today's reading.

So this passage focuses mainly on the two disciples: Peter and another whom tradition identifies as the apostle John.

The narrator tells us that John believes as soon as he sees the abandoned linen and the cloth which covered Jesus' head in the grave. What caused John to believe Jesus is alive? Some authors believe it was the folding of the grave clothes in a particular style – Jesus' style, one that John recognised. Whoever had done this was not dead but alive. Surely this must be Jesus. This was John's first encounter with the risen Christ.

Did John share his belief with Peter? We don't know. All we are told is that the disciples still did not understand the Scriptures which said he must rise from the dead. But this would soon change.

Mary Magdalene, Peter, John and the other disciples meet the risen Christ face to face in the verses following today's reading in John's account.

The eye witness accounts of these disciples are fundamental to the faith of Christians.

They knew Jesus died on the cross, they knew precisely where he was buried and they each met with the risen Christ. These encounters with the risen Jesus confirmed their faith in the truth of the Scriptures: because they knew what was said and prophesied was the true word of God.

MEDITATIO:

- Imagine what thoughts and emotions Mary Magdalene might have had when she discovered the empty tomb.
- Consider the full significance of Jesus being raised from the dead. Why is it essential to Christian faith?
- How would you explain the significance of the events of Easter to a friend?

ORATIO:

Over this next week pray these three verses from Psalm 118. Verse 24 'This is the day of the Lord's victory; let us be happy, let us celebrate! Verse 22 'The stone which the builders rejected as worthless turned out to be the most important of all.' Verse 1 'Give thanks to the Lord, because he is good, and his love is eternal.' Listen for the Lord to say something more to you and take the opportunity to give him thanks in your own words.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Today's first reading Acts 10: 34, 37-43 continues the theme of being witnesses. Peter now boldly proclaims that God raised Jesus from the dead. He preaches the gospel so that people can have their sins forgiven by believing in Jesus.

In Colossians 3:1-4 we read how in Christ we have experienced our own 'resurrection' into a new spiritual life. So we should live in the light of eternal values rather than temporary earthly concerns.

THE RISEN CHRIST

John 20:19-31

¹⁹It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. Then Jesus came and stood among them. "Peace be with you," he said. ²⁰After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." ²²Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

²⁴One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

Thomas said to them, "Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

²⁶A week later the disciples were together again indoors, and Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe!"

²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹Jesus said to him, "Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!"

³⁰In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. ³¹But these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life.

Other Readings: Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 118:2-4, 15-18, 22-24; 1 John 5:1-6

LECTIO:

John provides us with a description about the appearance of the risen Christ to his disciples. Many such accounts circulated among the Christians living in Jerusalem in the first few days after his death, about 30 AD. The Gospel writers then used these same stories for teaching.

John takes us to a Sunday meeting with the disciples when all of a sudden Jesus appears among them. The disciples are overjoyed. Jesus sends them to spread the gospel and tells them to receive the Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, one of the 'twelve', Thomas, was not there to share the experience. When the others tell him they have seen the living Lord Jesus, he doesn't believe them. Rather brashly he declares he will only believe if he can touch the nail scars in Jesus' hands and the scar in his side.

The community meet again the next Sunday and Thomas is with them. The Lord appears and greets them. Shockingly, he invites Thomas to probe his wounds by putting his fingers in the torn hands and his entire hand in the hole in Jesus' side.

Did Thomas do it? We don't know. It appears that seeing Jesus was enough. So he too declares Jesus to be his Lord and his God.

Thomas made a confession of faith because he saw the risen Christ. Jesus recognises all those who come after and still believe without seeing him physically.



MEDITATIO:

- What is the difference between the new found church community described above and the one to which you belong?
- Is the risen Jesus present in your Christian community? Can he be seen and touched, apart from Jesus as the consecrated bread and wine?
- If Jesus is alive after his death on the cross does it make a difference to you? Can you join Thomas and say, 'my Lord and my God'?
- The first words John records Jesus saying to the disciples when he appears among them are 'Peace be with you'. Consider the significance of this. Maybe these are words you need to hear from Jesus too.



ORATIO:

Using Psalm 118, choose some verses as a thanksgiving to your Father in heaven for Jesus' resurrection and the eternal hope this gives us. Also give thanks for Jesus' presence within our communities.



CONTEMPLATIO:

The two New Testament texts take us deeper into our contemplation. Acts 4:32-35 explains how the apostles witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In 1 John 5:1-6 John reflects on the outcomes of accepting the resurrection of Jesus. It has to lead to loving our neighbour and being prepared to share with those in need.

A MESSAGE FOR ALL NATIONS

Luke 24:35-48

³⁵The two then explained to them what had happened on the road, and how they had recognized the Lord when he broke the bread.

³⁶While the two were telling them this, suddenly the Lord himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

³⁷They were terrified, thinking that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸But he said to them, "Why are you alarmed? Why are these doubts coming up in your minds? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet, and see that it is I myself. Feel me, and you will know, for a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones, as you can see I have."

⁴⁰He said this and showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹They still could not believe, they were so full of joy and wonder; so he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴²They gave him a piece of cooked fish, ⁴³which he took and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴Then he said to them, "These are the very things I told you about while I was still with you: everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the writings of the prophets, and the Psalms had to come true."

⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶and said to them, "This is what is written: the Messiah must suffer and must rise from death three days later, ⁴⁷and in his name the message about repentance and the forgiveness of sins must be preached to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things.

Other Readings: Acts 3:13-15, 17-19; Psalm 4:1, 3, 6, 8; 1 John 2:1-5

LECTIO:

This reading takes up the story immediately after the two disciples who encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus had returned to Jerusalem. As the story spills from the excited lips of these two disciples, Jesus appears right in front of them!

They are terrified and don't know what to think. Is this really Jesus or is it a ghost? Jesus is patient with them. Firstly he tells them to look at his hands and feet, presumably to see the scars. Then he invites them to touch him so they know he's real, not a ghost.

They are full of joy and wonder. It appears they want to believe but it seems just too good to be true. They still have their doubts. So Jesus eats a piece of fish in front of them.

Then Jesus does what we would all like him to do for us. He takes them through the Scriptures and helps them to recognise verse by verse where it speaks of him and his life.



MEDITATIO:

- How does Jesus try to help his disciples accept that he really has risen from the dead? Jesus is very practical in the way he shows them he is real.
- What helps you trust Jesus? What builds your faith that he is alive and in our midst today? Ask your Christian friends what they think?
- Jesus describes the disciples as 'witnesses to these things' (verse 48). They were eye witnesses. In what way can we today also be considered witnesses?



ORATIO:

Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection so we can be forgiven and have eternal life is almost too good to be true. But it is true! Spend some time praising God for the wonder of God's salvation plan. Ask God to take away any doubts you may have.

Psalm 4 speaks of joy (verse 7), but joy slips away as the difficulties increase. Can you recall a time of spiritual joy or peace when life was tough? Pray for God to remind you and for others who may need this hope today.



CONTEMPLATIO:

In Acts 3:13-19 we hear how Peter explains to the Jews exactly what has happened and why Jesus died. He says repent and believe. John repeats this message in 1 John 2:1-5. It is only through Christ that we can have our sins forgiven. Jesus is shown as both our mediator and sin bearer. Isn't it wonderful to know that Jesus 'pleads with the Father on our behalf'!

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10:11-18

¹¹“I am the good shepherd, who is willing to die for the sheep. ¹²When the hired man, who is not a shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees a wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away; so the wolf snatches the sheep and scatters them. ¹³The hired man runs away because he is only a hired man and does not care about the sheep. ¹⁴⁻¹⁵I am the good shepherd. As the Father knows me and I know the Father, in the same way I know my sheep and they know me. And I am willing to die for them. ¹⁶There are other sheep which belong to me that are not in this sheep pen. I must bring them, too; they will listen to my voice, and they will become one flock with one shepherd.

¹⁷“The Father loves me because I am willing to give up my life, in order that I may receive it back again. ¹⁸No one takes my life away from me. I give it up of my own free will. I have the right to give it up, and I have the right to take it back. This is what my Father has commanded me to do.”

Other Readings: Acts 4:8-12; Psalm 118:1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 28-29; 1 John 3:1-2

LECTIO:

The imagery of the shepherd was a familiar one in Jewish culture. Political as well as religious leaders were often called ‘shepherds’ (see Ezekiel 34) and the metaphor is applied to the Lord himself in the well-loved words of Psalm 23.

The importance of being a leader for the sheep tended to be emphasised in Old Testament texts. John, by contrast, focuses on the deep relationship between the shepherd and his sheep. Jesus therefore transforms a well-known metaphor to highlight that he is more than a leader of his disciples. His sheep recognise his voice and follow him. The shepherd’s knowledge of his sheep is as named individuals and he knows their needs.

One important difference between Psalm 23 and John 10 is that in John’s gospel Jesus speaks of himself as the shepherd. In Psalm 23 the poet King David applies the metaphor prophetically to the Lord, ‘The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need.’

Jesus and the psalmist agree about the nature of the shepherd Lord. Jesus adds that he will give his own life on behalf of his sheep. He will satisfy all the spiritual needs of his faithful ones. All they need to do is hear his voice and follow wherever he leads.

Jesus, the good shepherd, includes the sheep that are not yet part of his flock. They too are included in the promise he is making.

In verse 18 Jesus makes it very clear that he chooses to give his life up. The Roman and Jewish authorities thought they were in control but it was Jesus who was in absolute control – even on the cross.

MEDITATIO:

- How does Jesus distinguish himself from the shepherds who are not ‘good’? How does the good shepherd provide security for his sheep? Who is Jesus thinking of when he speaks of the wolves from whom he will defend his sheep (see also Matthew 15: 16)? How would Jesus ultimately defend his sheep?

ORATIO:

The clatter of thoughts in our heads can drown out the quiet voice of God. Ask Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit to help you recognise his voice when he speaks to you. Thank him for the opportunity to soak ourselves in his words in the Bible so we can recognise the way he speaks. Thank him too for being the cornerstone of the church and of our lives as Christians (Psalm 118: 22).

CONTEMPLATIO:

Today’s other readings confirm the gospel reading. In his speech before the Jewish religious leaders, Peter insists that salvation only comes through Jesus (Acts 4:8-12).

In 1 John 3:1-2 we learn that God’s love for us is so great that he made us his children. We are moving towards the return of Jesus. Then we shall see the ‘good shepherd’ as he really is.

BEARING FRUIT

John 15:1-8

¹"I am the real vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He breaks off every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and he prunes every branch that does bear fruit, so that it will be clean and bear more fruit. ³You have been made clean already by the teaching I have given you. ⁴Remain united to me, and I will remain united to you. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it can do so only if it remains in the vine. In the same way you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵"I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me. ⁶Those who do not remain in me are thrown out like a branch and dry up; such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, where they are burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, then you will ask for anything you wish, and you shall have it. ⁸My Father's glory is shown by your bearing much fruit; and in this way you become my disciples.

Other Readings: Acts 9:26-31; Psalm 22:25-27, 29-31; 1 John 3:18-24



LECTIO:

This powerful speech in John's gospel paints a vivid picture of the relationship Jesus has with the Father and with his followers, people like you and me.

In last week's reading Jesus described himself as the 'Good Shepherd' (John 10). In today's passage Jesus speaks about himself as 'the real vine'. Vineyards would have been a common sight in Jesus' day, just as they are in some countries today.

Three 'characters' stand out: Jesus the vine, the Father or gardener, and the disciples or vine branches. The vine sustains the branches; one cannot bear fruit without the other.

The Father tends the vine. He prunes branches encouraging strong growth and a bumper crop of fruit. Branches that don't bear fruit are cut off and thrown away.

So how do the 'branches' remain united to the 'vine'? Jesus offers two ideas: 'remain in me, and I in them' (verse 5) and 'my words remain in you' (verse 7). We are to live like Jesus and accept the cleansing and 'pruning' the teaching of Jesus will accomplish in our lives (verse 3).

The purpose of our lives and the fruit we need to bear is that of giving glory and praise to the Father. Put simply we need to surrender ourselves completely to doing the will of our loving God.



MEDITATIO:

- Spend some time thinking about what it means for you to remain in Jesus. Consider too how his words can remain in you.
- How do you feel under God's correction or 'pruning'? Remember how much God loves you. Does it help to remind yourself that pruning will produce more fruit?



ORATIO:

To pray today take a sheet of paper and a few coloured pens or pencils. Sketch a simple vine bearing fruit – lines and blobs will do. Draw in some roots too. By each root write the name of something that feeds your relationship with God. Imagine you are one of the branches. Forgetting modesty, as this is between you and God alone, try to name some of the fruit pictured on your branch. This is harder to do, but ask the Holy Spirit to help you. On some of the other branches write the names of people who strengthen your relationship with Jesus. Consider this prayerfully. It may take a little time, but when you're ready offer it to God in thanksgiving and trust for future crops.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Acts 9:26-31 explains what being united to Jesus means: it means being united to his Church. Paul was transformed by his conversion. For him to bear the fruit God intended he needed to be reconciled with the Church in Jerusalem he'd previously persecuted.

1 John 3:18-24 is very practical: believe in Jesus and love your neighbour. Love for fellow believers should not be just words, rather 'it must be true love, which shows itself in action' (verse 18).

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

John 15:9-17

⁹I love you just as the Father loves me; remain in my love. ¹⁰If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

¹¹"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹²My commandment is this: love one another, just as I love you. ¹³The greatest love you can have for your friends is to give your life for them. ¹⁴And you are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants any longer, because servants do not know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because I have told you everything I heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me; I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures. And so the Father will give you whatever you ask of him in my name. ¹⁷This, then, is what I command you: love one another.

Other Readings: Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48; Psalm 98:1-4; 1 John 4:7-10

LECTIO:

Jesus speaks these words to his disciples just a few hours before he is crucified and before his disciples abandon him in terror. They also form part of the longer teaching Jesus gives his disciples in John 13-17.

Jesus wants his disciples to share his joy. He is a deeply joyful person and here he tells them the way to share this joy for themselves: remaining in his love and loving one another.

The love between Jesus and God the Father is mutual. Jesus makes it clear that the way he remains in his Father's love is through obedience. It's just the same for us. This on-going relationship between us and Jesus transforms us from being servants into Jesus' friends (verses 14-15).

Jesus gives the disciples one commandment 'love one another, just as I love you' (verse 12). They are to follow his example of love. To love each other in the same way he loves them. Without this they cannot share his joy, nor can we.

This deep and practical love in a community makes Jesus' love and life a reality to the giver and the receiver. By living constantly in his presence, Jesus is in our midst and through his Word we receive confidence about life with the Father. In short, this is the mystery of Christian living.

MEDITATIO:

- Why does Jesus insist on love as the critical condition? How do we remain in his love?
- Consider what it means to love fellow Christians the way Jesus loves us. What does it mean in practice to lay down your life for your friends? What can we learn from 1 Corinthians 13 about love?

ORATIO:

We do not just choose the Christian life ourselves; we are in fact 'chosen and appointed' (John 15:16). It is an overwhelming idea to think God knew and chose us for his own loving purpose. We can join this great song of praise in Psalm 98. Read these verses through several times and offer them as your own prayer of praise to God.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Acts 10:25-48 tells of the events after Peter sees a vision (Acts 10:1-24) and goes to visit a man called Cornelius. Peter receives the revelation that the Good News of the gospel is not just for a chosen few but for all mankind. Peter tells Cornelius' household that 'God treats everyone on the same basis' (verse 34).

1 John 4:7-10 reinforces this point. God demonstrated his love for us by sending Jesus into the world so our sins can be forgiven.

FATHER'S PROTECTION

John 17:11-19

¹¹ And now I am coming to you; I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world. Holy Father! Keep them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one just as you and I are one. ¹² While I was with them, I kept them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me. I protected them, and not one of them was lost, except the man who was bound to be lost—so that the scripture might come true.

¹³ And now I am coming to you, and I say these things in the world so that they might have my joy in their hearts in all its fullness. ¹⁴ I gave them your message, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but I do ask you to keep them safe from the Evil One. ¹⁶ Just as I do not belong to the world, they do not belong to the world. ¹⁷ Dedicate them to yourself by means of the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ I sent them into the world, just as you sent me into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I dedicate myself to you, in order that they, too, may be truly dedicated to you.

Other Readings: Acts 1:15-17, 20-26; Psalm 103:1-2, 11-12, 19-20; 1 John 4:11-16

LECTIO:

Today's passage is part of Jesus' profound prayer for his disciples prior to his passion. This concludes his final teaching to them on Maundy Thursday (John 13-17). Jesus knows his days on earth are numbered; he is going to leave the 'world' and asks his Father's protection for his disciples.

Jesus asks that the disciples would be protected from a world where people do not believe or care about Jesus and don't live by his standards. He asks for his Father's protection so they can live the life he taught them to live and they can grow in their faith.

Jesus asks for the disciples to be united in the same way he and his Father are united, living and working together in love.

Jesus asks the Father to 'consecrate' the disciples to him (verses 17-18), that is to set them apart from other people who are divided and from the culture, enabling them to live in unity in the same way that the Father and the Son live.

The Father does this through his Word (Jesus) which is true, or rather the truth itself (verse 17). Jesus dedicates himself in complete surrender to his Father so his disciples can be truly dedicated to the Father too.

MEDITATIO:

- How does Jesus' prayer, which goes on to include us, strengthen your daily walk with God (John 17:20-21)? Which parts speak to you most directly? Which parts do you find difficult to understand?
- Jesus submitted his life completely to God. To what extent do our lives belong to God?
- Jesus prayed that his disciples might be one. What might this mean for you in the Christian community you are part of? Consider whether you have opportunities to build bridges with those of different Christian traditions.

ORATIO:

The real reason for our Easter joy is we are set free from sin and death. God flung our sins 'as far as the east is from the west' (Psalm 103:12) when Jesus died on the cross. He did it because his love is higher than Mount Everest (verse 11). Does this make you want to praise him? Use Psalm 103 in its entirety or a favourite hymn or song of praise to express your worship to our God of everlasting mercy and kindness.

CONTEMPLATIO:

In Acts 1:15-17, 20-26 we read about who was chosen to replace Judas, whom Jesus mentions in his prayer (John 17:12), so there is another 'witness to the resurrection'.

John continues his great theme of love in 1 John reminding us once again that we must love one another just as God loves us. He expresses the truth of Matthew 18:20 'For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there with them.' In other words God is present where people live in Christian love.

SUPREME LORD

Mark 16:14-20

¹⁴Last of all, Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples as they were eating. He scolded them, because they did not have faith and because they were too stubborn to believe those who had seen him alive. ¹⁵He said to them, "Go throughout the whole world and preach the gospel to the whole human race. ¹⁶Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. ¹⁷Believers will be given the power to perform miracles: they will drive out demons in my name; they will speak in strange tongues; ¹⁸if they pick up snakes or drink any poison, they will not be harmed; they will place their hands on sick people, who will get well."

¹⁹After the Lord Jesus had talked with them, he was taken up to heaven and sat at the right side of God. ²⁰The disciples went and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and proved that their preaching was true by the miracles that were performed.

Other Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47:1-2, 5-8; Ephesians 4:1-13

LECTIO:

We can consider today's text in two parts. In verses 14-18 Jesus gives his disciples their final instructions before returning to heaven.

Each of the four gospel writers end their gospels with a strong call to action. Jesus' mission on earth isn't over, far from it – in fact it's about to go global. This is the beginning of an exciting new chapter of God's plan of salvation. Jesus' commission to the disciples is nothing less than 'Go throughout the whole world and preach the gospel to the whole human race' (verse 15).

Peoples' response to the gospel has eternal consequences. Those who believe the message will be saved, those who don't will be condemned. Jesus' proclamation of the gospel came not only with words but also with signs – healing the sick, demonic deliverance and miracles. Jesus clearly expects believers to minister the gospel in the same way. Earlier in his gospel Mark reported how the twelve disciples went out preaching, healing the sick and casting out demons (Mark 6:7-13). Luke recalls an occasion with a larger group in Luke 10:1-12, 17-20. The disciples come back ecstatic 'even the demons obeyed us' (v17). Jesus reminds them to keep their focus on what is really important 'rather be glad because your names are written in heaven' (v20). The apostle Paul tells the Corinthians '...my teaching and message were not delivered with skilful words of human wisdom, but with convincing proof of the power of God's Spirit' (1 Cor 2:4). We can only be effective witnesses to the gospel if we let God's Holy Spirit empower us (Acts 1:8).

The second part of the text, verses 19-20, speaks about Jesus' ascension into heaven. Mark only gives us the briefest of details but nonetheless they are highly significant. He tells us that Jesus is seated 'at the right side of God' in heaven. This is the place of highest honour and supreme power. Having completed his mission on earth, Jesus returns to his rightful place with God the Father in heaven.

Paul sums up this position well in Ephesians 1:20-22:

'...when he raised Christ from death and seated him at his right side in the heavenly world. Christ rules there above all heavenly rulers, authorities, powers, and lords; he has a title superior to all titles of authority in this world and in the next. God put all things under Christ's feet and gave him to the church as supreme Lord over all things.'

MEDITATIO:

- Meditate on Jesus as supreme Lord seated at the right hand of God in heaven.
- How do you respond to Jesus' call to share the gospel with others? What has been your experience of sharing your faith?
- Consider your priorities. Is your life focused on God's kingdom or on earthly concerns?

ORATIO:

Take time to give Jesus the worship he deserves as supreme Lord. Let this build your faith as you pray. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the power to be a witness to the gospel.

CONTEMPLATIO:

In the light of today's reading contemplate what it means to 'live a life worthy of the calling you have received' (NIV) as Paul exhorts the Ephesians (4:1).

THE HELPER

John 15:26-27; John 16:12-15

²⁶“The Helper will come—the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God and who comes from the Father. I will send him to you from the Father, and he will speak about me. ²⁷ And you, too, will speak about me, because you have been with me from the very beginning.

¹²“I have much more to tell you, but now it would be too much for you to bear. ¹³ When, however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own authority, but he will speak of what he hears and will tell you of things to come. ¹⁴ He will give me glory, because he will take what I say and tell it to you. ¹⁵ All that my Father has is mine; that is why I said that the Spirit will take what I give him and tell it to you.

Other Readings: Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-31, 34; Galatians 5:16-25



LECTIO:

The two passages above are contained within Jesus' final words to his disciples on that last night in Jerusalem (John 13-17). Today the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is in the spotlight (John 15, 16).

Jesus is preparing his disciples for his imminent departure, but first he wants to entrust them to the Holy Spirit. Why was this so important? Jesus knows that the Holy Spirit's main role is to reveal new aspects of God and his Word (15:26). In doing this he will help the disciples understand Jesus better.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist together as the Trinity in perfect love and understanding. So there could be none better than the Holy Spirit to reveal and teach whatever the Father and Son choose to say (16:13).

The Holy Spirit remains our personal guide on how to live and share Jesus' message of love (15:27). We know from this and other passages that the Holy Spirit does this in four ways: he inspired the authors of the Holy Scriptures, people like David, Isaiah, John, Luke and Paul; he reminds us of Jesus' words; he helps us understand the Scriptures; and finally he fans the fire of God's love in our lives. It is a mutual love which strengthens Christians on their life journey.

Jesus does not promise his followers an easy life; he does promise God's help in our trials and our endeavours to be his witnesses to all men (15:26, 16:12).

MEDITATIO:

- The promise of help from the Holy Spirit comes with a purpose, to enable us to speak about Jesus and live in truth. In what ways have you experienced the Holy Spirit helping and teaching you?
- What does Jesus mean by the term 'truth'? Does he mean only words and ideas?

ORATIO:

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal more of the Father and Son to you. Ask for his help so that you can play your part in continuing Jesus' work on earth and demonstrate his fruit in your life (Galatians 5:22-23).

Prayerfully read Psalm 104 throughout the week. Let God direct you to a few verses at a time. Use these verses to praise the greatness of the God of creation.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Today we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost and the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2:1-11 we read of the glorious outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples. It wasn't the last and today people continue to invite the Holy Spirit to fill, guide, teach and encourage them.

Paul puts a practical face on the work of the Holy Spirit when he writes to the Galatians (5:16-25). The fruits of the spirit's work should be as evident in our lives today as in the lives of the first Christians.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶The eleven disciples went to the hill in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go.

¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him, even though some of them doubted.

¹⁸Jesus drew near and said to them, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age."

Other Readings: Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40; Psalm 33:4-6, 9, 18-20, 22; Romans 8:14-17

LECTIO:

Matthew's gospel concludes with a final face-to-face meeting between Jesus and his disciples. Once again the disciples could see Jesus, but not everyone could believe their eyes. From now on Jesus will continue to be with his disciples but they wouldn't be able to see him anymore. In today's reading Jesus gives his disciples a very important commission that has come to be known as 'The Great Commission'. They are to go to people of all nations, tell them the gospel and make them Jesus' disciples and part of the Christian community by baptising them.

Jesus gives them specific instructions. Firstly they are to baptise people in the name of the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus teaches his followers to see God as three persons in one and to love and serve one another in the same way the members of the Trinity do. Secondly they are to teach the new disciples to obey all the commandments Jesus gives them.

Finally, Jesus leaves the disciples with a tremendous promise which remains as true for us today as it did for the very first disciples, 'I will be with you always' (verse 20).

The invisible presence of the risen Lord in our midst is the mystery of the Christian community. It is Jesus, living in his disciples, who attracts new believers and helps them grow. His number one rule remains love one another (John 15:12).

MEDITATIO:

- Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (verse 18). Ultimately God is therefore in control of everything. How might this influence our thinking and prayers?
- Consider some of Jesus' teaching and commandments. To what extent are you obeying them? James warns us not to be deceived 'by just listening to his word; instead, put it into practice' (James 1:22).
- Jesus promises us he will be always with us. What does this mean to you personally?

ORATIO:

Psalm 33 speaks of creation, God's everlasting promises and his protection. God's promises are worth remembering because they give us strength and hope. As you pray have your Bible open, take a pencil and write a 'P' in the margin beside Matthew 28:20 and Psalm 33:20. Thank God for his promises to you, the Bible is full of them. During the day try and bring those verses back to mind – as you learn them and apply them they will become a reality in your life. You'll find many more promises so keep your pencil handy.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Consider the love, unity and service that exists between the members of the Godhead. What can we learn from this example and apply to our relationships with others?

Read through Paul's words in Romans 8:14-17 and let these amazing truths minister to your spirit.

OUR PASSOVER LAMB

Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

²⁰On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the day the lambs for the Passover meal were killed, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and get the Passover meal ready for you?"

¹³Then Jesus sent two of them with these instructions: "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him ¹⁴to the house he enters, and say to the owner of the house: 'The Teacher says, Where is the room where my disciples and I will eat the Passover meal?' ¹⁵Then he will show you a large upstairs room, prepared and furnished, where you will get everything ready for us."

¹⁶The disciples left, went to the city, and found everything just as Jesus had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

²²While they were eating, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. "Take it," he said, "this is my body."

²³Then he took a cup, gave thanks to God, and handed it to them; and they all drank from it. ²⁴Jesus said, "This is my blood which is poured out for many, my blood which seals God's covenant. ²⁵I tell you, I will never again drink this wine until the day I drink the new wine in the Kingdom of God."

²⁶Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.

Other Readings: Exodus 24:3-8, Psalm 116:12-13, 15-18, Hebrews 9:11-15

LECTIO:

Today we reflect on the one most profound celebrations of the church – the Eucharist. We begin our reading with Jesus and the disciples making preparation to share the Passover meal together. This was, and still is, one of the most significant dates in the Jewish calendar, the annual celebration marking God's protection and deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt.

The disciples would have shared this meal many times with their own families but they would certainly never forget this particular Passover meal as Jesus gives it a whole new meaning.

The provision of the room where they celebrated the Passover seems remarkable to us, although we are not told what the disciples thought about this, only that they followed Jesus' instructions and found things just as he told them.

The real surprise comes during the meal itself. When Jesus breaks the bread he tells them 'this is my body'. When he hands them the cup he tells them 'this is my blood... poured out for many...which seals God's covenant'.

The gospel text begins in verse 12 with the reference to the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. The covenant that God made with Moses and the people of Israel at Mount Sinai was sealed with the blood of animals, as we can read in today's Old Testament reading (Exodus 24:3-8).

Jesus himself now becomes the Passover lamb (John 1:29) and God seals a new covenant through the blood of his Son on the cross (1 Corinthians 11:25).

At this Passover meal Jesus institutes the Eucharist by the sharing of bread and wine and Christians continue to remember his sacrifice and celebrate his new covenant in this way ever since.

MEDITATIO:

- Enrich your appreciation of the Eucharist by reflecting on the three other accounts we have of the institution of the Lord's Supper in Matthew 26:17-25, Luke 22:7-23 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-34.
- Consider the significance of Jesus using bread and wine to signify his presence.
- Consider the importance of being in communion, both with God and your brothers and sisters rather than just receiving communion.

ORATIO:

Come before God with humility and thankfulness. Thank him for sending Jesus so that you can have your sins forgiven and come into communion with God and his people. Ask him to deepen your appreciation of all Jesus accomplished by his death and resurrection.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Read Hebrews 9:11-15 and contemplate Jesus as our 'perfect sacrifice' setting us free from the wrong things we have done 'so that we may serve the living God'.

GOD'S KINGDOM IN US

Mark 4:26-34

²⁶Jesus went on to say, "The Kingdom of God is like this. A man scatters seed in his field. ²⁷He sleeps at night, is up and about during the day, and all the while the seeds are sprouting and growing. Yet he does not know how it happens. ²⁸The soil itself makes the plants grow and bear fruit; first the tender stalk appears, then the head, and finally the head full of grain. ²⁹When the grain is ripe, the man starts cutting it with his sickle, because harvest time has come.

³⁰"What shall we say the Kingdom of God is like?" asked Jesus. "What parable shall we use to explain it? ³¹It is like this. A man takes a mustard seed, the smallest seed in the world, and plants it in the ground. ³²After a while it grows up and becomes the biggest of all plants. It puts out such large branches that the birds come and make their nests in its shade."

³³Jesus preached his message to the people, using many other parables like these; he told them as much as they could understand. ³⁴He would not speak to them without using parables, but when he was alone with his disciples, he would explain everything to them.

Other Readings: Ezekiel 17:22-24; Psalm 92:1-2, 12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

LECTIO:

The 'Kingdom of God' or, as Matthew calls it 'the Kingdom of Heaven', represents the new spiritual life Jesus offers anyone willing to hear and accept his teaching. Jesus likes to use parables to explain this lifestyle to the general public, but for his committed followers he explains his teaching in more detail.

Parables are short stories designed to create a picture in the mind of the hearer. Jesus just uses simple everyday situations and events to show what his kingdom will be like and the lifestyle people who live in it should have.

The first parable demonstrates how God works, often beneath the surface, to bring about new spiritual life and growth. It starts with the scattering of seeds which represent the preaching of the Word of God. The Kingdom of God starts in the life of the individual, or in society, when God's word is proclaimed; but its growth depends on God's power.

The parable of the mustard seed is simplicity itself - a tiny seed grows into a huge tree, eventually. Here the contrast in size is significant - the tiny, seemingly insignificant seed becomes a thing of stature and glory. The mustard seed can be interpreted as representing both the Church and the spiritual life of individual Christians like you and me.

MEDITATIO:

- Do you remember who sowed the Word of God into your life which started to change you? Has your spiritual life grown or deepened since your first beginnings? Can you describe the changes? How can you help this growth?
- Have you sowed the Word of God into the lives of others? This could be through explaining your faith to someone who doesn't believe in Jesus. Or it could be by helping a fellow Christian with a verse or two from the Bible. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how you can play your part in sowing the seed.

ORATIO:

In Psalm 92 the psalmist develops the idea of seeds which become plants and trees. Each day this week join the psalmist to proclaim God's love in the morning and his truth at night.

Ask God to show you how you can become more deeply rooted in him so your Christian life becomes strong and fruitful as verses 12-15 encourage us to be.

CONTEMPLATIO:

In Ezekiel 17:22-24 the people of God and their spiritual life are compared to a tree planted upon a high mountain. The one who plants, sustains and develops the plant is God. See the parallels with today's gospel reading.

In 2 Corinthians 5:6-10 we are reminded that 'our life is a matter of faith, not of sight' (verse 7) and more than anything our desire should be to please God.

MIRACLE ON THE LAKE

Mark 4:35-41

³⁵On the evening of that same day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." ³⁶So they left the crowd; the disciples got into the boat in which Jesus was already sitting, and they took him with them. Other boats were there too. ³⁷Suddenly a strong wind blew up, and the waves began to spill over into the boat, so that it was about to fill with water. ³⁸Jesus was in the back of the boat, sleeping with his head on a pillow. The disciples woke him up and said, "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to die?"

³⁹Jesus stood up and commanded the wind, "Be quiet!" and he said to the waves, "Be still!" The wind died down, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Why are you frightened? Do you still have no faith?"

⁴¹But they were terribly afraid and began to say to one another, "Who is this man? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Other Readings: Job 38:1, 8-11; Psalm 107:23-26, 28-31; 2 Corinthians 5:14-17

LECTIO:

Mark uses this incident to throw a vivid light on Jesus, his personality and identity. With just a couple of words Jesus commands the elements, something normally done by God alone.

The same situation is a test for the disciples. Jesus and the disciples are travelling by boat across Lake Galilee. Suddenly a storm hits and the waves threaten to sink the boat. Jesus we discover is sleeping soundly at the back of the boat. The disciples wake him urgently and accuse him of not caring that they are all about to die.

Jesus remains calm and in complete control. He commands the wind and the waves to be still. The storm is over. Jesus then chides his disciples for their lack of faith and for being afraid.

The disciples appear to have been badly shaken by their experience and Jesus' intervention. They are left still feeling afraid and asking themselves just who Jesus is that 'Even the wind and waves obey him!'

MEDITATIO:

- What do you think the disciples' words and actions reveal of their thoughts about Jesus?
- What does this passage reveal to us about Jesus' true identity? What lessons can we draw from it?
- Compare the disciples' reaction to this dangerous situation to Jesus' reaction. Jesus doesn't want us to be ruled by fear but by peace and faith in him. What can we do when we find ourselves in frightening situations? Sometimes we turn to Jesus as a last resort when of course he should be our very first thought.

ORATIO:

Psalm 107:23-31 tells us something about travelling by boat well before Jesus' time. The sailors were totally dependent on God and in many ways the events mimic the storms and calm in our lives. As you pray through this Psalm ask God to remind you of some of the 'storms' you have weathered with his help. Why not jot them down in your notebook. Next time a storm comes along, look at your notes and this Psalm to remind yourself that God will help you through.

CONTEMPLATIO:

In 2 Corinthians 5:14-17 Paul reminds us that when we believe in Jesus we start a brand new spiritual life. Love for Jesus should now be our driving force. We should no longer be living our lives to please ourselves, but like the wind and waves, be ready to obey Jesus.

FAITH REWARDED

Mark 5:21-43

²¹ Jesus went back across to the other side of the lake. There at the lakeside a large crowd gathered around him. ²² Jairus, an official of the local synagogue, arrived, and when he saw Jesus, he threw himself down at his feet ²³ and begged him earnestly, "My little daughter is very sick. Please come and place your hands on her, so that she will get well and live!"

²⁴ Then Jesus started off with him. So many people were going along with Jesus that they were crowding him from every side.

²⁵ There was a woman who had suffered terribly from severe bleeding for twelve years, ²⁶ even though she had been treated by many doctors. She had spent all her money, but instead of getting better she got worse all the time. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus, so she came in the crowd behind him, ²⁸ saying to herself, "If I just touch his clothes, I will get well."

²⁹ She touched his cloak, and her bleeding stopped at once; and she had the feeling inside herself that she was healed of her trouble. ³⁰ At once Jesus knew that power had gone out of him, so he turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

³¹ His disciples answered, "You see how the people are crowding you; why do you ask who touched you?"

³² But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. ³³ The woman realized what had happened to her, so she came, trembling with fear, knelt at his feet, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ Jesus said to her, "My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your trouble."

³⁵ While Jesus was saying this, some messengers came from Jairus' house and told him, "Your daughter has died. Why bother the Teacher any longer?"

³⁶ Jesus paid no attention to what they said, but told him, "Don't be afraid, only believe." ³⁷ Then he did not let anyone else go on with him except Peter and James and his brother John. ³⁸ They arrived at Jairus' house, where Jesus saw the confusion and heard all the loud crying and wailing. ³⁹ He went in and said to them, "Why all this confusion? Why are you crying? The child is not dead—she is only sleeping!"

⁴⁰ They started making fun of him, so he put them all out, took the child's father and mother and his three disciples, and went into the room where the child was lying. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha, koum," which means, "Little girl, I tell you to get up!"

⁴² She got up at once and started walking around. (She was twelve years old.) When this happened, they were completely amazed. ⁴³ But Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell anyone, and he said, "Give her something to eat."

Other Readings: Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15; 2:23-24; Psalm 30:1, 3-5, 10-12; 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15

LECTIO:

Mark neatly entwines two stories about healing. The main story is about Jairus and his daughter, but nestling inside we find another healing.

The two stories share a number of similarities; Jairus and the woman show great faith in Jesus and they are both desperate. Jesus responds with compassion. Both the woman and Jairus' daughter are healed.

Jairus was an official of the local synagogue, yet in front of everyone he throws himself at Jesus' feet to beg him to heal his daughter. This is the act of a desperate father who out of love for his daughter is prepared to throw all pride and caution to the wind and cast himself on Jesus' mercy. Jairus' faith is later tested because while they are going to his daughter news reaches him that she has died. Others urge him to give up but Jesus encourages him 'Don't be afraid, only believe'.

The woman has suffered from severe bleeding for twelve years. She has seen many doctors but got worse rather than better. Jesus is her last hope. But surely he won't lay his hands on her because she is 'unclean' according to the religious law. So if she can just touch him, when no one else notices, she can be healed.

MEDITATIO:

- How did Jairus and the woman show their faith in Jesus?
- Jairus turned to Jesus on behalf of his daughter. The woman expressed her faith through her actions rather than her words. Consider what lessons we can learn about faith from these two stories.
- Jairus was tempted by others to give up. What helped him to continue putting his faith in Jesus? What challenging issues have tried your faith and do you still trust Jesus?

ORATIO:

Use the words of Psalm 30 to thank God for the healing he has brought to your life – spiritual, emotional and physical. Consider whether, like Jairus, you can seek help from Jesus on behalf of someone you care for.

CONTEMPLATIO:

In the Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15, 2:23-24 we read that God made us in his image and is concerned about our health. Perhaps this explains why Jesus healed so many people. In 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15 Paul reflects upon the loving acts of Jesus. He urges Christians to be as generous as Jesus in sharing what they have with others.

GOOD QUESTION, WRONG ANSWER

Mark 6:1-6

¹Jesus left that place and went back to his hometown, followed by his disciples. ²On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue. Many people were there; and when they heard him, they were all amazed. "Where did he get all this?" they asked. "What wisdom is this that has been given him? How does he perform miracles?" ³Isn't he the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon? Aren't his sisters living here?" And so they rejected him.

⁴Jesus said to them, "Prophets are respected everywhere except in their own hometown and by their relatives and their family."

⁵He was not able to perform any miracles there, except that he placed his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶He was greatly surprised, because the people did not have faith.

Other Readings: Ezekiel 2:2-5; Psalm 123; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

LECTIO:

Mark tells us about this disappointment for Jesus. The people he knew well, those of his hometown, refused to believe in him because they knew him as a local lad.

They acknowledged that he spoke with wisdom and performed miracles. In fact they were amazed when they heard him. But they couldn't understand how someone from an ordinary local family, who had grown up among them, could do and say these things.

They ask three important questions: "Where did he get all this?", "What wisdom is this that has been given to him?" and "How does he perform miracles?" Their actions in rejecting Jesus reveal they did not find the right answers. Their minds were made up.

In that atmosphere of such unbelief and closed hearts and minds Jesus was not able to perform any miracles, although he still healed a few sick people.

Jesus performed miracles as a sign of God's power and presence. He relied completely on what God told him to do. It was not magic but God's power. What he asked of those present was a degree of 'faith'. You could call it openness towards God – a willingness to receive his presence in their life.

MEDITATIO:

- Consider how Jesus might have felt to have been rejected by people, friends and family from his hometown who he would have known since childhood. Have you experienced rejection from people close to you because of your faith?
- Can you remember an occasion when you rejected Jesus or were not prepared to do what he asked? Did you change your mind? If so, why? How do you feel about this now?
- What do you think are the 'correct' answers to the three questions the people asked? What do they reveal about Jesus? How does this build our faith that things can change when Jesus intervenes?
- How can we ensure that we keep our hearts and minds open?

ORATIO:

Psalm 123 describes servants fixing their eyes on their master to be ready to respond to an order. It is an attentive waiting. This week make a deliberate effort to set aside your own concerns and requests. Simply spend time with the Lord. Fix your eyes on him and give him your undivided time and attention. Listen to what he wants to say to you.

CONTEMPLATIO:

In Ezekiel 2:2-5 God warns his prophet that the people he is being sent to are stubborn and do not respect God. This was also true of the people in Jesus' hometown and is sadly true of most people today.

In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 Paul speaks of other challenges a person sent by God on a mission may face. Being a missionary like Jesus is never without difficulties.

INTO ACTION

Mark 6:7-13

⁷He called the twelve disciples together and sent them out two by two. He gave them authority over the evil spirits ⁸and ordered them, "Don't take anything with you on the trip except a walking stick—no bread, no beggar's bag, no money in your pockets. ⁹Wear sandals, but don't carry an extra shirt." ¹⁰He also told them, "Wherever you are welcomed, stay in the same house until you leave that place. ¹¹If you come to a town where people do not welcome you or will not listen to you, leave it and shake the dust off your feet. That will be a warning to them!"

¹²So they went out and preached that people should turn away from their sins. ¹³They drove out many demons, and rubbed olive oil on many sick people and healed them.

Other Readings: Amos 7:12-15; Psalm 85:8-13; Ephesians 1:3-14

LECTIO:

In just a few words Mark tells us how Jesus moves his disciples out of the 'class room' into action on their first Christian missionary trip. He equips them with clear instructions and spiritual authority but makes it plain that God, his Father, is to be their only provider.

The directions Jesus gave them were straightforward, but they demanded faith. Reading through the passage we see: 1) Jesus decides to send them out, it's not their idea. In addition to the 'when', Jesus also decides the 'where' and 'how' of the trip. 2) Jesus insists they depend on God alone. So there's no packing; no money, food, or extra clothes. 3) The trip is not to benefit them. They have to rely on God for the outcome, so faith and trust are essential. 4) Their responsibility is to preach the message of salvation, to pray for the sick and demon possessed. 5) If people don't accept them, or their message, there's no need to get angry. They should simply perform a common Jewish rite and shake the dust off their feet. This act is symbolic; originally it was a sign of pride and said we don't want to mix with you. Now it is a visual reminder to both sides that those who reject God's message of salvation now bear the responsibility for their decision. 6) Many are set free and healed during this first missionary trip.

MEDITATIO:

- Why did Jesus send his disciples out in pairs? Why did he give them authority to heal the sick and to drive out evil spirits? Why did Jesus insist that the disciples must go empty handed on their mission?
- Has God ever asked you to step out and do something new for him? How did you feel? What happened? What did you learn from this experience?

ORATIO:

Psalm 85:8-13 describes the attitude of someone listening carefully to God and acknowledging their dependency on him. Thank God for all the ways he provides for you physically, emotionally and spiritually. Ask him to show you if you share the same eagerness to hear his voice as these verses suggest the psalmist did.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Mission is the central theme today. In our first reading Amos is challenged about his calling as a prophet. But he has no doubts about his call or his duties or who gave them to him.

Ephesians 1:3-14 contains so many amazing truths and affirms us in our calling. We are equipped with 'every spiritual blessing' (verse 3). Our sins are forgiven and we are chosen to be holy (verses 7 & 4). Through Christ we become his sons and daughters (verse 5), adopted into his family. We have been given the Holy Spirit as God's stamp of ownership because we believe. So we are kitted out and ready for action on God's mission.

MOVED BY PITY

Mark 6:30-34

³⁰The apostles returned and met with Jesus, and told him all they had done and taught. ³¹There were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his disciples didn't even have time to eat. So he said to them, "Let us go off by ourselves to some place where we will be alone and you can rest a while." ³²So they started out in a boat by themselves to a lonely place.

³³Many people, however, saw them leave and knew at once who they were; so they went from all the towns and ran ahead by land and arrived at the place ahead of Jesus and his disciples. ³⁴When Jesus got out of the boat, he saw this large crowd, and his heart was filled with pity for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began to teach them many things.

Other Readings: Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 23; Ephesians 2:13-18

LECTIO:

Mark doesn't linger on the thrill of this first mission. But the disciples must have been bubbling over with excitement that God used them to do things for him. They must have been very tired too.

Mark quickly moves on to Jesus' own ministry in the north of Palestine, a region called Galilee. Jesus' ministry was powerful and well known. But it took its toll on the spiritual lives of the disciples, leaving them no recovery time.

As a wise leader Jesus realises this could lead to spiritual and physical exhaustion for the entire group. So he plans for them to go somewhere to relax and be refreshed, away from all the demands of others. They set off across the Sea of Galilee for a quiet place. This sea is more of a large lake and is narrow at the northern end.

The local people, however, guess what Jesus is up to and run off on foot to get there first! As the boat beaches, Jesus looks at the waiting crowds and he can't ignore them or their needs. When he sees how eager they are to listen to him 'his heart was filled with pity for them' (verse 34).

Jesus gives himself to the people who were 'like sheep without a shepherd'. Jesus' and his disciples' well merited break has to wait for another day!

MEDITATIO:

- How do you balance the demands of work and serving God with the need for rest? Does your rest give you more time to spend with God in prayer and reading the Bible or less time?
- How can you discern when people have a genuine need for help that requires your immediate attention?
- How do you feel when the needs of others mean you have to change your plans? What can we learn from Jesus' response?

ORATIO:

Psalm 23 is one of the most-loved passages in the Bible. It reminds us we are no longer 'like sheep without a shepherd'. Jesus himself is now our shepherd.

Read these precious truths slowly out loud. Savour the words and let God speak into your life and circumstances.

CONTEMPLATIO:

The significance and responsibilities of leadership are explored in today's complementary readings. God takes these seriously. Jeremiah 23:1-6 highlights what God does to those who ignore their responsibilities. Verses 5-6 are a prophecy for Jesus; he'll restore godly leadership and be called 'The Lord Our Salvation'.

Ephesians 2:13-18 explains what this salvation means. Through his death on the cross Jesus has broken the barrier that separates us from God. Jesus has made peace possible now between us and God, and between Jews and Gentiles.

JESUS FEEDS 5,000

John 6:1-15

¹ After this, Jesus went across Lake Galilee (or, Lake Tiberias, as it is also called). ² A large crowd followed him, because they had seen his miracles of healing the sick. ³ Jesus went up a hill and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The time for the Passover Festival was near. ⁵ Jesus looked around and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, so he asked Philip, "Where can we buy enough food to feed all these people?" (⁶ He said this to test Philip; actually he already knew what he would do.)

⁷ Philip answered, "For everyone to have even a little, it would take more than two hundred silver coins to buy enough bread."

⁸ Another one of his disciples, Andrew, who was Simon Peter's brother, said, ⁹ "There is a boy here who has five loaves of barley bread and two fish. But they will certainly not be enough for all these people."

¹⁰ "Make the people sit down," Jesus told them. (There was a lot of grass there.) So all the people sat down; there were about five thousand men. ¹¹ Jesus took the bread, gave thanks to God, and distributed it to the people who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, and they all had as much as they wanted. ¹² When they were all full, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces left over; let us not waste a bit." ¹³ So they gathered them all and filled twelve baskets with the pieces left over from the five barley loaves which the people had eaten.

¹⁴ Seeing this miracle that Jesus had performed, the people there said, "Surely this is the Prophet who was to come into the world!" ¹⁵ Jesus knew that they were about to come and seize him in order to make him king by force; so he went off again to the hills by himself.

Other Readings: 2 Kings 4:42-44; Psalm 145:10-11, 15-18; Ephesians 4:1-6

LECTIO:

John narrates this episode with relish. It's clear that the disciples are not expecting a miraculous event. Philip can't see past the great cost - around eight month's salary. Andrew only sees as far as the boy's loaves and fishes.

Jesus saw no problem; he already knew how this need would be met. He accepts the boy's loaves and fishes and miraculously multiplies them, feeding everyone fully. There are even twelve baskets of leftovers!

What is the meaning of this miracle? We could stop at the literal meaning but if we continue reading the rest of chapter 6, we see John brings an additional dimension.

John develops the theme of food. He uses it as a metaphor or word picture. Jesus is presented as 'the bread of life', bread which sustains life, especially spiritual life (verses 27-36).

Bread has a double meaning here: it is the teachings of Jesus and it is Jesus himself. His description of himself and his nature is what we are to 'feed on' or draw strength from.

Jesus himself draws the parallel between meeting people's physical needs and meeting their spiritual needs (verses 26-27). To benefit from this spiritual nourishment we must do something too - believe in Jesus (verse 29). His teaching is perfect nourishment for anyone who will base their life on it and, in this case, every piece is valuable.



MEDITATIO:

- What lessons do you think Jesus wanted to teach his disciples through this miracle? How can we learn from this too?
- How do you 'feed' on Jesus and on his words? Most people see the importance of physical food. Consider whether you give enough priority to your spiritual diet?



ORATIO:

Psalm 145 gives praise to God for his care of all his creatures. Verses 15-16 speak of 'food' being supplied when needed. Think of a time when a verse of Scripture has given you strength to keep going.

Thank God for the different ways he has helped and provided for you at specific times in your life. Let these prayers, and the words of this Psalm, build faith and confidence for the future.



CONTEMPLATIO:

When the crowd witnessed Jesus multiplying the food they said 'this is the Prophet who was to come into the world'. The expectancy of a prophet like Moses in the last days (Deuteronomy 18:15) was widespread. Perhaps they also made the connection with a similar miracle in 2 Kings 4:42-44 when Elisha fed a hundred prophets by multiplying 20 loaves.

In Ephesians 4:1-6, Paul reminds us that Christians are one body in and with Jesus. This means we share a common hope - salvation. We also have 'one Lord of all, who works through all, and is in all'. So we can all be included in this promise.

BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:24-35

²⁴When the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they got into those boats and went to Capernaum, looking for him.

²⁵When the people found Jesus on the other side of the lake, they said to him, "Teacher, when did you get here?"

²⁶Jesus answered, "I am telling you the truth: you are looking for me because you ate the bread and had all you wanted, not because you understood my miracles. ²⁷Do not work for food that spoils; instead, work for the food that lasts for eternal life. This is the food which the Son of Man will give you, because God, the Father, has put his mark of approval on him."

²⁸So they asked him, "What can we do in order to do what God wants us to do?"

²⁹Jesus answered, "What God wants you to do is to believe in the one he sent."

³⁰They replied, "What miracle will you perform so that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" ³¹Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, just as the scripture says, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

³²"I am telling you the truth," Jesus said. "What Moses gave you was not the bread from heaven; it is my Father who gives you the real bread from heaven. ³³For the bread that God gives is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

³⁴"Sir," they asked him, "give us this bread always."

³⁵"I am the bread of life," Jesus told them. "Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty."

Other Readings: Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15; Psalm 78:3-4, 23-25, 54; Ephesians 4:17, 20-24



LECTIO:

John tends to use more conversation rather than just narratives in his Gospel. He brings people together and then reports what they say.

Here the crowd is curious to know how Jesus arrived – is it another miracle? Jesus refuses to be drawn, knowing they are seeking extraordinary events rather than him alone.

Instead he starts to discuss their attitude to him; they do not really believe in him, merely enjoy the spectacle of miracles, especially their free lunch!

Jesus asks them to seek spiritual not material treasures. Believe in me he asks. But they are not satisfied with the miracles they have already seen and ask for another one.

Probably hoping for another free meal, they recall how their ancestors received manna from heaven (Exodus 16:13-36). Jesus explains that his Father was the true source of their manna then and has far better bread to offer them now.

Eager to have whatever is going, the crowd ask for this bread and Jesus reveals the mystery: he is the bread from heaven. He is able to satisfy all human needs including spiritual needs.

Jesus fed people with physical bread as a token of the bread of heaven; Jesus himself. This promised 'bread' will not just stave off hunger, it provides eternal life.



MEDITATIO:

- Bread would have always been part of the meal in Jesus' day. Consider how important Jesus is in your daily diet today. Given the choice most people don't usually eat or drink just once a day. Why should it be different spiritually?
- The people were happy with physical bread but Jesus had so much more to give them. Consider whether you have settled for less than Jesus might want you to experience in your relationship with him.



ORATIO:

Use Psalm 78, which is a beautiful meditation on God's relationship with us, as a prayer throughout this week. Think about what God has done in your own life and add your own words of thanks. They don't have to be fancy words, just from the heart.

Every time you eat a piece of bread this week, say a short prayer thanking God for sending us Jesus – the bread of life.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Exodus 16:2-4 opens with the Israelites complaining they had no food. God promises to give them food 'from heaven.' He adds he will test them to see if they will follow his instructions to collect their food on a daily basis. Does this have anything to teach us today?

In Ephesians 4:17, 20-24 we are given some clear and practical guidelines on how to live the Christian life. As you read these verses ask God to tell you if there is anything you need to change about the way you are currently living.

COME TO JESUS

John 6:41-51

⁴¹ The people started grumbling about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴² So they said, "This man is Jesus son of Joseph, isn't he? We know his father and mother. How, then, does he now say he came down from heaven?"

⁴³ Jesus answered, "Stop grumbling among yourselves. ⁴⁴ People cannot come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me; and I will raise them to life on the last day. ⁴⁵ The prophets wrote, 'Everyone will be taught by God.' Anyone who hears the Father and learns from him comes to me.

⁴⁶ This does not mean that anyone has seen the Father; he who is from God is the only one who has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ I am telling you the truth: he who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate manna in the desert, but they died. ⁵⁰ But the bread that comes down from heaven is of such a kind that whoever eats it will not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If you eat this bread, you will live forever. The bread that I will give you is my flesh, which I give so that the world may live."

Other readings: 1 Kings 19:4-8; Psalm 34:1-8; Ephesians 4:30 – 5:2

LECTIO:

This chapter of John's Gospel majors on Jesus being the 'bread of life'. Jesus' audience begins to react to his words and to what these words suggest.

According to John the crowd reacts first to Jesus' claim of heavenly origin. He says he is the bread of life and sent by the Father. The people reject this claim as absurd because they know his Mum and Dad and where he lives.

Jesus ignores their objections. He insists they need grace from the Father to know and understand him. No one can go to Jesus unless the Father 'draws them to me'.

God the Father is the real source of our faith in Jesus. Our part is to respond in faith to God's wonderful gift of salvation and submit our lives to his will. So faith in Jesus is not just what we think and believe; our whole lives are involved in the unfolding relationship between God and us. This includes our commitment of love towards all, within and outside our Christian community.

Jesus maintains the theme of the 'bread of life' but latterly he is referring to the Eucharist. "The bread I will give is my flesh, which I give so the world may live." Jesus in the Eucharist also sustains and deepens our spiritual lives and our relationship with him.

God started it all. It was his plan for Jesus, the Word, to be our bread of life. This passage takes us deep into the mystery of our relationship with Jesus and our Father in Heaven.

MEDITATIO:

- Can you identify when you made a decision for yourself to believe in and love Jesus? Do you also have a relationship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit as well?
- How do you see Jesus? What do you like most about him? What do you find difficult to accept in him and his words here today?

ORATIO:

Consider your response to today's reading. Can you make the following your own prayer? 'Here I am, Lord Jesus, I am following you because the Father gave me this opportunity and his grace.'

Psalm 34 speaks about encounters with the Lord. Verse 8 sums it up so well 'Find out for yourself how good the Lord is. Happy are those who find safety with him'. Thank God for all the ways God has shown you his goodness. Pray too for family and friends to discover his goodness for themselves.

CONTEMPLATIO:

In 1 Kings 19:4-8 we read how Elijah wanted to give up and die but God provided 'bread from heaven' to sustain him. Read the rest of the story and consider what we can learn from his dramatic encounter with God.

Once again we taste the riches of Ephesians (4:30 – 5:2). Read these practical gems of guidance for pleasing God and ask for his grace to live by them.

REAL FOOD

John 6:51-58

⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If you eat this bread, you will live forever. The bread that I will give you is my flesh, which I give so that the world may live.”

⁵² This started an angry argument among them. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” they asked.

⁵³ Jesus said to them, “I am telling you the truth: if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in yourselves. ⁵⁴ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them to life on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is the real food; my blood is the real drink. ⁵⁶ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood live in me, and I live in them. ⁵⁷ The living Father sent me, and because of him I live also. In the same way whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This, then, is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the bread that your ancestors ate, but then later died. Those who eat this bread will live forever.”

Other Readings: Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 34:1-2, 9-14; Ephesians 5:15-20

LECTIO:

Jesus continues his teaching about being the ‘bread of life’. His listeners are outraged. They only hear the words literally, not their spiritual depth. They simply can not accept the idea.

On one level this is a picture to help us understand. Eating his body indicates we want to accept and absorb Jesus and his message of salvation.

In another way it is sacramental, his word will ‘change’ into bread allowing us to ‘eat his flesh’ as we encounter him in Scripture and the Eucharist. So whoever eats Jesus, in his word or Eucharist, lives in Jesus and Jesus lives in him or her.

Jesus is speaking of the deep relationship that will grow with his disciples if they accept his words and eat his body in this sacramental way. Their relationship will resemble the one between Jesus, the Son, and the Father who sent him into the world.

This is the mystery of Christian living; it is not just a question of a good moral life, grace and relationship are essential. Life must be lived in a deepening communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In this way we reflect the life of the Trinity. We are to share their character and priorities by living in constant conversation with them and, by grace, hearing something of their own conversations.

MEDITATIO:

- Do you participate in what the Church calls the Eucharist? How does it influence your own life? Are you challenged by the thought of Jesus’ flesh and blood? Try reading 1 Corinthians 15:35-42.
- Consider what it means for Jesus to live in you and you in Christ. How does this influence your thoughts and behaviour?

ORATIO:

We return to Psalm 34. The praise continues but this week the focus is on honouring God. The psalmist speaks of those seeking material goods and a long life as compared to honouring God. Use the verses as a springboard to your own words of praise to God. When you get to the verses about honouring God, take your time and listen to what God might want to say to you about this and your own lifestyle.

CONTEMPLATIO:

The common thread in today’s liturgy is wisdom, learning to see things God’s way. The verses from Proverbs 9:1-6 make wisdom a person and we are invited to eat and drink what she has prepared.

Ephesians 5:15-20 continues the theme of being wise and gives us some very practical advice. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit and find out what God wants us to do.

WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE

John 6:60-69

⁶⁰Many of his followers heard this and said, "This teaching is too hard. Who can listen to it?"

⁶¹Without being told, Jesus knew that they were grumbling about this, so he said to them, "Does this make you want to give up? ⁶²Suppose, then, that you should see the Son of Man go back up to the place where he was before? ⁶³What gives life is God's Spirit; human power is of no use at all. The words I have spoken to you bring God's life-giving Spirit. ⁶⁴Yet some of you do not believe." (Jesus knew from the very beginning who were the ones that would not believe and which one would betray him.) ⁶⁵And he added, "This is the very reason I told you that no people can come to me unless the Father makes it possible for them to do so."

⁶⁶Because of this, many of Jesus' followers turned back and would not go with him any more. ⁶⁷So he asked the twelve disciples, "And you—would you also like to leave?"

⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. ⁶⁹And now we believe and know that you are the Holy One who has come from God."

Other Readings: Joshua 24:1-2, 15-18; Psalm 34:1-2, 15-22; Ephesians 5:21-32

ILECTIO:

We continue to look at the important teaching of Jesus being the 'bread of life'. Many of his followers had now reached a crisis point. They found his teaching impossible to accept and left.

Jesus is not taken by surprise by this mass defection. He remains in complete control; he knew all along who would leave him. He repeats the point from John 6:44 that the Father has to be involved in our relationship with Jesus.

Jesus challenged the twelve disciples to choose: stay with me and believe, or go. They stayed. Peter's response to Jesus is worth repeating, often. His two short sentences sum up faith. But they don't reveal how Peter dealt with his own inner challenges to make this commitment to Jesus.

Peter must have decided to be Jesus' disciple no matter what. Nothing will make him turn away now. Jesus does reveal we can't follow him in our own strength – the Holy Spirit is essential (verse 63).

Being or becoming Jesus' disciple is more than a human decision. All the Trinity are involved. The Father 'draws' and 'makes it possible for us' to follow Jesus. The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus, helps us understand God's Word and gives us the power to live the Christian life. Through faith in the Son, Jesus, we receive forgiveness and eternal life.

Miss out on any part and we'll never be able to stay the course – Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all essential.

MEDITATIO:

- Which part of Jesus' teaching do you find difficult to accept or do?
- Have you ever been tempted to quit being a Christian and give up? What stopped you? Has Peter's response ever been on your lips?
- Think about the work of the Trinity in bringing you to faith and sustaining your faith. What is your response to this?

ORATIO:

As we return to Psalm 34, again we are reminded to bless the Lord at all times. By remembering God's faithfulness in the past and his special concern when we feel discouraged (verse 18) we are drawn closer to God.

This week prayerfully make a list of the 'goodness of God' you personally have 'tasted' and compare this with a list of the difficult or puzzling things in your life of faith. Use this to give thanks for what you have in God, and ask his help with everything you are struggling with.

CONTEMPLATIO:

This week's focus is love and commitment. In Joshua 24:1-2, 15-18 the Israelites are asked to choose: serve God or follow other gods. Remembering their deliverance from slavery in Egypt they renew their commitment to serve God.

In Ephesians 5 Paul opens up a mystery. He compares the relationship between Jesus and the church to a marriage. Love and commitment are the foundation of both.

HEART ATTITUDE

Mark 7:1-8,14-15, 21-23

¹Some Pharisees and teachers of the Law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus. ²They noticed that some of his disciples were eating their food with hands that were ritually unclean—that is, they had not washed them in the way the Pharisees said people should.

³For the Pharisees, as well as the rest of the Jews, follow the teaching they received from their ancestors: they do not eat unless they wash their hands in the proper way; ⁴nor do they eat anything that comes from the market unless they wash it first. And they follow many other rules which they have received, such as the proper way to wash cups, pots, copper bowls, and beds.)

⁵So the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law asked Jesus, “Why is it that your disciples do not follow the teaching handed down by our ancestors, but instead eat with ritually unclean hands?”

⁶Jesus answered them, “How right Isaiah was when he prophesied about you! You are hypocrites, just as he wrote:

“These people, says God, honor me with their words,
but their heart is really far away from me.

⁷It is no use for them to worship me,
because they teach human rules
as though they were my laws!

⁸“You put aside God’s command and obey human teachings.”

¹⁴Then Jesus called the crowd to him once more and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand. ¹⁵There is nothing that goes into you from the outside which can make you ritually unclean. Rather, it is what comes out of you that makes you unclean.”

²¹For from the inside, from your heart, come the evil ideas which lead you to do immoral things, to rob, kill, ²²commit adultery, be greedy, and do all sorts of evil things; deceit, indecency, jealousy, slander, pride, and folly— ²³all these evil things come from inside you and make you unclean.”

Other Readings: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8; Psalm 15:1-5; James 1:17-18, 21-22, 27

LECTIO:

Jesus’ teaching about what was ritually clean and unclean was a very contentious issue both during his ministry on earth and afterwards as Gentile converts joined the church. Mark discusses the subject because he is writing for Christians of non-Jewish origin.

Of course God had given the Jewish people detailed rules about food and hygiene (see Leviticus 11).

Here Jesus confronts two issues: additional man-made rules and the very essence of what makes someone ritually clean or unclean. It appears that over time the religious leaders had added their own rules to God’s law but were passing them off as God’s commandments. Worse still, they were giving these man-made rules prominence at the expense of God’s original commands (verses 7-8).

Jesus challenges these traditions. It is not external things like what you eat that make you unclean but what’s inside your heart. It’s here that evil thoughts germinate and lead to evil actions.

Jesus is not interested in people saying or doing the ‘right’ things if underneath their heart attitude is not right. Many of the Pharisees had lost the plot. God wants us to worship and serve him from a pure heart of love. You can obey as many of man’s rules as you like, but before God you will remain a hypocrite if your heart is not pure.

EDITATIO:

- Consider the attitude of your heart. Are you worshipping and serving God out of love? Or are you paying more attention to outwardly keeping the rules and doing the ‘right’ things? What is Jesus looking for?
- The Pharisees got their priorities wrong. Consider your priorities. Does anything need to change?

ORATIO:

Ask God to help you keep a pure heart so that you always worship and serve him and others from an attitude of love.

Psalm 15 describes people who are likely to be found in God’s presence. Make a list of what does and doesn’t please God. Ask God to help you do the things you should and avoid what displeases him.

ONTEMPLATIO:

In Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8 we hear Moses start to deliver God’s laws to the Israelites. They are specifically instructed not to add or take anything away from God’s commandments - just what Jesus confronts the Pharisees about in the gospel reading.

Today’s verses from James 1 continue the theme of hearing and obeying God’s law. Verse 22 warns us not to deceive ourselves. Just listening to what God wants us to do is not enough; we must put it into practice. Helping those in need and keeping ourselves spiritually uncontaminated by the world will make faith a reality.

HEALING TOUCH

Mark 7:31-37

³¹ Jesus then left the neighborhood of Tyre and went on through Sidon to Lake Galilee, going by way of the territory of the Ten Towns. ³² Some people brought him a man who was deaf and could hardly speak, and they begged Jesus to place his hands on him. ³³ So Jesus took him off alone, away from the crowd, put his fingers in the man's ears, spat, and touched the man's tongue. ³⁴ Then Jesus looked up to heaven, gave a deep groan, and said to the man, "Ephphatha," which means, "Open up!"

³⁵ At once the man was able to hear, his speech impediment was removed, and he began to talk without any trouble. ³⁶ Then Jesus ordered the people not to speak of it to anyone; but the more he ordered them not to, the more they told it. ³⁷ And all who heard were completely amazed. "How well he does everything!" they exclaimed. "He even causes the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak!"

Other Readings: Isaiah 35:4-7; Psalm 146: 7-10; James 2:1-5

LECTIO:

Jesus solved two problems for this man when he healed him. The man who could not hear or speak was set free to do both. So a man who lived in a totally silent, isolated world, could now participate fully in his community.

His log jam of silence was blown apart by Jesus commanding him to 'open up'. Mark uses the Aramaic word Jesus spoke to give the healing. But it wasn't the choice of a language or a word that enabled the miracle to take place, it was Jesus' divine healing power.

The evangelists make it plain Jesus does not perform miracles by rite, magic or demonic power, but solely by the power of God. God's power at work in Jesus makes healing, forgiveness and deliverance a reality.

Mark is the only gospel writer to record this healing of someone who was both deaf and dumb. It is not clear where this miracle took place but, given the region Jesus was travelling through, it is possible the man was not a Jew. Jesus healed him just the same because the people who interceded for him showed faith. He and his divine power are there to serve and save all men irrespective of nationality or cultural background.

The people are thrilled. They can't contain their joy or approval and they tell everyone about the miracle, despite Jesus' orders!

MEDITATIO:

- What do you think the man thought as Jesus prepared to heal him? Why do you think Jesus took the man away from the crowd?
- Consider the role played by this man's friends. What can we learn from this? Why did Jesus direct the man's friends not to speak about this miracle?
- What are the outcomes from this miracle?

ORATIO:

Psalm 146 is a beautiful prayer extolling God's promises and faithfulness. It is full of hope and expectation listing miracle after miracle. If you can, join in and give thanks for God's miraculous intervention in your own life. Sometimes the answer to a real need seems a long time coming from God. The psalmist reminds us in verse 6 'he keeps his promises'. Don't lose hope, trust in God.

CONTEMPLATIO:

God heals where and when he chooses. Our first reading from Isaiah 35:4-7 offers the encouragement that God will rescue and heal his people. Two of the healings mentioned are fulfilled by Jesus in this single miracle we've read about today.

James 2:1-5 reminds us that God does not judge people by their outward appearance and neither should we. We should love and serve everyone equally and not be influenced by anyone's status.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Mark 8:27-35

²⁷ Then Jesus and his disciples went away to the villages near Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Tell me, who do people say I am?"

²⁸ "Some say that you are John the Baptist," they answered; "others say that you are Elijah, while others say that you are one of the prophets."

²⁹ "What about you?" he asked them. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

³⁰ Then Jesus ordered them, "Do not tell anyone about me."

³¹ Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: "The Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. He will be put to death, but three days later he will rise to life." ³² He made this very clear to them. So Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But Jesus turned around, looked at his disciples, and rebuked Peter. "Get away from me, Satan," he said. "Your thoughts don't come from God but from human nature!"

³⁴ Then Jesus called the crowd and his disciples to him. "If any of you want to come with me," he told them, "you must forget yourself, carry your cross, and follow me. ³⁵ For if you want to save your own life, you will lose it; but if you lose your life for me and for the gospel, you will save it.

Other Readings: Isaiah 50:5-9; Psalm 116:1-6, 8-9; James 2:14-18

LECTIO:

Wild rumours are flying around about Jesus' real identity. He asks the disciples who people think he is. Most people liken Jesus to Old Testament prophets, particularly Elijah. Others think he might even be John the Baptist.

Jesus then asks the disciples who they think he is. Peter says he is the Messiah, even though he doesn't fully understand this. At this point Jesus only wants the disciples to know his true identity, so he commands them not to tell anyone else.

Jesus then gives them an insight into how his mission on earth will end. He tells them clearly that he will suffer and die but three days later will rise from the dead. This doesn't fit with Peter's idea of a Messiah so he tells Jesus off!

Jesus firmly rejects Peter's suggestion and makes it clear that Satan is using Peter. This is human thinking not God's. Peter clearly has a lot more to learn about Jesus.

Jesus then explains to the crowd just what it means to be one of his disciples. He uses the image of carrying a cross. This would have created a vivid and fearful picture in the minds of his listeners. Many would have seen a condemned man staggering beaten and bleeding through the streets to face this humiliating and painful death.

Jesus' words are an alert for the first disciples. If you want to follow me be prepared; it will involve suffering. Some disciples did experience physical crucifixion. Some today still give their lives for the sake of the gospel. For the rest of us, being prepared to lay down our lives to submit completely to God's will is a daily challenge for every disciple.

MEDITATIO:

- Consider who you believe Jesus is. How complete is your understanding? Can we, like Peter, sometimes be guilty of thinking we know better than Jesus?
- Consider why you follow Jesus. Does it help to remember these reasons when following him involves sacrifice or suffering in some way?
- Jesus speaks of 'carrying your cross daily' and 'losing your life for Jesus and the gospel'. What does this mean for you? Remember Jesus sends us the Holy Spirit to help us live the Christian life.

ORATIO:

Psalm 116 is a great shout of joy for deliverance. The psalmist says 'I kept on believing' even though he was crushed and afraid (verses 10-11). Think about your relationship with God; can you use these verses to praise him now?

CONTEMPLATIO:

Isaiah 50:4-9 is often referred to as one of the Servant Songs and is generally understood as prophecy about the suffering of Christ. (See also Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12.) Jesus would have been well aware of these words and doesn't allow the suffering ahead to stop him obeying God.

James 2:14-18 makes it clear that real faith in Jesus will always show itself not only in words but also in our actions. Faith will spill over into self-sacrificing and practical love for others.

A NEW WAY

Mark 9:30-37

³⁰Jesus and his disciples left that place and went on through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where he was, ³¹because he was teaching his disciples: "The Son of Man will be handed over to those who will kill him. Three days later, however, he will rise to life."

³²But they did not understand what this teaching meant, and they were afraid to ask him.

³³They came to Capernaum, and after going indoors Jesus asked his disciples, "What were you arguing about on the road?"

³⁴But they would not answer him, because on the road they had been arguing among themselves about who was the greatest. ³⁵Jesus sat down, called the twelve disciples, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all." ³⁶Then he took a child and had him stand in front of them. He put his arms around him and said to them, ³⁷"Whoever welcomes in my name one of these children, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not only me but also the one who sent me."

Other Readings: Wisdom of Solomon 2:12, 17-20; Psalm 54:1-4, 6; James 3:16 – 4:3

LECTIO:

In today's reading Jesus repeats the teaching to his disciples about his death and resurrection that we read about last week (Mark 8:31-33). It was so important that Jesus made sure they were alone and wouldn't be interrupted.

Mark reveals the disciples were puzzled and afraid to ask Jesus about the subject.

Perhaps they were afraid they might get a similar rebuke to Peter if they said the wrong thing (Mark 8:33) so decided to keep quiet. Or maybe they just couldn't handle the implications of what Jesus was saying.

The disciples' discussion about who is the greatest may have been prompted by wondering who would be their leader if Jesus died. Of course Jesus picked this up straight away. The disciples were too ashamed to confess what they had discussed. Jesus doesn't wait for them to explain. He simply shows them. But not in a way they would have expected.

Importance within Jesus' community is achieved through service to others not by imposing power. At that time children had no power and little value. But in Jesus' view whoever welcomed a 'valueless' person welcomed him and the Father who sent him. Jesus' view of life and the world's way can never mix; they are like oil and water.

The disciples' views had to be shaken up to adopt Jesus' teaching. Jesus and his Father will be encountered in and through the people society rejects. If the disciples do not change they will still be thinking like the world and not like God. Once again Jesus is saying 'my way is not and never will be the world's way'.

MEDITATIO:

- Were the disciples right to be afraid of asking Jesus to explain his teaching? Do you feel able to ask Jesus about things you don't understand?
- Why did Jesus use a child to illustrate his teaching about being a disciple? What can we learn from this? What additional insights can we gain from Mark 10:13-16?
- Consider the importance Jesus places in our attitudes to serving others. How do you make this a practical part of your life?

ORATIO:

Prayerfully read through Psalm 54. Can you join the psalmist in expressing your reliance on God? Throughout this week repeat verse 4 'But God is my helper. The Lord is my defender.' To which specific situations in your life can these truths be applied?

CONTEMPLATIO:

The Scriptures today compare the way godly people behave with the world's behaviour. Wisdom of Solomon 2:12, 17-20 shows how the wicked hate the just. They make life difficult for the just because they are a constant reminder of their own failure to do what God wants.

James 3:16 – 4:3 warns us against being jealous or selfish. These ungodly attitudes bring disharmony and all sorts of evil. We need to live by godly wisdom which will bear good fruit.

KEEP FAITH IN JESUS

Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

³⁸John said to him, “Teacher, we saw a man who was driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop, because he doesn’t belong to our group.”

³⁹“Do not try to stop him,” Jesus told them, “because no one who performs a miracle in my name will be able soon afterward to say evil things about me.” ⁴⁰For whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹I assure you that anyone who gives you a drink of water because you belong to me will certainly receive a reward.

⁴²“If anyone should cause one of these little ones to lose faith in me, it would be better for that person to have a large millstone tied around the neck and be thrown into the sea.” ⁴³So if your hand makes you lose your faith, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life without a hand than to keep both hands and go off to hell, to the fire that never goes out.

⁴⁵And if your foot makes you lose your faith, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life without a foot than to keep both feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷And if your eye makes you lose your faith, take it out! It is better for you to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to keep both eyes and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁸There ‘the worms that eat them never die, and the fire that burns them is never put out.’

Other Readings: Numbers 11:25-29; Psalm 19:7, 9, 11-13; James 5:1-6



LECTIO:

Jesus surprises his disciples yet again. Apparently someone was casting out demons in Jesus’ name. The disciples tell him to stop because he is not one of their group.

Jesus surprises them by telling them not to stop him. The reason Jesus gives is very practical. Someone performing miracles in his name could hardly turn round later and speak against Jesus’ ministry. We’re not really given many details so do not know why this person was not more closely connected with Jesus’ disciples. However Jesus makes it clear that kindness shown to one of his disciples because they are following him will certainly be rewarded.

Jesus then turns his attention to the seriousness of sin. He gives a strong warning to those who cause the young to lose their faith in Jesus (verse 42).

Jesus sums his teachings up by saying don’t allow anyone or anything to cause you to lose faith in him. He emphasises the importance of this by repeating it no fewer than three times. It’s a matter of life or death, heaven or hell. We must keep our lives clearly focused on Jesus and the Kingdom of God.



MEDITATIO:

- What reasons do you think the disciples might have had for stopping the man casting out demons in Jesus’ name?
- What does this passage teach us about how we should deal with temptation and sin? Do we take it as seriously as God does?
- What can we learn about our responsibility to others, especially to children concerning their faith in Jesus?



ORATIO:

As we read and reflect on Holy Scripture it changes us. The Holy Spirit helps in this transition. These verses from Psalm 19 help us to focus on obeying God and keeping free from sin. As you ponder this psalm allow time for the Holy Spirit to open up areas that need to change. If we confess our sins God promises ‘he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all wrongdoing’ (1 John 1:9).



CONTEMPLATIO:

In Numbers 11:25-29 we learn that Joshua reacted in a similar way to the disciples when someone did something he didn’t consider was right. Moses, like Jesus, took the opposite view. We know from previous readings that God is more concerned with our heart attitude.

James 5:1-6 is a warning to people who put their trust in their earthly wealth and who exploit other people. God will judge them. Selfish and loveless actions by Christians may well cause others to lose faith in Jesus and the church. Our personal behaviour must reflect Jesus; thoughtless words and actions can have a significant impact on others.

JESUS' TEACHING ON MARRIAGE

Mark 10:2-16

²Some Pharisees came to him and tried to trap him. "Tell us," they asked, "does our Law allow a man to divorce his wife?"

³Jesus answered with a question, "What law did Moses give you?"

⁴Their answer was, "Moses gave permission for a man to write a divorce notice and send his wife away."

⁵Jesus said to them, "Moses wrote this law for you because you are so hard to teach.

⁶But in the beginning, at the time of creation, 'God made them male and female,' as the scripture says. ⁷'And for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife, ⁸and the two will become one.' So they are no longer two, but one. ⁹No human being must separate, then, what God has joined together."

¹⁰When they went back into the house, the disciples asked Jesus about this matter.

¹¹He said to them, "A man who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against his wife. ¹²In the same way, a woman who divorces her husband and marries another man commits adultery."

¹³Some people brought children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples scolded the people. ¹⁴When Jesus noticed this, he was angry and said to his disciples, "Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵I assure you that whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." ¹⁶Then he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on each of them, and blessed them.

Other Readings: Genesis 2:18-24; Psalm 128; Hebrews 2:9-11

LECTIO:

This is a well known text in the New Testament and it can also be found in Matthew 19:1-15 and Luke 16:18.

The Pharisees ask Jesus a question about divorce. They want to trap him by drawing him into a controversy over the law of Moses. Jesus immediately asks them what Moses teaches about the subject, making them answer their own question. They quote from Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which permitted a man to divorce his wife if he disliked something about her. There is one condition. He can't change his mind later, marrying her a second time is not an option.

Jesus takes us back to God's original plan and in doing so points to a higher standard. He makes it clear that when a man and woman come together in marriage, in God's eyes they become one and nobody should separate them. So ideally people should not get divorced. It was only permitted under the law of Moses because people 'are so hard to teach'.

On this occasion the disciples do ask Jesus more about the subject. Here Jesus goes further than Moses by saying that if someone who is divorced remarries they are committing adultery. So now Jesus rules out remarriage completely. God sends us the Holy Spirit to help us live as he intended.

Almost in the same breath Jesus highlights the faith found in a child's heart. Simple faith is required to live in the Kingdom of God, the very same faith that is needed to accept his teaching on marriage.

MEDITATIO:

- What do you think about Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage? Do you agree or does it seem too hard for every circumstance?
- What questions would you like to ask Jesus about this subject? How do you think Jesus might respond?

ORATIO:

Psalm 128 lists the blessings of obeying God. With God at the heart of family relationships, blessings can follow for each member of the family.

Jot down some of the blessings you see in your family and give thanks to God for these. On the days when trials and challenges come, look at your list and remind yourself of God's faithfulness.

CONTEMPLATIO:

This week's readings revolve around relationships. In Genesis 2:18-24 God reveals his care by creating a special companion for man, sometimes described as a 'helpmate'. Jesus quotes directly from verse 24 in our gospel reading today.

In Hebrews 2:9-11 we read of Jesus, the perfect leader, who accepted suffering to purify us from our sins and open the way into the Kingdom of God.

TRUE RICHES

Mark 10:17-30

¹⁷ As Jesus was starting on his way again, a man ran up, knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?”

¹⁸ “Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked him. “No one is good except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not accuse anyone falsely; do not cheat; respect your father and your mother.’”

²⁰ “Teacher,” the man said, “ever since I was young, I have obeyed all these commandments.”

²¹ Jesus looked straight at him with love and said, “You need only one thing. Go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me.” ²² When the man heard this, gloom spread over his face, and he went away sad, because he was very rich.

²³ Jesus looked around at his disciples and said to them, “How hard it will be for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God!”

²⁴ The disciples were shocked at these words, but Jesus went on to say, “My children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.”

²⁶ At this the disciples were completely amazed and asked one another, “Who, then, can be saved?”

²⁷ Jesus looked straight at them and answered, “This is impossible for human beings but not for God; everything is possible for God.”

²⁸ Then Peter spoke up, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.”

²⁹ “Yes,” Jesus said to them, “and I tell you that those who leave home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and for the gospel, ³⁰ will receive much more in this present age. They will receive a hundred times more houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields—and persecutions as well; and in the age to come they will receive eternal life.

Other Readings: Wisdom of Solomon 7:7-11; Psalm 90:12-17; Hebrews 4:12-13

LECTIO:

The man in today’s reading raises a profound question when he asks Jesus what he needs to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus questions him to check his sincerity.

We learn that he has obeyed all God’s commandments since he was young. Jesus then poses the real question: can you give up all of your wealth for me? Jesus knew this man was very rich and his question reveals this fact to everyone. The man is unwilling to obey Jesus’ demand for him to give up this wealth. The man turns away sadly from Jesus and his invitation to become one of his followers.

Jesus uses this incident to teach his disciples. He tells them how hard it is for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God. The disciples are shocked. From the Old Testament, riches were generally seen as a sign of God’s blessing. This threw the Kingdom of God into a whole new light.

Jesus then reinforces his point. In many manuscripts the last part of verse 24 reads ‘how hard it is for those who trust in riches’. Jesus then uses a comparison with something that is impossible, to bring the disciples to the point he wants them to reach: we can’t save ourselves, only God can save us.



MEDITATIO:

- Why were the disciples shocked by Jesus’ words to the rich man?
- What was Jesus asking of this man?
- What does this reading have to say about the cost of following Jesus?
- Does this passage teach us that living a good moral life is not enough? What is needed for us to receive eternal life?



ORATIO:

Psalm 90:12-17 helps us to keep our focus on God. The psalmist asks openly for God’s help and blessing and so can we. However we must ensure we keep our faith and trust in God himself, not the blessings we receive. God is always with us both in the good times and in hard times.



CONTEMPLATIO:

The Wisdom of Solomon 7:7-11 reminds us that God’s wisdom is more valuable than earthly riches.

Hebrews 4:12-13 underlines the power of God’s Word to judge our thoughts. How might we apply this to Jesus’ teaching about riches?

A SERVING ATTITUDE

Mark 10:35-45

³⁵Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus. "Teacher," they said, "there is something we want you to do for us."

³⁶"What is it?" Jesus asked them.

³⁷They answered, "When you sit on your throne in your glorious Kingdom, we want you to let us sit with you, one at your right and one at your left."

³⁸Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking for. Can you drink the cup of suffering that I must drink? Can you be baptized in the way I must be baptized?"

³⁹"We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup I must drink and be baptized in the way I must be baptized. ⁴⁰But I do not have the right to choose who will sit at my right and my left. It is God who will give these places to those for whom he has prepared them."

⁴¹When the other ten disciples heard about it, they became angry with James and John. ⁴²So Jesus called them all together to him and said, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the heathen have power over them, and the leaders have complete authority. ⁴³This, however, is not the way it is among you. If one of you wants to be great, you must be the servant of the rest; ⁴⁴and if one of you wants to be first, you must be the slave of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people."

Other Readings: Isaiah 53:10-11; Psalm 33:4-5, 18-20, 22; Hebrews 4:14-16

LECTIO:

As a good teacher Jesus uses every opportunity to teach on discipleship. John and James' question opens up the subject of power and leadership. The two disciples ask for the significant positions, either side of Jesus' throne, when his Kingdom is established.

It was a foolish request to make and showed their immature thinking. Jesus took the question very seriously because it revealed a wrong attitude to power that has no place in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus asks if they are ready to endure the suffering he now faces. Instantly, they say yes. Jesus uses two images to express the suffering he faces. The first is a cup and the second is baptism. Jesus confirms they will indeed experience the same type of suffering as him but this doesn't mean they can have their request. Only God the Father decides who will sit next to Jesus.

The others are outraged and jealousy erupts. So Jesus talks to the entire group. He explains that in the Kingdom power does not mean dominating others. Power is to be expressed as service to the community or individual. Our actions should help people to meet Jesus so he can redeem them.

Those with power in a Christian community need wisdom and spiritual maturity to ensure they use their power to serve those they are responsible for. Christians with authority in any area of life – family, work, society – should follow Jesus' example by having a serving attitude.

MEDITATIO:

- What motivated the brothers to ask Jesus for the best places? And why were the other disciples so jealous?
- What do you think about Jesus' teaching on serving? What is your attitude to serving others? Does it come naturally or do you find it hard to put into practice?
- What do we need to sacrifice in order to serve others?

ORATIO:

Ask God to give you a serving attitude towards others like Jesus.

Prayerfully read through Psalm 33. Choose one or two verses each day to meditate on and bring them to God in prayer.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Isaiah 53:10-11 is a poem about God's servant, Jesus the Messiah, and the suffering he will endure so our sins can be forgiven.

Hebrews 4:14-16 offers us a tremendous promise. Because of Jesus we can dare to approach God's throne and receive grace and mercy 'just when we need it'.

PERSISTENT FAITH

Mark 10:46-52

⁴⁶They came to Jericho, and as Jesus was leaving with his disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus son of Timaeus was sitting by the road. ⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!"

⁴⁸Many of the people scolded him and told him to be quiet. But he shouted even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁹Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."

So they called the blind man. "Cheer up!" they said. "Get up, he is calling you."

⁵⁰So he threw off his cloak, jumped up, and came to Jesus.

⁵¹"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.

"Teacher," the blind man answered, "I want to see again."

⁵²"Go," Jesus told him, "your faith has made you well."

At once he was able to see and followed Jesus on the road.

Other Readings: Jeremiah 31:7-9; Psalm 126; Hebrews 5:1-6

LECTIO:

Sometimes a noisy child can disturb Sunday worship. People nearby may give the parents a look or say something to get them to stop the disruption.

Bartimaeus discovers that Jesus is near and he wants to get his attention. Because he is blind he cannot see exactly where Jesus is, so he shouts out. The crowd are intent on hearing Jesus so they tell him to be quiet. Bartimaeus will not be silenced. In fact he shouts even louder because he wants to be healed. Perhaps there were others who needed healing in the crowd, but only he took action.

It is interesting to note exactly what Bartimaeus shouts out. Firstly he refers to Jesus as the 'Son of David'. This is in fact a title for the Messiah. So perhaps Bartimaeus believes that Jesus was far more than an ordinary teacher. Perhaps it was this title that attracted Jesus' attention. Secondly he initially asks for 'mercy' rather than for healing.

Jesus hears him and stops. Jesus asks him what he wants. Bartimaeus explains he wants to be able to see again. Jesus tells him his faith has healed him and straight away he is able to see.

Bartimaeus follows Jesus, although we hear of him no more. But the event must have impressed Jesus' disciples because Matthew, Mark and Luke all recount this event and refer to him by name.

MEDITATIO:

- What do you think about the people who tried to silence Bartimaeus? .
- Compare this to the way Jesus responded to him. Does this teach us anything about how we should treat those in need?
- How would you describe Bartimaeus's faith? What do you think he believed about who Jesus was and what Jesus could do? What can we learn from this?
- Is it significant that Bartimaeus asked for mercy rather than healing first? What does it reveal about his attitude? Can we learn from this when we approach God?

ORATIO:

The joy in Psalm 126 can almost be touched it is so strong. The first three verses look back to a time of great joy in the past when God saved them. The last three verses are in anticipation of God doing the same again.

Perhaps you too have experienced the joy of 'deliverance' from sorrow or pain? Or maybe you are right now calling out to God for 'deliverance'? Whatever point you are at thank God for his faithfulness and mercy. Ask God to strengthen your faith and help you, like Bartimaeus, not to give up.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Today's two other readings continue the theme of God's intervention. In Jeremiah 31:7-9 God promises to rescue his people, including the lame and the blind.

In Hebrews 5:1-6 Jesus appears as the perfect High Priest who understands the needs of his people and intervenes on our behalf so our sins can be forgiven.

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Mark 12:28-34

²⁸A teacher of the Law was there who heard the discussion. He saw that Jesus had given the Sadducees a good answer, so he came to him with a question: "Which commandment is the most important of all?"

²⁹Jesus replied, "The most important one is this: 'Listen, Israel! The Lord our God is the only Lord. ³⁰Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' ³¹The second most important commandment is this: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' There is no other commandment more important than these two."

³²The teacher of the Law said to Jesus, "Well done, Teacher! It is true, as you say, that only the Lord is God and that there is no other god but he. ³³And you must love God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength; and you must love your neighbor as you love yourself. It is more important to obey these two commandments than to offer on the altar animals and other sacrifices to God."

³⁴Jesus noticed how wise his answer was, and so he told him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God."

After this nobody dared to ask Jesus any more questions.

Other Readings: Deuteronomy 6:2-6; Psalm 18:1-3, 46, 50; Hebrews 7:23-28

LECTIO:

A teacher of the law, who is impressed by the answers Jesus has been giving, asks him what the greatest commandment is. Jesus replies from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 also known as Shema Israel.

Jesus follows the accepted method of Jewish teachers by choosing the most important commandment to sum up all the teaching from the Books of Law: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. In other words this one verse is the foundation and purpose of everything said in these books and everything in them should be interpreted with this in mind. The words used to express the first commandment vary slightly from those recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and you can look up the difference.

Jesus then links the first commandment to a second: loving your neighbour as yourself. This is a reference to a commandment in Leviticus 19:18.

Jesus makes it clear that love must be at the centre of the greatest commandment. Firstly love for God and secondly love for your neighbour. By linking the two together Jesus implies the two must go hand in hand. True religion cannot neglect the social aspect of man's life.

Jesus sets no limits on our love for God and our love for our neighbours must be at least equal to our love for ourselves. Jesus sets a very high standard: we should love our neighbour without expecting to receive or gain anything (Luke 10:25-37).

The questioner agrees with Jesus' answer and makes the perceptive comment that obeying these commandments is our highest priority, more important than the animal sacrifices which were such a central feature of worship at that time.

MEDITATIO:

- Consider what it means practically to obey these two commandments. What are the implications? How can you love God completely? How can you love your neighbour as yourself?
- Which is more important to you: observing religious practices or obeying these commandments? What does this passage have to say about what our priorities should be?

ORATIO:

Ask God to help you love him and others more fully.

Psalm 18 in its entirety lists many of the attributes of God and many promises. As you pray through this psalm look out for what these verses reveal about God's character. What can you discover and build into your faith life?

CONTEMPLATIO:

To amplify what we hear in the Gospel the first reading Deuteronomy 6:2-6 gives the original text to which Jesus refers.

Hebrews 7:23-28 explains why Jesus is our perfect High Priest. No further sacrifices are necessary. Jesus has dealt with our sin once and for all through the sacrifice of his own life, through his perfect obedience to the Father's will.

GOD'S VALUES

Mark 12:38-44

³⁸As he taught them, he said, "Watch out for the teachers of the Law, who like to walk around in their long robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplace, ³⁹who choose the reserved seats in the synagogues and the best places at feasts. ⁴⁰They take advantage of widows and rob them of their homes, and then make a show of saying long prayers. Their punishment will be all the worse!"

⁴¹As Jesus sat near the Temple treasury, he watched the people as they dropped in their money. Many rich men dropped in a lot of money; ⁴²then a poor widow came along and dropped in two little copper coins, worth about a penny. ⁴³He called his disciples together and said to them, "I tell you that this poor widow put more in the offering box than all the others. ⁴⁴For the others put in what they had to spare of their riches; but she, poor as she is, put in all she had—she gave all she had to live on."

Other Readings: 1 Kings 17:10-16; Psalm 146:7-10; Hebrews 9:24-28

LECTIO:

In today's reading Jesus contrasts the behaviour of the religious teachers and the wealthy with a humble widow.

Jesus is watching people dropping their money into the Temple treasury. Many rich people make their gifts but it is the offering of a poor widow that Jesus notices. In monetary terms her gift is tiny, insignificant in comparison to the money given by the wealthy. But in God's eyes her gift is more valuable than anyone else's.

Jesus explained why her gift was so precious to God. The wealthy gave from their surplus; they still had plenty left over to meet their own needs. The widow put in all she had. There was nothing left, nothing for food or anything else. Her gift involved a far greater sacrifice than the gifts given by the rich people.

Mark uses the widow's story to highlight the behaviour of religious teachers. Religious law guided every aspect of Jewish life. These teachers had a lot of power as they taught ordinary people how to live according to the scriptures, especially concerning legal issues from Leviticus and Deuteronomy. They were full of their own importance and abused their power.

Jesus highlights their hypocrisy by describing in a single sentence how they took advantage of widows, robbed them of their inheritance while giving the appearance of piety by saying long prayers.

MEDITATIO:

- What do the actions of the widow and the religious teachers reveal about their attitude towards God? What is the role of faith, love and humility here? What can we learn from this?
- What does this passage teach us about our attitude to giving and God's attitude to our gifts?
- What does this passage teach us about judging by outward appearances?
- How do we guard against becoming hypocrites ourselves, saying we believe something when our actions contradict our words?

ORATIO:

Psalm 146 is essentially about who we put our trust in. The only firm foundation is to put our faith in God. God is concerned for the weak and vulnerable in society and we should play a practical part in helping them.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Another widow features in our first reading 1 Kings 17:10-16. She took good care of Elijah in a time of utter poverty in Palestine. Like the widow in the Gospel she put God first. God provided for the prophet and both the widow and her son.

Hebrews 9:24-28 continues the theme of Christ the High Priest who enters 'the tent', or heaven, offering himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. He gave everything and won everything for us. So we must be generous in our self-giving as he was.

COME, LORD JESUS!

Mark 13:24-32

²⁴“In the days after that time of trouble the sun will grow dark, the moon will no longer shine, ²⁵the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers in space will be driven from their courses. ²⁶Then the Son of Man will appear, coming in the clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷He will send the angels out to the four corners of the earth to gather God’s chosen people from one end of the world to the other.

²⁸“Let the fig tree teach you a lesson. When its branches become green and tender and it starts putting out leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹In the same way, when you see these things happening, you will know that the time is near, ready to begin. ³⁰Remember that all these things will happen before the people now living have all died.

³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³²“No one knows, however, when that day or hour will come—neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son; only the Father knows.

Other Readings: Daniel 12:1-3; Psalm 16:5, 8-11; Hebrews 10:11-14, 18

LECTIO:

When Jesus lived on earth many Jews believed the end of human history had already been decided by God. In today’s reading Jesus provides a little more detail.

After a period of cosmic upheaval, when the sun and moon will no longer shine and stars fall from the heaven, Jesus will appear in the sky in great power and glory. He will send his angels to gather his people together from all over the world. So for Christians the end of history is the beginning of a new experience of life with Jesus. First century Christians eagerly anticipated Jesus’ return and prayed daily, ‘Come, Lord Jesus’ (Revelation 22:20).

We can live in constant hope. On the one hand we long for Jesus to return so we can be with him forever, and on the other we must continue to live faithfully in the here and now of today. We have the future hope that we will be with him and the promise that he may return at any moment to collect us.

Jesus uses the parable of a fig tree and tells us to watch out for the signs which, like the arrival of summer, will be obvious to those who are looking. However no one knows the exact date when Jesus will return – not even Jesus himself. Only God the Father knows.

In the midst of all this upheaval Jesus offers reassurance, ‘Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away’.

MEDITATIO:

- What difference does knowing this world will end make to the way we live our lives?
- How does this affect the decisions we make? Should it affect the way we spend our time and money?
- Jesus says heaven and earth will pass away but his words will remain forever. What does this tell us about the importance of his words? How much time do we spend finding out just what God has revealed to us through Holy Scripture?

ORATIO:

‘Come, Lord Jesus’, is a powerful prayer. Try praying it regularly and expect to find opportunities to serve Jesus cropping up in all sorts of people and places. In this way you will play your part in hastening Jesus’ second coming and extending his kingdom on earth.

CONTEMPLATIO:

In Daniel 12:1-3 we read a vision of the end of time. In it those who have learned to do right and taught others to do the same are saved. Daniel also points to Revelation 21:27 and the Lamb’s book of the living, which lists everyone who will be saved.

Hebrews 10:11-14, 18 compares Jesus’ priesthood to that of Jewish priests. Both Jesus’ priesthood and his sacrifice achieve everything for us. This is why the promises sketched out in Daniel and confirmed in Mark are so secure.

KING OF ALL CREATION

John 18:33-37

³³ Pilate went back into the palace and called Jesus. “Are you the king of the Jews?” he asked him.

³⁴ Jesus answered, “Does this question come from you or have others told you about me?”

³⁵ Pilate replied, “Do you think I am a Jew? It was your own people and the chief priests who handed you over to me. What have you done?”

³⁶ Jesus said, “My kingdom does not belong to this world; if my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish authorities. No, my kingdom does not belong here!”

³⁷ So Pilate asked him, “Are you a king, then?”

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this one purpose, to speak about the truth. Whoever belongs to the truth listens to me.”

Other Readings: Daniel 7:13-14; Psalm 93:1-2, 5; Revelation 1:5-8

LECTIO:

These few verses from the passion narrative in John’s gospel describe the encounter between Jesus and Pilate, the Roman governor of Palestine. The Jewish authorities have finally found something to accuse Jesus of that required the death sentence.

But the Jewish leaders had a problem. Yes, they had decided to kill Jesus. But the Romans had taken away their authority to do this legally. They needed Jesus’ death to be very public so there could be no dispute about it. They wanted to put an end to Jesus and his teaching once and for all.

So somehow they had to get the Romans to execute Jesus. Roman crucifixion was a slow and excruciatingly painful death. It was also humiliating with the victim hanging naked on a cross for all to see.

But Pilate needed a political, not a religious reason to execute Jesus. So he asks Jesus if he is a political agitator. Did he claim to be a king? Jesus merely responds with a question of his own: did Pilate decide this question from his own observation or from hearsay?

Pilate is irritated by Jesus’ comment as it was the Jewish leaders who had handed him over. Jesus ignores Pilate’s second question. He goes back to the question about his kingship to clarify it.

Jesus explains his kingship involves truth, truth that he must preach and teach. Our text finishes at this point. But the conversation continues with Pilate asking what Jesus means by ‘truth’? He never finds out because he doesn’t want to listen and falls into the trap set for him by the Jewish authorities.

MEDITATIO:

- What sort of kingship is Jesus hinting at here? In which kingdom is Jesus king? What does this mean for you personally?
- What is the truth Jesus came into the world to speak about?
- How do you listen to Jesus? How much priority do you give to this in your daily life?

ORATIO:

Psalm 93 pictures God the king in all his majesty and glory. The liturgy applies this psalm to Jesus. Make a list of all God’s kingly attributes. Invite the Holy Spirit to give you a fresh sense of awe and wonder as you read these verses. Use them to worship your amazing king.

CONTEMPLATIO:

To enhance our understanding of Christ’s kingship we have another of Daniel’s visions. We can understand Daniel 7:13-14 to refer to Jesus. It gives us great confidence that Jesus’ authority and Kingdom will last forever.

In Revelation 1:5-8 John tells us more about the kingship of Jesus. What more fitting way to draw this cycle’s lectionary readings to a close than by echoing John’s prayer of praise “To Jesus Christ be the glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”