

“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 C: Year of Luke



Canadian Bible Society

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.*

KNOWING HOW TO WAIT

Luke 21:25-36

²⁵“There will be strange things happening to the sun, the moon, and the stars. On earth whole countries will be in despair, afraid of the roar of the sea and the raging tides. ²⁶People will faint from fear as they wait for what is coming over the whole earth, for the powers in space will be driven from their courses. ²⁷Then the Son of Man will appear, coming in a cloud with great power and glory. ²⁸When these things begin to happen, stand up and raise your heads, because your salvation is near.”

²⁹Then Jesus told them this parable: “Think of the fig tree and all the other trees. ³⁰When you see their leaves beginning to appear, you know that summer is near. ³¹In the same way, when you see these things happening, you will know that the Kingdom of God is about to come. ³²“Remember that all these things will take place before the people now living have all died. ³³Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³⁴“Be careful not to let yourselves become occupied with too much feasting and drinking and with the worries of this life, or that Day may suddenly catch you ³⁵like a trap. For it will come upon all people everywhere on earth. ³⁶Be on watch and pray always that you will have the strength to go safely through all those things that will happen and to stand before the Son of Man.”

*Other Readings: Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14;
1 Thessalonians 3:12 – 4:2*

LECTIO:

Waiting can be difficult, even for the most patient among us. It’s even harder when the circumstances in which we wait are unsettling, but Jesus has some encouragement for us about how to wait.

At first glance, beginning the Advent season with this text might seem a little counter-intuitive. After all, this is the Sunday when we begin to celebrate the arrival of one meek and mild, humbled as a baby in a manger, and this portion from one of the final chapters of Luke portrays an adult Jesus with some rather hard and disturbing things to say. And the apocalyptic text seems to refer to still future events. But we have things to learn about the waiting.

Speaking to people who were very close to their natural surroundings, who knew how to recognize the signs of the changing seasons around them, Jesus

suggests that they also need to learn to interpret the signs of things to come. The difficulties and harsher weather of the winter are never reasons for despair, but indications of the coming spring. The first budding leaves of the apparently barren fig tree bring the promise of spring and summer.

Time and time again, the people of God have waited through difficult times, where despair seemed to be the only solution, but redemption was at hand and the kingdom of God was near. As the church collectively holds its breath through Advent, it remembers the dark days of Exile and Captivity, the harsh words of the prophets and then even the long dark silence before the light shone at Bethlehem.

Remembering how brightly the wait of Advent ended gives us courage to have patience through the difficulties and challenges that still await us before the Messiah’s kingdom is fully realized. The glorious note on which that first Advent ended should help us bear patiently the wait that is ours.

MEDITATIO:

- How patiently do you wait?
- What tough circumstances are made more bearable by you knowing that they are not the end, but that there is something better yet to come?
- When Paul prays for his readers in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, he asks that in preparation for the Lord’s coming, they might grow in their love one for another. How would being this deeply loved by other believers help make the waiting a little easier?

ORATIO:

Verses 4 and 5 from Psalm 25 are an appropriate prayer for someone seeking to wait faithfully for the coming kingdom of God:

“Teach me your ways, O Lord; make them known to me.

Teach me to live according to your truth,

for you are my God, who saves me, I always trust in you.”

CONTEMPLATIO:

In Jeremiah 33:14, the Lord tells his people that “the time is coming when I will fulfill the promise I made to the people...”. Given the way he has fulfilled his promises in the past, reflect on the assurance this provides for the future.

THE TIME IS AT HAND

Luke 3:1-6

¹It was the fifteenth year of the rule of Emperor Tiberius; Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip was ruler of the territory of Iturea and Trachonitis; Lysanias was ruler of Abilene, ²and Annas and Caiaphas were High Priests. At that time the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. ³So John went throughout the whole territory of the Jordan River, preaching, "Turn away from your sins and be baptized, and God will forgive your sins." ⁴As it is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah: "Someone is shouting in the desert: 'Get the road ready for the Lord; make a straight path for him to travel!' ⁵Every valley must be filled up, every hill and mountain leveled off. The winding roads must be made straight, and the rough paths made smooth. ⁶The whole human race will see God's salvation!"

Other Readings: Baruch 5:1-9; Psalm 126; Philippians 1:3-6, 8-11

LECTIO:

During our celebration of Advent, we will be reading a lot of prophetic texts that refer to times and events in what feels like very general terms. In contrast, Luke's precision is almost jarring. Using the standard method of his day to mark the time, Luke refers to the reign of sovereigns and rulers, and pinpoints the exact moment when the ministry of John the Baptist began.

Luke's precision does more than just help us correlate the Scriptural narrative with the surrounding historical events. It helps us to understand the cultural setting of the events Luke will recount. It reminds us that the Messiah came to his people at a time when they were not in control of their own fate. This was a time of occupation, with all the difficulty that went with it.

Luke's precision also helps us to make the connection between the text of Isaiah written long ago and the lives of ordinary men and women of his day. For this is the jarring premise of the Advent, the central reality of the Incarnation, that after centuries of divine promises, the day arrived when the Eternal stepped into the reality of time and space.

MEDITATIO:

- Much of our texts for this week focus on the positive side of the Incarnation, on how good it feels to have the Lord enter into our world and walk among us. But Malachi 3:1-4 also reminds us that this can be a frightening thing. Having one of such great righteousness and purity in our midst might not always be so comforting. Malachi asks a hear-searching question in verse 2. Will you be able to endure the day when he comes? Why do you think the presence of God might be troubling?

ORATIO:

This excerpt from Zechariah's prophetic prayer in Luke 1:68-75 is quite appropriate for us as Christian believers today:

⁶⁸ "Let us praise the Lord, the God of Israel!

He has come to the help of his people and has set them free.

⁶⁹ He has provided for us a mighty Saviour,
a descendant of his servant David.

⁷⁰ He promised through his holy prophets long ago
⁷¹ that he would save us from our enemies,
from the power of all those who hate us.

⁷² He said he would show mercy to our ancestors
and remember his sacred covenant.

⁷³⁻⁷⁴ With a solemn oath to our ancestor Abraham
he promised to rescue us from our enemies
and allow us to serve him without fear,

⁷⁵ so that we might be holy and righteous before him all the days of our life."

CONTEMPLATIO:

In Philippians 1, Paul prays that as they wait for the coming day of the Lord, his readers' lives be "filled with the good qualities which only Jesus Christ can produce." Imagine the way our world would be impacted if each believer were to truly live out the qualities that Jesus was known for.

MOURNING AND JOY, PUNISHMENT AND REWARD

Luke 3:7-18

⁷ Crowds of people came out to John to be baptized by him. “You snakes!” he said to them. “Who told you that you could escape from the punishment God is about to send? ⁸ Do those things that will show that you have turned from your sins. And don’t start saying among yourselves that Abraham is your ancestor. I tell you that God can take these rocks and make descendants for Abraham! ⁹ The ax is ready to cut down the trees at the roots; every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire.” ¹⁰ The people asked him, “What are we to do, then?” ¹¹ He answered, “Whoever has two shirts must give one to the man who has none, and whoever has food must share it.” ¹² Some tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what are we to do?” ¹³ “Don’t collect more than is legal,” he told them. ¹⁴ Some soldiers also asked him, “What about us? What are we to do?” He said to them, “Don’t take money from anyone by force or accuse anyone falsely. Be content with your pay.” ¹⁵ People’s hopes began to rise, and they began to wonder whether John perhaps might be the Messiah. ¹⁶ So John said to all of them, “I baptize you with water, but someone is coming who is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to untie his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ He has his winnowing shovel with him, to thresh out all the grain and gather the wheat into his barn; but he will burn the chaff in a fire that never goes out.” ¹⁸ In many different ways John preached the Good News to the people and urged them to change their ways.

Other Readings: Zephaniah 3:14-18; Isaiah 12:2-6; Philippians 4:4-7

LECTIO:

Several of our texts have spoken about the rejoicing at the Lord’s coming that is central to our celebration of Advent, but the preaching of John the Baptist echoes some of the trepidation we saw in the Malachi text last week. The approach of a just and righteous God seems to require certain changes in our behaviour. John even challenges the religiously smug who are content to rest on their family ties – apparently even they are in for a surprise! It is the ordinary working people who respond the most appropriately to John’s preaching. While the people of high social status often reject calls for change in their behaviour that might endanger their

standing, the ordinary people who feel that they have less to lose, and perhaps feel their need for God more keenly, respond to the desert prophet’s preaching more quickly. “What are we to do?” they ask.

John’s response is striking. He doesn’t call them to join him on some spiritual pilgrimage, or to leave their occupations to become foreign missionaries, or to enter a religious order. Some may well be called by God to do any of these things, but they seem to be the exception. John’s instructions to these sincere ordinary working people is to live their daily lives with love for others, and to do the work they are given in honourable ways.

And John has a clear sense of the task to which he is called. He makes it clear that he is not The One, but merely the one preparing the way. There is a greater one yet to come!

MEDITATIO:

- When we consider our encounter with God and the things that might need to change in our lives as that happens, typically, we immediately think of “spiritual” things. I should pray more. I should read the Bible more often, be less shy about sharing the Good News... But John the Baptist addresses several people about what appear to be the details of the way they practice their profession. If John were to speak to you, whether you are an accountant, a retail clerk, a lawyer, a homemaker... what advice do you think he might have for you about doing your job in a way that pleases God?

ORATIO:

Include this paraphrase of two of the verses from our Isaiah text in your prayers this week (Isaiah 12:2-3):

God you are my saviour, I will trust you and not be afraid.
You give me power and strength; You are my saviour.
As fresh water brings joy to the thirsty,
So your people rejoice when you save them.

CONTEMPLATIO:

The three additional texts for this week (Zephaniah 3:14-18, Isaiah 12:2-6, Philippians 4:4-7) all have peace as a theme, a peace linked to the security we find in the presence of God and the redemption he brings. As you read the passages, thank God for the peace he brings into your heart, in spite of often difficult situations.

REJOICING WITH MARY

Luke 1:39-55

³⁹ Soon afterward Mary got ready and hurried off to a town in the hill country of Judea. ⁴⁰ She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby moved within her. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and said in a loud voice, "You are the most blessed of all women, and blessed is the child you will bear!" ⁴³ Why should this great thing happen to me, that my Lord's mother comes to visit me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard your greeting, the baby within me jumped with gladness. ⁴⁵ How happy you are to believe that the Lord's message to you will come true!"

⁴⁶ Mary said, "My heart praises the Lord; ⁴⁷ my soul is glad because of God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has remembered me, his lowly servant! From now on all people will call me happy, ⁴⁹ because of the great things the Mighty God has done for me. His name is holy; ⁵⁰ from one generation to another he shows mercy to those who honor him. ⁵¹ He has stretched out his mighty arm and scattered the proud with all their plans. ⁵² He has brought down mighty kings from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly. ⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away with empty hands. ⁵⁴ He has kept the promise he made to our ancestors, and has come to the help of his servant Israel. ⁵⁵ He has remembered to show mercy to Abraham and to all his descendants forever!"

Other Readings: Micah 5:1-4; Psalm 80:1-2, 14-15, 17-18; Hebrews 10:5-10

LECTIO:

Time seems to play a role in all of our texts this week.

Psalm 80 has a haunting refrain (vv. 3, 7, 19) asking God to bring his people back, showing them mercy that they might be saved. Verse 4 asks God "how much longer," echoing the theme of so many of the Messianic prophets.

Micah's prophecy of the coming saviour provides the place of his birth and zeroes in on the time, speaking of the day when a woman will give birth to a special child.

The portion from Hebrews gives us a glimpse of a conversation between Christ and the Father, just before the Incarnation.

And in Luke, as the two pregnant cousins meet, they are both very conscious of time, but not only as it relates to their pregnancy. Mary glimpses back at her ancestors who longed for this day of deliverance and redemption, and she looks forward to the future generations. The two women also seem to be aware of the uniqueness of the time in which they were living. "From now on", Mary prays in the prayer the church

still recites as the Magnificat. This was a turning point in history. The Ancient of Days, was about to enter history and he was about to do it in the humility of human flesh. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin, and yet for these nine months, the great Eternal One would know the greatest of limitations.

MEDITATIO:

- While there have been attempts to soften the implication by replacing the BC and AD in our dating system with the more widely acceptable BCE (before the common era), we continue to look back at Christ's birth as that unique transitional point in time where everything changed. Are there ways in our own lives as Christians, that we can affirm the coming of Christ as the central event of our own history?
- Some feel a little uncomfortable thinking about the human aspects of the developing Christmas story as it talks about conception, pregnancy, babies kicking in the womb, giving birth, swaddling clothes.... As one might expect, among the four evangelists it is Luke, a physician according to tradition, who offers the most details about Jesus' birth, life and death. Why do you think the text seems to insist on these tangible physical details?

ORATIO:

Through the liturgy of the coming weeks, you will no doubt have several opportunities to pray the Magnificat with Mary, both at home and at church. The challenge with prayers we know so well is that we tend to recite them with too little thought to the actual words. Try to find the words in a translation of the Bible you are a little less familiar with to see if that wording sparks new thoughts for you. Write out the words on an index card and carry it with you in the coming weeks, taking the time to look at them again and to pray through them during quiet moments of the day when you might be out of your normal setting.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Psalm 80 is full of expectant appeals for the Lord's mercy. In contrast, Mary's prayer looks back at God's past mercy, it extols him for what he was in the process of doing, and it affirms that future generations would look back in amazement at the grace and mercy she was shown. As you think of the details of God's interventions in your own life, thank him for the moments of mercy and grace that you have lived.

GOD HAS REVEALED HIS GRACE

Luke 2:1-20

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

⁴ Joseph 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. ⁵ He went to register with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant, ⁶ and while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. ⁷ She 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.

⁸ There were some shepherds in that part of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid, ¹⁰ but 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. ¹¹ This very day in David’s town your Savior was born – Christ the Lord! ¹² And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly 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!

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them back into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us.” 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.”

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

LECTIO:

Luke once again begins with specific details that anchor our story in time and space. This is no longer just wishful thinking. Our text from Isaiah has a beautiful

ring to it, but what good are beautiful words if they are just empty and distant promises? But on this night, on the hills outside Bethlehem, things have gone a step beyond the prophecies of old. The message God has for the shepherds this night is no longer just “Wait and see.” On this night he says “Come and see!”

The shepherds tremble in fear when they first see the angels. No doubt they have heard many stories from their ancestors about times when angels appeared with grim news or with a tough job to do. Between their occupation and the other troubles affecting their people, they really aren’t expecting good news. And if it were good news, why would it come to them?

But the shepherds hear them out, heed the angels’ instructions and find what they were promised. While the prophets spoke of things that would happen one day, the angels’ message to the shepherds is “This very day!” and indeed, moments after they hear the news, the shepherds are kneeling before the Christ child.

And not only is the message immediate, but it’s for everyone. Nobody is excluded. So the shepherds take their cues from the angels, repeating the Gospel “good news” proclamation to everyone who will listen, and likely even to some who won’t!

MEDITATIO:

- Imagine the immediacy, almost a sense of urgency that filled the angels’ message, and the rush of the shepherds as they make their way to the manger. How fast do you think the shepherds went to the manger?
- Psalm 96:2 urges us to “proclaim every day the good news that he has saved us.” Are you as prompt and as committed as the angels and the shepherds were to proclaim the Good News? What holds you back?

ORATIO:

As we pray on this Christmas Day, we could join the angels praising: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!”

CONTEMPLATIO:

The beginning of our text in Titus is wonderfully descriptive of that first Christmas: “For God has revealed his grace for the salvation of all people...” What an appropriate echo of the joy of the shepherds! But the text suggests that the grace revealed on that first Christmas morning demands a response: godly lives that will bring further glory to the one the angels worshipped. May our Christmas joy lead to godly lives!

GROWING IN WISDOM

Luke 2:41-52

⁴¹ Every year the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. ⁴² When Jesus was twelve years old, they went to the festival as usual. ⁴³ When the festival was over, they started back home, but the boy Jesus stayed in Jerusalem. His parents did not know this; ⁴⁴ they thought that he was with the group, so they traveled a whole day and then started looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ They did not find him, so they went back to Jerusalem looking for him. ⁴⁶ On the third day they found him in the Temple, sitting with the Jewish teachers, listening to them and asking questions. ⁴⁷ All who heard him were amazed at his intelligent answers. ⁴⁸ His parents were astonished when they saw him, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been terribly worried trying to find you." ⁴⁹ He answered them, "Why did you have to look for me? Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand his answer. ⁵¹ So Jesus went back with them to Nazareth, where he was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² Jesus grew both in body and in wisdom, gaining favor with God and people.

Other Readings: 1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28; Psalm 84:3-6, 9-10; 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24

LECTIO:

While several popular fiction writers have tried to imaginatively fill in what Jesus' childhood and adolescence may have been like, we are actually told very little in the biblical canon. In fact all we have is this text, and a few other hints we can pick up through later discussions in the Gospels about his family life. But this silence in itself makes several important points about Jesus.

First, it seems that as Jesus grew up, the fullness of his humanity made him entirely fit in in most respects. There were diapers to change. Painful nights spent teething. Learning to eat solid food. In most of those respects, Jesus' childhood seems to have been a normal one. This fits with what we are told about Jesus being made like us in every way so that he might understand our struggles and have compassion on our weaknesses.

Secondly, we note from the tone of this text that while he clearly had a spiritual mission – one that he was clearly aware of and committed to even from childhood – he nevertheless balanced that mission with perfect obedience to his parents. As in all other areas of his earthly life, Jesus was sinless in his relationships with his family. For most of us, our families would be the ones who can most quickly identify our shortcomings. In some cases those heavily involved in ministry use their spiritual

mission as a reason to shortchange their family responsibilities, but Jesus didn't. In spite of his high and unique calling, Jesus was flawless in his responsibilities to his family. Tradition even suggests that one of the reasons Jesus began his ministry as late as he did was his ongoing financial care for his mother after Joseph had died.

We notice thirdly that these quiet years of obscurity, through his adolescence and early adulthood, were years of training and preparation. Aside from learning a trade and earning a living, it seems that Jesus spent much time studying the Scriptures, even as a child. It is not uncommon for God to prepare his servants for public ministry by taking them through years of quiet training in relative obscurity. These are never wasted years. They bring the strength and depth to later ministry.

MEDITATIO:

- Have you ever been tempted to shortchange your responsibility to family and loved ones for the sake of ministry or public service?
- Can you recall a period in your life when you felt that you were working in the shadows or wasting your time, only to realize later that God had been preparing you for service?
- This text emphasizes again the very humanness of Jesus. How are you encouraged today by the fact that he experienced hunger, thirst, fatigue, loneliness and all of these other emotions and experiences common to us?
- What strikes you about the parallel between Jesus as a child and the little Samuel in the temple in our text from 1 Samuel?

ORATIO:

We might capture something of Jesus' joy at being in his Father's house by praying the words of Psalm 84:2-9.

Today's passage focuses on family relationships with both our heavenly Father and our human family. Give thanks to God that you too are his child. Take time to pray for members of your church and of your own family.

CONTEMPLATIO:

The verses in 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24 contain some amazing truths. Allow the wonder of a loving God who calls you his child to fill you.

Consider God's promise that we can live in union with him if we obey him.

THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA

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; 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. 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:

Many of the Psalms commend 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 are, God will give you all that he has for his heirs.'

BADLY KEPT SECRETS

Matthew 2:1-12

¹ Jesus 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 ² and 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."

³ When King Herod heard about this, he was very upset, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. ⁴ He 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."

⁷ So Herod called the visitors from the east to a secret meeting and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ Then 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."

⁹⁻¹⁰ And 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. ¹¹ They 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.

¹² Then 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; Psalms 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12

LECTIO:

In contrast to the shepherds who, in one sense, were almost accidental visitors, there is a sense of intentionality about the visit of the Magi. Many attempts have been made to explain what exactly brought them to Jerusalem. But suffice it to say, the One who wanted the nearby shepherds to come to the manger, also wanted these gentile kings from a foreign land to come and pay homage.

There are many theories about the astronomical phenomenon which drew the wise men to Jerusalem. Whatever the reason may have been, it required diligent searching and travelling a long distance on their part. In great contrast, the chief priests and teachers of the Law seemed to know exactly what to expect, and yet they missed it. This often seems to be the case: While God doesn't hide, he can be easy to miss for those who are not looking.

The worship of the foreign kings, together with the precious treasures they offer, becomes only the touchstone of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about the great valuable treasure the nations of the world will eventually find in Jerusalem's newborn king.

The relative nonchalance of those who were so close and yet didn't care, compared with the determination of those who came from so far to offer gifts of such great price, challenges us about the care and effort we bring to our worship of the Christ.

MEDITATIO:

- What do you think the star of the Magi may have looked like?
- Would you have travelled this far and gone through this much trouble with this little information to go on?
- What do you make of the gifts which the Magi offered? Why these gifts in particular?

ORATIO:

Verses 11 to 14 of Psalm 72 form a fitting prayer for the newborn king. Address them to him as a prayer:

All kings will bow down before you; all nations will serve you.
You rescue the poor who call to you, and those who are needy and neglected.
You have pity on the weak and poor; you save the lives of those in need.
You rescue them from oppression and violence; their lives are precious to you.

CONTEMPLATIO:

The Gospels tell us stories of others who did outlandish things in worship, including one woman who spent more than a year's salary to buy perfume with which to anoint Jesus. What is the most outlandish thing you have ever done in worship to God? How did it make you feel? Would you do it again?

THE RIGHT THING TO DO

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

¹⁵ People's hopes began to rise, and they began to wonder whether John perhaps might be the Messiah. ¹⁶ So John said to all of them, "I baptize you with water, but someone is coming who is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to untie his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ He has his winnowing shovel with him, to thresh out all the grain and gather the wheat into his barn; but he will burn the chaff in a fire that never goes out."

²¹ After all the people had been baptized, Jesus also was baptized. While he was praying, heaven was opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit came down upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you."

*Other Readings: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; Psalm 104:1-4, 24-25, 27-30;
Titus 2:11-14, 3:4-7*



LECTIO:

Christian scholars over the centuries have debated about why it was necessary for Jesus to be baptized. According to the words of John the Baptist, both here in Luke and in other Gospels, his was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, two things which Jesus certainly didn't need. And yet Jesus came to John to be baptized.

Some have suggested that for Jesus, this baptism simply had a different significance, marking out the beginning of his public ministry.

Others emphasize the fact that it was important for Jesus to relate to our humanity in every way so that he might be better able to meet our needs and to fulfill our salvation. His baptism therefore becomes a kind of association with us and with our needs. As Jesus connects with us more fully through his baptism, we publicly become participants in his redemptive work on our behalf.

Many have suggested that Jesus' decision to be baptized is simply one more step of obedience, one more example of Jesus doing the right thing, fulfilling all that needed to be done. This would certainly explain the Father's public expression of appreciation and approval as soon as the baptism was complete.

MEDITATIO:

- This passage in Luke is often used to reinforce the Christian teaching about the Trinity. Can you see why?
- How does the baptism of Jesus help you reflect on your own baptism?

ORATIO:

Our other readings for today also speak about the voice of God being heard, and Isaiah reminds a worried and frightened people that God not only knows their name but has used it to call them. Thank God that he knows your name, and that he has called you. Ask him to help you listen to his voice as Jesus did so well.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Knowing how committed he was to doing his Father's will, how must Jesus have felt when he heard his Father's audible approval? Is this kind of approval reserved only for Jesus, or is it something we too can experience?

REVEALING HIS GLORY

John 2:1-11

¹Two days later there was a wedding in the town of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ²and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine had given out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They are out of wine." ⁴"You must not tell me what to do," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." ⁵Jesus' mother then told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶The Jews have rules about ritual washing, and for this purpose six stone water jars were there, each one large enough to hold between twenty and thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to the servants, "Fill these jars with water." They filled them to the brim, ⁸and then he told them, "Now draw some water out and take it to the man in charge of the feast." They took him the water, ⁹which now had turned into wine, and he tasted it. He did not know where this wine had come from (but, of course, the servants who had drawn out the water knew); so he called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, "Everyone else serves the best wine first, and after the guests have drunk a lot, he serves the ordinary wine. But you have kept the best wine until now!" ¹¹Jesus performed this first miracle in Cana in Galilee; there he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

Other Readings: Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 96:1-3, 7-10; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

LECTIO:

Jesus' presence at the wedding in Cana affirms his approval of this sacred rite, and it becomes the scene of his first public miracle, the beginning of the revelation of his glory.

The miracles of Jesus in the Gospels always seem to be a little understated. Supposed miracle workers at other times have often liked to play for the cameras, working for their own benefit what often turn out to be "miracles" of dubious quality with questionable short-lived results. In contrast, Jesus performs this miracle and many others, in very discreet ways. Indeed it was done so quietly that compliments about the quality of the wine are addressed to the bridegroom and not to him. Jesus' intervention had apparently gone intentionally unnoticed, at least by everyone but those who drew the water and the nearby disciples for whom the incident seems to have sparked some level of faith.

As for the quality of the wine, is there any wonder that the host of the feast found it to be so good? Jesus had had a hand in creation after all. He sent the rain. He made the grapes. He oversaw the normal fermentation process. In one sense, what Jesus did here was merely a quickened shortcut from the bounty of creation.

MEDITATIO:

- Some have noted that Jesus' words to his mother sound a little harsh, would you agree? How would you explain his words?
- For some of his critics, making this wine might help to further tarnish Jesus' image as a drunkard and a loose living friend of sinners. Why do you suppose Jesus took that risk?

ORATIO:

Psalm 96 is a wonderful song of praise. Why not join the psalmist and make his words part of your daily prayer this week,
'Proclaim every day the good news that he has saved us.'

CONTEMPLATIO:

This week's text from 1 Corinthians 12 speaks about the way we are each called to use our gift for the common good. As Jesus used his gift to brighten the wedding at Cana, are there opportunities where you might use your own gifts to cheer and help those around you in the body of Christ?

LIBERTY PROCLAIMED

Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

¹Dear Theophilus:

Many people have done their best to write a report of the things that have taken place among us. ²They wrote what we have been told by those who saw these things from the beginning and who proclaimed the message. ³And so, Your Excellency, because I have carefully studied all these matters from their beginning, I thought it would be good to write an orderly account for you. ⁴I do this so that you will know the full truth about everything which you have been taught.

¹⁴Then Jesus returned to Galilee, and the power of the Holy Spirit was with him. The news about him spread throughout all that territory. ¹⁵He taught in the synagogues and was praised by everyone.

¹⁶Then Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath he went as usual to the synagogue. He stood up to read the Scriptures ¹⁷and was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it is written,

¹⁸“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free the oppressed

¹⁹and announce that the time has come
when the Lord will save his people.”

²⁰Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. All the people in the synagogue had their eyes fixed on him, ²¹as he said to them, “This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read.”

Other Readings: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

LECTIO:

Two extracts from the Gospel of Luke are presented together today. The first is an introduction to the second.

In Chapter 1 Luke is keen to show the quality and reliability of his information. Firstly he has spoken to eyewitnesses of the events he describes, and secondly he has done extensive research. So his report is not the sort of ‘embroidered news’

you can hear in the market or read in newspapers. The letter is addressed to Theophilus, which means ‘God’s friend’.

Jesus’ visit to the synagogue in Nazareth is the focus of Chapter 4. While Isaiah is chosen for him, it appears Jesus selects these specific verses. He reads them to the gathered community.

Jesus then teaches on the meaning of these words. He tells them that Isaiah’s prophecy, written hundreds of years ago, ‘has come true today!’ The implication is that Jesus himself is the fulfilment of these words. Local man Jesus now comes with the good news for the poor, freedom to captives, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed. We are not told whether Jesus is speaking literally or metaphorically here.

But how did this community feel when Jesus spoke out that Sabbath morning? What happened in their hearts and minds? Did Jesus’ words make any sense?

While this event took place two thousand years ago the truth of God’s Word is everlasting. So reading of Scripture should never be just a mere cultural event. Whenever the Scriptures are proclaimed they are alive, active and always full of power.

MEDITATIO:

- What do you think the people listening to Jesus would have understood when he said, ‘This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read.’?
- How well do you think these verses from Isaiah sum up Jesus’ ministry on earth? In what ways did Jesus fulfil this prophecy?
- Consider the good news of the Gospel. Give thanks for all the ways it is true for you personally.

ORATIO:

Pray that in your church everyone will play their part so the whole church functions healthily, as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12:12-30.

Pray about your role in this. Ask God to show you if there are things you should be doing or allowing others to do.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Reflect on Nehemiah 8:10:

‘The joy that the Lord gives you will make you strong.’

THE HARD HOMETOWN CROWD

Luke 4:21-30

²¹ He said to them, “This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read.”

²² They were all well impressed with him and marveled at the eloquent words that he spoke. They said, “Isn’t he the son of Joseph?”

²³ He said to them, “I am sure that you will quote this proverb to me, ‘Doctor, heal yourself.’ You will also tell me to do here in my hometown the same things you heard were done in Capernaum. ²⁴ I tell you this,” Jesus added, “prophets are never welcomed in their hometown. ²⁵ Listen to me: it is true that there were many widows in Israel during the time of Elijah, when there was no rain for three and a half years and a severe famine spread throughout the whole land. ²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to anyone in Israel, but only to a widow living in Zarephath in the territory of Sidon. ²⁷ And there were many people suffering from a dreaded skin disease who lived in Israel during the time of the prophet Elisha; yet not one of them was healed, but only Naaman the Syrian.”

²⁸ When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were filled with anger. ²⁹ They rose up, dragged Jesus out of town, and took him to the top of the hill on which their town was built. They meant to throw him over the cliff, ³⁰ but he walked through the middle of the crowd and went his way.

*Other Readings: Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19; Psalm 71:5-8, 15, 17, 19;
1 Corinthians 12:31 - 13:13*

LECTIO:

This is one of several moments in the Gospel of Luke where Jesus seems to be badly in need of a little public relations advice. His first public discourse at the synagogue in his hometown goes off without a hitch and at first everybody is really impressed. But Jesus realizes that his message doesn’t seem to have registered. By claiming that the Isaiah text he read was fulfilled in their hearing, Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah, essentially making a claim to divinity. So in response to their adulation, he pushed the issue.

This time, his comments about his people’s typically hard hearts and unwillingness to listen to the prophets, cut them to the quick. The insinuation that outsiders or gentiles are more spiritually responsive is particularly offensive to

them. The result is yet one more attempt to kill Jesus. Herod didn’t succeed when Jesus’ earthly life began, and the attempts of his hometown folks at the start of his ministry also fail.

While Jesus does appear to be intentionally provocative at times, he is clearly not interested in shallow followers who are only in as long as they like what they hear. The gospel message, with its insistence on our own helplessness and our dire need for help, is not complimentary to the human ego. Clear gospel presentations often result in disapproval and even anger and open hostility.

MEDITATIO:

- What would have happened if Jesus hadn’t pressed the issue, letting the adulation of the crowd linger, instead of pushing with harder comments?

ORATIO:

The first six verses of Psalm 71 provide a fitting prayer of praise for those who, like Jesus, meet adversity because of the ministry they are called to:

Lord, I have come to you for protection;
never let me be defeated!
Because you are righteous, help me and rescue me.
Listen to me and save me!
Be my secure shelter and a strong fortress to protect me;
you are my refuge and defense.
My God, rescue me from wicked people,
from the power of cruel and evil people.
Sovereign Lord, I put my hope in you;
I have trusted in you since I was young.
I have relied on you all my life;
you have protected me since the day I was born.
I will always praise you.

CONTEMPLATIO:

What are the moments in your life when you find it the hardest to speak out for the truth, even when it is unpopular and might result in persecution and misunderstanding?

FISHERS OF MEN

Luke 5:1-11

¹ One day Jesus was standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret while the people pushed their way up to him to listen to the word of God. ² He saw two boats pulled up on the beach; the fishermen had left them and were washing the nets. ³ Jesus got into one of the boats—it belonged to Simon—and asked him to push off a little from the shore. Jesus sat in the boat and taught the crowd.

⁴ When he finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Push the boat out further to the deep water, and you and your partners let down your nets for a catch.”

⁵ “Master,” Simon answered, “we worked hard all night long and caught nothing. But if you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶ They let them down and caught such a large number of fish that the nets were about to break. ⁷ So they motioned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats so full of fish that the boats were about to sink. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw what had happened, he fell on his knees before Jesus and said, “Go away from me, Lord! I am a sinful man!”

⁹ He and the others with him were all amazed at the large number of fish they had caught. ¹⁰ The same was true of Simon’s partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”

¹¹ They pulled the boats up on the beach, left everything, and followed Jesus.

Other Readings: Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 138:1-5, 7-8; 1 Corinthians 15.1-11

LECTIO:

This is such a well known story that we can read it and yet not get to the heart of this miraculous event. Luke invites us to become witnesses to the miracle and of the call of the first three disciples into service.

Crowds were already following Jesus to listen to him teaching on the word of God. What did they see in Jesus – was it something more than a simple preacher? Or did they recognize God’s representative?

When Simon witnesses the miraculous catch of fish he sees Jesus in a new light. He acknowledges Jesus as ‘Lord’ (verse 8) and feels the burden of his sinfulness before Jesus. He immediately falls to his knees and asks Jesus to leave him. The prophet Isaiah reacted in a similar way when he saw a vision of God (see Isaiah 6).

God seems to give both men impossible missions. Jesus tells Simon not to be afraid and then tells him he has a new job – catching people, not fish! We are not given any more details at this stage but Luke hints it is Jesus who will turn these humble fishermen into ‘catchers of people’.

Simon and the other new disciples are captivated by Jesus and leave with him. Implicit in what Jesus has said is the need for the disciples to be with Jesus all the time to fulfil their vocation. Nets, boats, livelihood, homes and families are all left behind as the disciples set off with Jesus for a totally new life.



MEDITATIO:

- What does Simon’s initial reaction to this miracle reveal about who he thought Jesus was?
- Have you ever experienced the burden of your sinfulness? How do you think God wants us to respond to him at this time? What can we learn from Simon’s response?
- To become a ‘catcher of people’ Simon, James and John had to spend time with Jesus and follow him. What does this mean for us today? Is every Christian called to be ‘a catcher of people’? If so how can we draw practical lessons from Jesus in the time we spend with him?



ORATIO:

Give thanks that we can know forgiveness of our sins because of Jesus’ death and resurrection. 1 John 1:9 gives us the assurance that ‘if we confess our sins to God... he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing.’ Ask God to help you forget your own frailties and to give you the faith and courage to follow Jesus and tell others about him.



CONTEMPLATIO:

Contemplate God’s pure holiness. Join the seraphim in declaring God’s holiness and glory.

PRIORITIES

Luke 6.17, 20-26

¹⁷ When Jesus had come down from the hill with the apostles, he stood on a level place with a large number of his disciples. A large crowd of people was there from all over Judea and from Jerusalem and from the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon.

²⁰ Jesus looked at his disciples and said,
“Happy are you poor;
the Kingdom of God is yours!

²¹ Happy are you who are hungry now;
you will be filled!

Happy are you who weep now;
you will laugh!

²² “Happy are you when people hate you, reject you, insult you, and say that you are evil, all because of the Son of Man! ²³ Be glad when that happens, and dance for joy, because a great reward is kept for you in heaven. For their ancestors did the very same things to the prophets.

²⁴ “But how terrible for you who are rich now;
you have had your easy life!

²⁵ How terrible for you who are full now;
you will go hungry!

How terrible for you who laugh now;
you will mourn and weep!

²⁶ “How terrible when all people speak well of you; their ancestors said the very same things about the false prophets.”

Other readings: Jeremiah 17:5-8 ; Psalm 1:1-4, 6 ; 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20

LECTIO

Matthew and Luke, in their Gospels, present the ethical teachings of Jesus. But there are a number of differences between their accounts. Matthew records Jesus’s teaching on “true happiness” in the form of nine statements – the Beatitudes (Matthew 5: 3-12)

Luke uses contrasts to shed light on the salient points, and reduces the number of blessings from nine to four.

Now let’s get to the heart of Jesus’s teaching. Jesus said that the four situations of poverty, hunger, sadness, and rejection become sources of blessing. He presents a radically new perspective on life and offers hope and consolation to all who find themselves in these situations. Our human nature prompts us to avoid them, but Jesus warns that it is precisely their opposite – abundance, gluttony, light joy, and an apparent good reputation – that can be our ruin.

Perhaps the truth is written so clearly that we do not see it. These four moments of difficulty can lead us to total dependence on God, where we are fully focused on him. In times of plenty, on the other hand, it is all too easy to think that the source of our happiness lies in ourselves and in our possessions rather than in a life that pleases God. Jesus shows clearly that God himself is the only guarantee of happiness and security

MEDITATIO

- What is your reaction to Jesus’ teaching in this passage? Which part stands out most?
- Reflect on Matthew 6.33, “Be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and with what he requires of you”. What should we do to ensure that our first priority, in all circumstances, would always be serving God and doing what he asks of us?
- Think of a tree planted by the water, as described by Jeremiah 17 and Psalm 1. How can you be rooted in God?

ORATIO

Pray with the response of today: “Happy are those who trust the Lord” (Psalm 40.5) Ask the Holy Spirit to show you the areas of your life in which you need to put more trust in God or to change your priorities.

To strengthen your trust, start writing in a prayer journal. Write down your prayers for each day, then take a moment every week to add notes next to each prayer as they are answered. This is a great way to increase your faith and trust in God.

CONTEMPLATIO

Consider the example Jesus sets for us. His only thought was to listen to his Father and realize his plans.

Think of a few examples of God’s faithfulness towards people in the Bible. Then think of the many times God has shown faithfulness towards you.

WALK IN LOVE

Luke 6:27-38

²⁷ But I tell you who hear me: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, and pray for those who ill-treat you. ²⁹ If anyone hits you on one cheek, let him hit the other one too; if someone takes your coat, let him have your shirt as well. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you for something, and when someone takes what is yours, do not ask for it back. ³¹ Do for others just what you want them to do for you.

³² If you love only the people who love you, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners love those who love them! ³³ And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners do that! ³⁴ And if you lend only to those from whom you hope to get it back, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount! ³⁵ No! Love your enemies and do good to them; lend and expect nothing back. You will then have a great reward, and you will be children of the Most High God. For he is good to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷ Do not judge others, and God will not judge you; do not condemn others, and God will not condemn you; forgive others, and God will forgive you. ³⁸ Give to others, and God will give to you. Indeed, you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands — all that you can hold. The measure you use for others is the one that God will use for you.

*Other Readings: Genesis 45:3-11, 15; Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40;
1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50*

LECTIO

This passage opens with Jesus highlighting some Old Testament teaching (Exodus 21:12-27 and its parallel texts in Leviticus). Jesus wants to contrast the guidelines set out in the Law, or the Torah, with a new attitude and way of behaving.

The Law established the level of compensation equal to the damage done — an eye for an eye and so on. Jesus points his disciples to a new way of looking at things where generosity is the standard.

For this kind of behaviour, which goes well beyond human expectations, Jesus takes God as the model. We have to imitate God, who is perfect. God does not distinguish between good and bad people when he lavishes his blessings on mankind. In this God shows his perfection.

The Torah demands God's people to be holy and perfect just as God is. In the Gospel reading, God calls for his people to sort out disputes, not to hold grudges and to love others as themselves. What a different place this world would be if we lived like that. Well, this is indeed the challenge that Jesus places before us: follow my example.

MEDITATIO:

- Who influences your behaviour towards others, God or 'the world'?
- What lessons can we learn from this passage about the values of the kingdom? In what practical ways can we start living the kingdom way now?
- Have you been in a situation, perhaps even in church, where no one speaks to you? Jesus' words challenge us to be friendly to others. Look out for opportunities to speak a friendly word to people this week.

ORATIO:

'Praise the Lord, my soul, and do not forget how kind he is.
He forgives all my sins...'
'He does not punish us as we deserve or repay us
according to our sins and wrongs' Psalm 103:2-3, 10

Thank God for the mercy and grace he has shown you. If there is someone you need to forgive or are finding it hard to love, ask God to help you. Remembering God's forgiveness for you may help.

The counterpart of today's passage (Matthew 5) specifically instructs us to pray for people who persecute us. Maybe someone has been unkind or hurtful to you. Bring them before the Lord and ask God how you can pray for them.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Consider the ways in which Jesus gives us an example of loving his neighbour as himself and 'turning the other cheek'.

DOING GOOD, BUT DOING IT WELL

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

¹“Make certain you do not perform your religious duties in public so that people will see what you do. If you do these things publicly, you will not have any reward from your Father in heaven. ²“So when you give something to a needy person, do not make a big show of it, as the hypocrites do in the houses of worship and on the streets. They do it so that people will praise them. I assure you, they have already been paid in full. ³But when you help a needy person, do it in such a way that even your closest friend will not know about it. ⁴Then it will be a private matter. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you.

⁵“When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites! They love to stand up and pray in the houses of worship and on the street corners, so that everyone will see them. I assure you, they have already been paid in full. ⁶But when you pray, go to your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you...

¹⁶“And when you fast, do not put on a sad face as the hypocrites do. They neglect their appearance so that everyone will see that they are fasting. I assure you, they have already been paid in full. ¹⁷When you go without food, wash your face and comb your hair, ¹⁸so that others cannot know that you are fasting—only your Father, who is unseen, will know. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you.

¹⁹“Do not store up riches for yourselves here on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and robbers break in and steal. ²⁰Instead, store up riches for yourselves in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and robbers cannot break in and steal. ²¹For your heart will always be where your riches are.

Other Readings: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17; Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 51:1-17; 2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10



1 LECTIO:

As Ash Wednesday begins our process into Lent, we are conscious that Lent is very different from Advent. The joyous crowning moment of the patient process of Advent was the birth of the Christ Child in the manger; the culmination of these coming 40 days will see him mocked, beaten and killed. It is a far more somber process.

As we walk this difficult road with Christ, we will be startled to see him not only obediently doing his Father’s will, but far more importantly, doing it with integrity and humility of heart.

During Lent, our Christian tradition will focus our attention on acts of piety and contrition. There will be prayer, readings, almsgiving, ... Sadly, even these spiritual exercises can be done for the wrong reasons, with selfish motives.

2 MEDITATIO:

- As you read Christ’s instructions about prayer and generosity, can you remember moments in your life when you simply went through empty spiritual exercises just to check off the boxes on a to-do list?
- What steps might we take together as a community of believers to keep our spiritual walk through Lent real and relevant?

3 ORATIO:

The words of Psalm 51 are always a most appropriate portion of our Lenten process. Take a few minutes to read them again, writing down bits that you find particularly helpful as you invite Christ to search your heart during the coming weeks.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

While Jesus speaks to us about the way our prayers and giving impact others, there are moments when the generosity and prayers of others impact us. Think of a moment in your life when you have been on the receiving end of someone’s kindness, whether through their prayers or their generosity. Let that memory encourage you to show kindness to someone else during this Lenten season.

TRIED AND TRUE

Luke 4:1-13

¹ Jesus returned from the Jordan full of the Holy Spirit and was led by the Spirit into the desert, ² where he was tempted by the Devil for forty days. In all that time he ate nothing, so that he was hungry when it was over.

³ The Devil said to him, "If you are God's Son, order this stone to turn into bread."

⁴ But Jesus answered, "The scripture says, 'Human beings cannot live on bread alone.'"

⁵ Then the Devil took him up and showed him in a second all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ "I will give you all this power and all this wealth," the Devil told him. "It has all been handed over to me, and I can give it to anyone I choose. ⁷ All this will be yours, then, if you worship me."

⁸ Jesus answered, "The scripture says, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him!'"

⁹ Then the Devil took him to Jerusalem and set him on the highest point of the Temple, and said to him, "If you are God's Son, throw yourself down from here. ¹⁰ For the scripture says, 'God will order his angels to take good care of you.' ¹¹ It also says, 'They will hold you up with their hands so that not even your feet will be hurt on the stones.'"

¹² But Jesus answered, "The scripture says, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

¹³ When the Devil finished tempting Jesus in every way, he left him for a while.

Other Readings: Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91:1-2,9-16; Romans 10:8b-13

LECTIO:

The temptation of Jesus serves two important purposes:

First, it reveals the sinless character of Christ. At the end of Lent, we will look to him as our sin offering, and as such, he needed to be pure and sinless himself, otherwise his sacrifice and its merit could not have been imputed to us. Just as the Israelites would pick out a sacrificial lamb for Passover several days before the event, observe it in seclusion to be sure that it actually was a spotless lamb without blemish and appropriate to be presented as an offering for sin, so too the Lord Jesus Christ, our passover lamb, is isolated and observed to see whether he is indeed a worthy offering for our sin. This week's text is just the first of many in the Gospels that will affirm his sinless perfection.

The second important thing about the temptation of Christ, is that it provides encouragement to us in our own struggle with sin. It is often at times when we begin a new ministry or a new challenge in our lives, that the Devil will approach with his dark proposals. The lure of quick ill-gotten gain, fame and power is strong for each one of us, but perhaps the worst temptation of all is putting God to the test, reducing him to some kind of magical genie who must respond to our whims and desire. How much harder it often is to patiently wait for the ways of God to be manifest, rather than pushing for an immediate miraculous intervention.

Ultimately, Jesus uses two weapons against temptation. The fact that he had gone into this desert seclusion with prayer is significant, and then of course his use of God's Word to rebuff temptation is exemplary. Prayer and the Word remain our two best weapons in the struggle with temptation.

MEDITATIO:

- The Devil often shows a cunning ability to adapt his temptations to who we are and what we are called to do for God. How did the Devil's temptations in the case of Christ almost seem to tie right in to the will of God?

ORATIO:

In our text the Devil actually misquotes Psalm 91, taking a few verses out of context. The end of that Psalm reaffirms that God sustains those who love him and acknowledge only him as Lord. Use these words in prayer as you struggle with the temptation to serve someone other than God – maybe even yourself:

God says, "I will save those who love me
and will protect those who acknowledge me as Lord.
When they call to me, I will answer them;
when they are in trouble, I will be with them.
I will rescue them and honour them.
I will reward them with long life; I will save them."

CONTEMPLATIO:

When temptation came, Jesus was able to quickly respond with Scripture because he knew it so well. Do you know enough Scripture by heart that it can come back to your mind effortlessly when you struggle with sin?

GOD'S CHOSEN ONE

Luke 9:28-36

²⁸ Jesus took Peter, John, and James with him and went up a hill to pray. ²⁹ While he was praying, his face changed its appearance, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ Suddenly two men were there talking with him. They were Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who appeared in heavenly glory and talked with Jesus about the way in which he would soon fulfill God's purpose by dying in Jerusalem. ³² Peter and his companions were sound asleep, but they woke up and saw Jesus' glory and the two men who were standing with him. ³³ As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, how good it is that we are here! We will make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." (He did not really know what he was saying.)

³⁴ While he was still speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them with its shadow; and the disciples were afraid as the cloud came over them. ³⁵ A voice said from the cloud, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen—listen to him!"

³⁶ When the voice stopped, there was Jesus all alone. The disciples kept quiet about all this and told no one at that time anything they had seen.

Other Readings: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17–4:1

LECTIO:

Jesus chooses only his first three disciples – Peter, John and James – to climb a mountain with him for a prayer time. We don't know how long Jesus prays but the disciples fall asleep. It appears that the disciples wake up just in time to witness the end of a remarkable encounter. Jesus' clothes are now dazzling white and he is talking to Moses and Elijah.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah is significant. Moses led the exodus of God's people out of slavery in Egypt and many Jews expected the prophet Elijah to return before the coming of the Messiah. They talk with Jesus about how he will soon fulfill God's purpose through his death (or 'exodus', the literal meaning of Luke's writing here) in Jerusalem. God's salvation plan for mankind, bringing true and lasting deliverance, is being fulfilled in Jesus.

This experience may have strengthened Jesus for the testing days ahead that would culminate with his death on the cross. Luke makes no comment on this. What is clear is that God is present, as indicated by the cloud which veils his glory.

As at Jesus' baptism, God speaks. He affirms Jesus as his Son whom he has chosen. And this time God adds the instruction to the disciples to 'listen to him'.

This event, together with the other miracles and teaching that surround it, gave the disciples glimpses of who Jesus was. But they needed to travel much further with Jesus. In fact they needed to meet him after the resurrection to really understand who he was and his mission on earth.

MEDITATIO:

- Imagine you were one of the disciples that witnessed this event. How might you have felt? What would you have learnt?
- What has Jesus been chosen for? In what way does his death in Jerusalem fulfil God's purpose?
- In what ways can we 'listen to him' as God told the disciples to do?
- What is your experience of prayer? Do you find it as easy to listen to God as to talk to him?

ORATIO:

Thank God for the words from today's responsorial Psalm:
'The Lord is my light and my salvation;'

Thank God each day this week for all the ways he has guided and saved you. Ask him to deepen your appreciation of his salvation for you.

Ask the Holy Spirit to overshadow you, to transform your life so that people around you notice something different about the way you live. Ask God to help you reflect more of Jesus to others.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Consider the glory of Jesus' transfigured body. For Christians, Paul offers us a tremendous promise, 'He will change our weak mortal bodies and make them like his own glorious body...' (Philippians 3:21). Consider what it means that we are now 'citizens of heaven' (Philippians 3:20).

JUDGMENT AND MERCY

Luke 13:1-9

¹ At that time some people were there who told Jesus about the Galileans whom Pilate had killed while they were offering sacrifices to God. ² Jesus answered them, "Because those Galileans were killed in that way, do you think it proves that they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?" ³ No indeed! And I tell you that if you do not turn from your sins, you will all die as they did. ⁴ What about those eighteen people in Siloam who were killed when the tower fell on them? Do you suppose this proves that they were worse than all the other people living in Jerusalem?" ⁵ No indeed! And I tell you that if you do not turn from your sins, you will all die as they did."

⁶ Then Jesus told them this parable: "There was once a man who had a fig tree growing in his vineyard. He went looking for figs on it but found none. ⁷ So he said to his gardener, 'Look, for three years I have been coming here looking for figs on this fig tree, and I haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it go on using up the soil?' ⁸ But the gardener answered, 'Leave it alone, sir, just one more year; I will dig around it and put in some fertilizer. ⁹ Then if the tree bears figs next year, so much the better; if not, then you can have it cut down.'"

Other Readings: Exodus 3:1-8, 10, 13-15; Psalm 103:1-4, 6-8, 11; 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12

LECTIO:

Much has been written about the "hard sayings" of Jesus, and sometimes the texts above, warning about impending judgment, are included among them. Somehow we find it hard to reconcile such statements about judgment with a loving God and with Jesus. Yet, warning someone of impending danger, certainly is a merciful and kind gesture.

When someone tells us that one of the wheels on our car is loose and wobbling dangerously, or that the wallet we have tucked away in our back pocket is working itself free and is about to fall out, we see these as gestures of kindness. When the doctor tells us that we have a problem which requires immediate attention, or when the dentist points out a cavity, responding in anger would be pointless. Taking corrective action is the smart thing to do.

In his prophetic role, Jesus certainly had a lot to say about God's love and care, but the sin that too often marks our lives is as dangerous as a wobbling wheel or a tooth cavity. Continuing headstrong in sin will eventually lead us to a confrontation with a pure and righteous God that we cannot win. How could a loving Jesus not also fulfill this important part of the prophetic ministry and seek to woo us away from sin.

Warnings of coming judgment and words of mercy are not opposite sides of Jesus' teaching, they are in fact both signs of his great care for us.

MEDITATIO:

- Has someone ever warned you that something was dangerously wrong, perhaps with your car, with a tool or even with your health? How did it feel to get that warning? What did you do about it?
- Have you ever had someone close to you warn you about an area of your life where you needed to address a shortcoming? How did you respond?

ORATIO:

Use the verses from Psalm 103 for a time of fellowship and prayer with God. Remember his love, mercy and kindness. Worship him for his holiness. Thank him that he forgives our sins – even though we don't deserve it.

Ask him how your life could be more fruitful for him.

CONTEMPLATIO:

If God were to ask you to help warn someone else of sin, how would you do that? Would you be willing?.

THE “GOOD” SON WITH THE BAD ATTITUDE

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

¹One day when many tax collectors and other outcasts came to listen to Jesus, ²the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law started grumbling, “This man welcomes outcasts and even eats with them!” ³So Jesus told them this parable:

¹¹“There was once a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to him, ‘Father, give me my share of the property now.’ So the man divided his property between his two sons. ¹³After a few days the younger son sold his part of the property and left home with the money. He went to a country far away, where he wasted his money in reckless living. ¹⁴He spent everything he had. Then a severe famine spread over that country, and he was left without a thing. ¹⁵So he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him out to his farm to take care of the pigs. ¹⁶He wished he could fill himself with the bean pods the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything to eat. ¹⁷At last he came to his senses and said, ‘All my father’s hired workers have more than they can eat, and here I am about to starve! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father and say, ‘Father, I have sinned against God and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired workers.’” ²⁰So he got up and started back to his father.

“He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with pity, and he ran, threw his arms around his son, and kissed him. ²¹‘Father,’ the son said, ‘I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.’ ²²But the father called to his servants. ‘Hurry!’ he said. ‘Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. ²³Then go and get the prize calf and kill it, and let us celebrate with a feast! ²⁴For this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.’ And so the feasting began.

²⁵“In the meantime the older son was out in the field. On his way back, when he came close to the house, he heard the music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants and asked him, ‘What’s going on?’ ²⁷‘Your brother has come back home,’ the servant answered, ‘and your father has killed the prize calf, because he got him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸The older brother was so angry that he would not go into the house; so his father came out and begged him to come in. ²⁹But he spoke back to his father, ‘Look, all these years I have worked for you like a slave, and I have never disobeyed your orders. What have you given me? Not even a goat for me to have a feast with my friends! ³⁰But this son of yours wasted all your property on prostitutes, and when he comes back home, you kill the prize calf for him!’ ³¹‘My son,’ the father answered, ‘you are always here with me, and everything I have is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and be happy, because your brother was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.’”

Other Readings: Joshua 5:9-12; Psalm 32; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

1 LECTIO:

When we read this parable, we often focus on the “bad” or prodigal son, but I suggest that this is really a parable about the “good” son who stayed home. There are two cues to look for when you want to understand the point of a parable:

The first is that Jesus tells each of his parables in a very specific context, and typically to address a specific group of people. In this case, Jesus addresses not the tax collectors and sinful outcasts who would certainly relate to the prodigal, but the judgmental Pharisees and teachers of the Law who would identify with the self-righteous young man who stayed home.

The second clue to understanding a parable is that usually Jesus helpfully wraps up the parable by making the point explicit. He ends this parable not with the father hugging the returning wayward, but with his weighty words to the sour brother who had stayed home.

Ironically, while he had always been close enough to enjoy both the father’s presence and the father’s possessions, he had never really taken any pleasure in either because he was so busy working, self-absorbed in self-righteous behaviour.

2 MEDITATIO:

- Why is our tendency so strong to look at people like the prodigal and the hard working son who stayed home and to make value judgments about them, usually elevating the hard working righteous looking people and glancing askance at the others?
- Which of the two sons do you resemble the most?

3 ORATIO:

Part of the process of Lent is the challenge to examine our lives more closely. Our tendency is often to consider the more visible and tangible shortcomings, but to feel pretty smug about areas of our lives where we really “have it together”. Today’s parable challenges us to also consider our heart attitude. Even the best of our apparently righteous and religious observances can conceal problems with our attitude. Psalm 32 might help you open your heart to God in prayer.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

Guard your heart. Try to make sure that in the busy-ness of Lent, in the midst of the religious observances, that you are not so focused on the externals that your heart attitude suffers to the point where you don’t enjoy the presence of the Father.

A LESSON IN MERCY

John 8:1-11

¹ Then everyone went home, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Early the next morning he went back to the Temple. All the people gathered round him, and he sat down and began to teach them. ³ The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees brought in a woman who had been caught committing adultery, and they made her stand before them all. ⁴ “Teacher,” they said to Jesus, “this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵ In our Law Moses commanded that such a woman must be stoned to death. Now, what do you say?” ⁶ They said this to trap Jesus, so that they could accuse him. But he bent over and wrote on the ground with his finger.

⁷ As they stood there asking him questions, he straightened himself up and said to them, “Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her.” ⁸ Then he bent over again and wrote on the ground. ⁹ When they heard this, they all left, one by one, the older ones first. Jesus was left alone, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ He straightened himself up and said to her, “Where are they? Is there no one left to condemn you?”

¹¹ “No one, sir,” she answered.

“Well, then,” Jesus said, “I do not condemn you either. Go, but do not sin again.”

Other Readings: Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3:4b-14

LECTIO:

This week we read another example of Jesus’ forgiveness and mercy. A woman has been caught in adultery. The Pharisees, knowing Jesus’ compassion for sinners, take this opportunity to try and trap him.

Picture the scene. Jesus is teaching in the temple, the holiest place for the Jews which Jesus described as ‘my Father’s house’. A crowd of people are gathered around listening to what he has to say.

A group of Pharisees and teachers of the Law arrive and make a woman stand before Jesus and the crowd. They declare that she was caught in adultery and that the punishment required by the Law of Moses is death by stoning (Deuteronomy 22: 22-24). Then comes the loaded question, “Now, what do you say?” They pretend to accuse only the woman, but they are actually looking for a chance to accuse (and try) Jesus.

The man with whom she was committing adultery is not mentioned, nor is her husband. The atmosphere must have been electric. It was quite literally a matter of life and death. All eyes shift from the woman, whose life hangs in the balance, to Jesus. What will he say?

Jesus bends down and writes on the ground. What did he write? Why? Perhaps Jesus wanted to draw attention away from the terrified woman, perhaps he was considering his answer. John gives no explanation.

Jesus’ answer is masterful. He is well aware of the intended trap. He silences the accusers without contradicting the Law or condoning the sin. The woman is eventually left on her own before Jesus. As he was without sin he could have carried out the punishment but he tells her she is free to go. He wants to give her the opportunity to repent and tells her not to sin again.

MEDITATIO:

- Compare the way the Pharisees treated this woman with the way Jesus treated her. Consider their actions and motives. How did they differ? Were there any points of agreement?
- Imagine yourself firstly as one of the Pharisees, then as this frightened woman. What impact do you think this encounter would have had on you?
- What can we learn from this passage about our attitudes to our own behaviour and our attitudes to others?

ORATIO:

Thank God for his grace and mercy. He knows our weaknesses and when we sin we can come to him to be forgiven and restored. Ask God to deepen your appreciation of these wonderfully undeserved gifts.

Pray through Psalm 126 and give thanks for ‘What marvels the Lord has worked for us!’

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any attitudes in you that should change.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Consider the images of water in Isaiah 43 and Psalm 126. Let God reveal its life-sustaining, refreshing and cleansing properties. Now relate this to God’s forgiveness and grace in your life.

UNSTOPPABLE “HOSANNA!”

Luke 19:28-40

²⁸ After Jesus said this, he went on in front of them toward Jerusalem. ²⁹ As he came near Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, he sent two disciples ahead ³⁰ with these instructions: “Go to the village there ahead of you; as you go in, you will find a colt tied up that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If someone asks you why you are untying it, tell him that the Master needs it.” ³² They went on their way and found everything just as Jesus had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying it?” ³⁴ “The Master needs it,” they answered, ³⁵ and they took the colt to Jesus. Then they threw their cloaks over the animal and helped Jesus get on. ³⁶ As he rode on, people spread their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ When he came near Jerusalem, at the place where the road went down the Mount of Olives, the large crowd of his disciples began to thank God and praise him in loud voices for all the great things that they had seen: ³⁸ “God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory to God!” ³⁹ Then some of the Pharisees in the crowd spoke to Jesus. “Teacher,” they said, “command your disciples to be quiet!” ⁴⁰ Jesus answered, “I tell you that if they keep quiet, the stones themselves will start shouting.”

Other Readings: Isaiah 50:4-9; Psalm 22:8-9, 17-20, 22-24

LECTIO:

We once again find Jesus surrounded by several very different groups of people.

The small group of disciples is following closely, listening to Jesus’ instructions, no doubt still a little bewildered and surprised at his uncanny ability to predict events before they happen. He had apparently already picked out far ahead of time the colt on which he would ride, and he knew exactly how to help his disciples find it. The disciples certainly would have shared in the building excitement of the “Hosannas!” but the Gospels tell us enough about their obtuseness and confusion that we feel a little safer to reserve judgment about just how much they understood at this point.

There are a few people on the outer edges of the story who have minimal contact and about whom we are also left wondering. The owners of the colt are surprisingly cooperative when their colt is apparently stolen or borrowed. Did they know who “the Master” was? Had they met Jesus before, or perhaps heard of him? Were they tempted to follow to see what exactly “the Master” wanted with their colt?

Luke then mentions a large crowd of disciples. This is no longer just the small band of “the twelve.” And this is not the larger crowd that had been watching and listening to Jesus at a safe distance. We are given few details about the crowd. Some have even discounted the emotional high of the triumphal entry suggesting that it was the same fickle crowd who would turn against Jesus several days later, pleading for Pilate to release Barabbas and to have Jesus crucified.

The Pharisees are also watching closely, but there is little doubt about where they stand. Over time the religious leaders had worked out an uneasy truce with Rome that let them run things with a fair amount of autonomy around Jerusalem. They know that every uprising, every riot and every public demonstration like this one, raises the ire of the Romans who like nothing better than peaceful stability among their conquered people. So the Pharisees fear the riot that might ensue, and they evidently also take issue with the theological implications of what the crowd is yelling.

But it’s pointless to stop them, says Jesus. As the battered and war-torn city of Jerusalem finally welcomes her Prince of Peace, if the children do not ring out in loud Hosannas, the rocks will gladly do it for them.

MEDITATIO:

- How would you have responded if you had been the owner of the colt? Would you have followed the colt to see what was happening?
- What do you think the Twelve were thinking as they finally saw their teacher receive the adulation of the crowd?

ORATIO:

In great contrast to the loud Hosannas of the crowd, Philippians 2:5-11 explains the humbling process that Jesus was going through, culminating in this final Passover week. Use the words of that passage in your prayers of worship this week as you thank Jesus for the difficult road he walked into Jerusalem, and eventually to Calvary.

CONTEMPLATIO:

How torn Jesus must have felt during this triumphal entry: on the one hand, feeling the affirmation of those he had helped and the approval of his Father, on the other, knowing the difficult days that were just ahead. Have you ever lived moments like these where you knew you were doing the right thing but were very conscious that it would cost you dearly?

“AS I HAVE LOVED YOU”

John 13:1-17, 31-35

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 around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured some water into a washbasin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and dry them with the towel around 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 taken a bath are completely clean and do not have to wash themselves, except for their feet. a 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. ¹⁶ I am telling you the truth: no slaves are greater than their master, and no messengers are greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷ Now that you know this truth, how happy you will be if you put it into practice!

³¹ After Judas had left, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man’s glory is revealed; now God’s glory is revealed through him. ³² And if God’s glory is revealed through him, then God will reveal the glory of the Son of Man in himself, and he will do so at once. ³³ My children, I shall not be with you very much longer. You will look for me; but I tell you now what I told the Jewish authorities, ‘You cannot go where I am going.’ ³⁴ And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.”

Other Readings: Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

1 LECTIO:

How you measure the real extent of somebody’s love for you?

In just a few hours, Jesus would begin a long painful process through the cruel sham of a trial. There would be mockery, beatings, and then the executioners’ nails driven through his flesh. If there was a time when he needed the comfort and care of his friends, this was it. But he would not insist upon his own needs.

Rising from the table, he dresses down in a gesture of simple humility, then he heads for the corner of the room where the footwashing basin was kept. In a wealthy context, or at a fancier establishment, a servant would have been provided to wash the dirt and dust that accumulated on their feet as they walked the rough ground in open sandals. Where there was no servant to do that, the water and towel were provided, but everybody took care of themselves.

In the end, Jesus would wash the feet of them all, even Judas’.

On a night where this small gesture of comfort from a friend would have meant so much to him, Jesus is in fact the only one whose feet did not get washed.

Sometimes the hardest thing about love, the greatest proof of our care one for another, are not the big sacrificial things, but the small details of ordinary life.

2 MEDITATIO:

- Admittedly, some religious groups still practice foot washing as a literal part of their liturgy, but what are some of the other ways in which this kind of practical care might be shown in a community of believers in our day?
- Can you remember a time when somebody figuratively “washed your feet?”

3 ORATIO:

Throughout the ordeal of his trial, and even on the cross, Jesus cried out to his Father, longing for a closer sense of His presence in the pain and the darkness that he was living. Our Psalm this week reminds us, with repeated refrains, of the Lord’s continued presence on our distress. Use some of its verses in your prayers this week.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

Think of a time in your life when either God, or a loved one, showed their care for you through a seemingly ordinary gesture, but that meant a lot to you.

WORTHY OF DEATH?

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?”

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

John 19

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

⁴ Pilate 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.” ⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Look! Here is the man!”

⁶ When 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.”

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

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

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

¹¹ Jesus 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.”

¹² When 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!”

¹³ When 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”.) ¹⁴ It was then almost noon of the day before the Passover. Pilate said to the people, “Here is your king!”

¹⁵ They 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!”

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

So they took charge of Jesus. ¹⁷ He went out, carrying his cross, and came to “The Place of the Skull”, as it is called. (In Hebrew it is called “Golgotha”.) ¹⁸ There they crucified him; and they also crucified two other men, one on each side, with Jesus between them. ¹⁹ Pilate wrote a notice and had it put on the cross. “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”, is what he wrote. ²⁰ Many 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. ²¹ The 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.’”

²² Pilate answered, “What I have written stays written.”

²³ After 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. ²⁴ The 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.

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

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

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

²⁹ A 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. ³⁰ Jesus drank the wine and said, “It is finished!”

Then he bowed his head and died.

³¹ Then 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. ³² So the soldiers went and broke the legs of the first man and then of the other man who had been crucified with Jesus. ³³ But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead, so they did not break his legs. ³⁴ One 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.) ³⁶ This was done to make the scripture come true: “Not one of his bones will be broken.” ³⁷ And there is another scripture that says, “People will look at him whom they pierced.”

³⁸ After 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. ³⁹ Nicodemus, 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. ⁴⁰ The two men took Jesus’ body and wrapped it in linen with the spices according to the Jewish custom of preparing a body for burial.

⁴¹ There 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. ⁴² Since it was the day before the Sabbath and because the tomb was close by, they placed Jesus’ body there.

WORTHY OF DEATH?

John 18:1 – 19:42

Other Readings: Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 31; Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9, 10:16-25

LECTIO:

For John, the youngest of the disciples, the one Jesus loved, the one who has earned a traditional reputation as the most emotionally intense of the disciples, this must have been the hardest part of the Gospel to record, and it must have been even more painful to live through.

In one sense, Jesus takes an almost secondary role. There are no great sections of teaching. No sermons, parables or discourses. Except for the restoration of the servant's ear in the Garden, there is no great show of force. All of these things seem to simply be done to a passive Jesus.

Even before Pilate, Jesus is essentially silent.

It speaks to the ways of God and to the character of his Son, that the great work of redemption, undoubtedly the greatest of miracles and the central event of history, is recounted for us in simple words. There is nothing showy or ostentatious. Nothing overblown or dramatic.

The Lord Jesus voluntarily delivers himself into the hands of sinful man. He restrains all the power of legions of angels which are at his command. Quietly. Abandoned. Alone. Often in the dark. He fulfills the great work of our redemption.

MEDITATIO:

- What stands out for you the most in the narrative of Jesus' Passion?
- Of the injustices which he suffered in the process, which one would you have had the hardest time withstanding without responding or lashing back?

ORATIO:

As you pray this week, use this paraphrase of the final words from Isaiah 53 to praise God for the work of Christ:

Heavenly Father,
 Thank you for your devoted servant,
 with whom you are pleased,
 who bore the punishment of many
 and for whose sake you have forgiven us.
 Thank you that you have given him a place of honour,
 a place among the great and powerful.
 Because he willingly gave his life
 and shared the fate of evil men.
 He took the place of many sinners
 and prayed that they might be forgiven.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Even as you thank God for our redemption through the work of Christ described in these chapters, think about the way the character of the suffering Christ contrasts with our often selfish behaviour. What are the things in your life, in your character, that you are challenged to change as you consider the Passion of Jesus?

HE IS RISEN

John 20:1-9

¹Early 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. ²She 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!”

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

Other Readings: Acts 10:34, 37-43; Psalm 118; Colossians 3:1-4

LECTIO:

This is a compelling narrative. Jesus’ body has disappeared and Mary Magdalene is first on the scene. You can read about her encounter with Jesus in the verses following today’s reading.

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 Jesus is risen as soon as he sees the abandoned linen in the grave. What causes John to believe Jesus is alive? Some commentators believe it was the folding of the grave clothes in a particular style – Jesus’ style, one that John recognized. Whoever had done this was not dead but alive. Surely this must be Jesus. This is 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 scripture which said Jesus must rise from the dead. This would soon change. But for each person it was a slightly different experience.

Mary Magdalene, Peter, John and the other disciples meet Jesus face to face in the verses following today’s reading in John’s account. The eyewitness accounts of these disciples are fundamental to the faith of Christians. They knew that Jesus died on the cross, they knew precisely where he was buried and each personally met with the risen Christ. These encounters with the risen Lord confirmed their belief that he was indeed who he said he was – the promised Messiah, the Son of God.’

MEDITATIO:

- Picture yourself on that first morning after Jesus’ crucifixion. Waking up, trying to eat and drink, and going with Mary Magdalene or Peter and John to the tomb. What would you think and feel? And by contrast, how would you feel going to bed that night?
- Think about how you might explain to a friend who doesn’t follow Jesus why the events that took place that first Easter are still so important today.

ORATIO:

Today is one of the most joyful in the church calendar. The words of the other gospel writers ‘He is not here; he has been raised’ (Matthew 28:6) echo down the centuries. Bring your own praise and express your joy and thanks to God. Use the verses from Psalm 118 to help you.

CONTEMPLATIO:

‘You have been raised to life with Christ, so set your hearts on the things that are in heaven, where Christ sits on his throne at the right hand side of God.’

Colossians 3:1-4 tells us that in Christ we have experienced our own ‘resurrection’ into a new spiritual life. Spend some time reflecting on what it means to have your life ‘hidden with Christ in God’ and setting your heart and mind on heaven instead of earthly concerns.

JESUS APPEARS TO HIS DISCIPLES

John 20:19-31

¹⁹“It 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 5:12-16; Psalm 118:14-29; Revelation 1:9-13, 17-19



1 LECTIO:

The disciples’ skepticism about the risen Christ continues to be helpful.

First because the interaction between Jesus and the disciples answers many of the questions that would naturally come to our mind. What is a resurrection body like? Is it just a mystical presence or is it a real tangible body?

Secondly we are comforted in our doubts by seeing that they too wrestled with whether this was indeed possible.

And thirdly, it leads to a blessing for us. “If you found it hard to believe with all the proofs you have Thomas” Jesus said, “How blessed and happy will be those who come after you!” That would include you and I.

2 MEDITATIO:

- The resurrection isn’t just a neat way to wrap up the texts of the Gospels. The bodily resurrection of Jesus remains central in Christian teaching and in our future hope. Look at the way the risen Christ features prominently at the very beginning of John’s revelation on Patmos. (See Revelation 1:4-8)

3 ORATIO:

Use these words paraphrased from Psalm 118 in your celebratory prayers this week:

The stone which the builders rejected as worthless
turned out to be the most important of all.

This was done by you Lord;
what a wonderful sight it is!

This is the day of the Lord Jesus’ victory;
let us be happy, let us celebrate!

Save us, Lord, save us!

Give us success, O Lord!

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

How does the resurrection of Christ provide a guarantee for our future hope as Christians?

DO YOU LOVE ME?

John 21:1-19

¹ After this, Jesus appeared once more to his disciples at Lake Tiberias. This is how it happened. ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael (the one from Cana in Galilee), the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples of Jesus were all together. ³ Simon Peter said to the others, "I am going fishing."

"We will come with you," they told him. So they went out in a boat, but all that night they did not catch a thing. ⁴ As the sun was rising, Jesus stood at the water's edge, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Then he asked them, "Young men, haven't you caught anything?"

"Not a thing," they answered. ⁶ He said to them, "Throw your net out on the right side of the boat, and you will catch some." So they threw the net out and could not pull it back in, because they had caught so many fish.

⁷ The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Peter heard that it was the Lord, he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken his clothes off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples came to shore in the boat, pulling the net full of fish. They were not very far from land, about a hundred yards away. ⁹ When they stepped ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there with fish on it and some bread. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." ¹¹ Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net ashore full of big fish, a hundred and fifty-three in all; even though there were so many, still the net did not tear. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and eat." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ So Jesus went over, took the bread, and gave it to them; he did the same with the fish.

¹⁴ This, then, was the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from death.

¹⁵ After they had eaten, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?"

"Yes, Lord," he answered, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my lambs." ¹⁶ A second time Jesus said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord," he answered, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep." ¹⁷ A third time Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter became sad because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" and so he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you!"

Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep. ¹⁸ I am telling you the truth: when you were young, you used to get ready and go anywhere you wanted to; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you up and take you where you don't want to go." ¹⁹ (In saying this, Jesus was indicating the way in which Peter would die and bring glory to God.) Then Jesus said to him, "Follow me!"

Other Readings: Acts 5:27-32, 40-41; Psalm 30; Revelation 5:11-14

LECTIO:

Jesus' graciousness in restoring Peter is striking. After three denials, Jesus gives Peter the chance to re-affirm his love three times. Poignantly, Jesus has decided to do this around a charcoal fire. The only other time in the New Testament where a fire is described specifically as a charcoal fire is the one found in the servants' courtyard where Peter had denied Jesus. How powerful the memories of that awful night must have been for Peter as he meets his Lord and confronts his failure.

When the risen Lord confronts us about our failures, they are not simply swept under the rug, as if to pretend they never happened. Through the work of Christ at the cross and the power of the empty tomb, our failures are dealt with head on and we find the strength to return to serving the Lord we love.

MEDITATIO:

- Have you ever failed in a way that was so monumental, so large, that you thought you would never again be used of God? What was the experience like when Jesus drew you back? Was there a charcoal fire or something similar that God used to make the point?

ORATIO:

Psalm 30 is a thanksgiving hymn that includes words of rejoicing about our sadness being turned into joyful dance, and our sorrow being replaced with joy. Use the words of the Psalm as you thank God again for the exuberance of our resurrection celebration.

CONTEMPLATIO:

As his death and resurrection have helped you rise above your failures, Jesus isn't simply calling you to go back to your fishing nets as if nothing had happened. He has something special in store for you.

REJECTION?

John 10:22-30

²²It was winter, and the Festival of the Dedication of the Temple was being celebrated in Jerusalem. ²³Jesus was walking in Solomon's Porch in the Temple, ²⁴when the people gathered around him and asked, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? Tell us the plain truth: are you the Messiah?"

²⁵Jesus answered, "I have already told you, but you would not believe me. The deeds I do by my Father's authority speak on my behalf; ²⁶but you will not believe, for you are not my sheep. ²⁷My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they shall never die. No one can snatch them away from me. ²⁹What my Father has given me is greater than everything, and no one can snatch them away from the Father's care. ³⁰The Father and I are one."

Other Readings: Acts 13:14, 43-52; Psalm 100:1-2, 3-5; Revelation 7:9, 14-17



LECTIO:

Even as Jesus is rejected by his hearers, he knows that this will not be the last of the rejections. His sheep, those who listen to his voice, will follow in his path, and he knows that they too will be rejected.

As he writes, John looks back to the events from the life of Christ that he is recording, but he is also very conscious of the people who will be reading his manuscript. John was the last of the evangelists to write, and the persecution of Christians has already begun to escalate. In fact, within a few years, John himself will be exiled to Patmos where we believe he did hard labour in the rock quarries, and the book of Revelation is written from the midst of that struggle. But already here, as he writes his Gospel, he knows that many believers are suffering. As he finds himself forced to choose what to include – (you remember that John said it was impossible to write everything down because it would fill too many books!) – John often includes words and incidents he knows will provide comfort to his readers.

Here John wants persecuted Christians to remember that Jesus was also deeply misunderstood and rejected. And because Jesus knew his sheep would meet the same fate, he assures them that they have received eternal life, that they are secure and that nobody can snatch them from His hand.

MEDITATIO:

- The events around the great throne of the Lamb foreshadowed in our Revelation 7:9-17 text have provided hope for the martyrs over many centuries. As you read those words, imagine how intense the worship will be since it will gather men and women with the greatest of faiths, whose lives have been powerful testimonies to Christ and who have most keenly felt his love and care at their moments of great suffering.

ORATIO:

In your prayers this week, use one of the phrases which the crowd of martyred witnesses uses around the throne of God: "Salvation comes from our God, who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!" and again, "Praise, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, power and might belong to our God forever and ever! Amen!"

CONTEMPLATIO:

Thank God for the relative freedom of worship which you enjoy, and think of your Christian brothers and sisters around the world who are still persecuted for the name of Christ.

THE NEW COMMANDMENT

John 13:31-35

³¹ After Judas had left, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man’s glory is revealed; now God’s glory is revealed through him. ³² And if God’s glory is revealed through him, then God will reveal the glory of the Son of Man in himself, and he will do so at once. ³³ My children, I shall not be with you very much longer. You will look for me; but I tell you now what I told the Jewish authorities, ‘You cannot go where I am going.’ ³⁴ And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.”

Other Readings: Acts 14:21-27; Psalm 145:8-9, 10-13; Revelation 21:1-5



1 LECTIO:

The context of a statement can make all the difference in the world, just ask anyone who has ever been misquoted, or quoted out of context. Sometimes the context changes the meaning of a statement, and sometimes it just makes it that much more significant.

Before John reports Jesus’ new commandment to his disciples to love one another, he is careful to emphasize the circumstances. Jesus is still in the upper room with his disciples. This has been a close intimate time where he has had a chance to teach his disciples, to comfort them, to tell them again about his impending death and to wash their feet. Judas has already slipped out into the night to begin the chain of events that will lead to the Crucifixion.

It is just then, at that moment, that Jesus asks the disciples – and us by extension – to love one another, just as he has loved us.

2 MEDITATIO:

- The disciples seemed like an unlikely band to be given this task of loving one another. The Gospels report several disputes among them, including quarrels about which of them was the greatest. They were often loud and impulsive. They came from very different walks of life and had a peculiar mix of personality traits that must have made for an interesting three years. And now Jesus asks them to love one another. How would the disciples’ challenge in living this out have been similar to the challenge of living this out in the church community today?

3 ORATIO:

Psalm 145:8-13 lists some of the characteristics of God. As God chips away at our worldliness to reveal his image and likeness we will start to reflect his nature. Prayerfully offer these verses to God.

Open your heart to God and let him speak to you. If you are experiencing difficulties in a particular relationship then bring this before the Lord.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

As you seek to imitate Christ, what part of the example of his love do you find the hardest to show to others?

OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND?

John 14:23-29

²³ Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and my Father and I will come to them and live with them. ²⁴ Those who do not love me do not obey my teaching. And the teaching you have heard is not mine, but comes from the Father, who sent me.

²⁵ “I have told you this while I am still with you. ²⁶ The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you.

²⁷ “Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, ‘I am leaving, but I will come back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father; for he is greater than I. ²⁹ I have told you this now before it all happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe.

Other Readings: Acts 15:1-2, 22-29; Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23

1 LECTIO:

Though it was a little hard for them to grasp, Jesus is actually telling his disciples that it was better for them that he went away. As they struggle together in the upper room, sensing the ominous forces that are already at work, and picking up on Jesus’ sadness – they know they are about to lose him and can’t quite cope with what life will be like without him.

It is the Holy Spirit who makes all the difference, both for the disciples and for us, because he will play several important roles.

Often called the comforter, or the helper, the Holy Spirit will make the continued presence of Jesus real for the believers as he indwells those who trust in Christ. Jesus describes the peace that will come from the Spirit’s presence.

The Spirit also plays an important role as a teacher, reminding the disciples of Jesus’ words and teachings as they transmitted them to other believers, and then driving them home into the hearts of believers.

2 MEDITATIO:

- All three persons of the Trinity are present in our text today – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What specific roles and actions are attributed to each of the three?

3 ORATIO:

In a very Trinitarian prayer, thank God for the ministry of the Holy Spirit, making real to us the presence of the Son.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

Our text from the book of Revelation looks forward to the day when believers will once again be in the presence of Christ. As you read that text, what do you most look forward to?

THE PROMISE OF THE ASCENSION

Luke 24:44-53

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. ⁴⁹And I myself will send upon you what my Father has promised. But you must wait in the city until the power from above comes down upon you.”

⁵⁰Then he led them out of the city as far as Bethany, where he raised his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹As he was blessing them, he departed from them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵²They worshiped him and went back into Jerusalem, filled with great joy, ⁵³and spent all their time in the Temple giving thanks to God.

Other Readings: Acts 1:1-11, Psalm 47 or 93, Ephesians 1:15-23

1 LECTIO:

We have already commented on the understated way in which the Gospel writers recount the incidents of Christ’s life, and the Ascension is one more striking example.

The epistles of the New Testament are replete with the deep theological repercussions of Christ’s resurrection and his return at God’s right hand from where he continues to reign as sovereign. Our text in Ephesians 1 is one good example. Yet, when the event occurred, Luke reports the incident very simply, without fanfare or glamour. If a modern publicist had been hired to produce the event, or if someone had come along later to concoct the details of a story, you can be sure that the event would have come out far more dramatically. There might have been a crowd scene, trumpets and red carpets perhaps, a chorus of angels like in Bethlehem, or a legion guard to welcome him back to heaven!

Luke simply reports what happened. Just as the Scriptures had predicted, and just as he himself had taught would happen – Jesus was taken up into heaven.

2 MEDITATIO:

- The text in Ephesians lists some of the after effects of the Ascension and glorification of Jesus. How many can you find?

3 ORATIO:

Our text in Luke says that filled with great joy, the believers who witnessed the Ascension, spent their time in the temple giving thanks to God. Join them today in giving joyful thanks to God for the Ascension of Christ and all that it means for us.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

Because Christ is not physically present with us, and our own frailties get in the way of the Spirit’s work in our lives, we often feel powerless. What areas of your life would be different if you lived out the reality of the fact that Christ has ascended to a position of power and authority at the Father’s right hand and intercedes for you and supports you from there?

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.

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

John 14:8-17, 25-27

⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father; that is all we need.”

⁹ Jesus answered, “For a long time I have been with you all; yet you do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Why, then, do you say, ‘Show us the Father’?” ¹⁰ Do you not believe, Philip, that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I have spoken to you,” Jesus said to his disciples, “do not come from me. The Father, who remains in me, does his own work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. If not, believe because of the things I do. ¹² I am telling you the truth: those who believe in me will do what I do—yes, they will do even greater things, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father’s glory will be shown through the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will obey my commandments. ¹⁶ I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever. ¹⁷ He is the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God. The world cannot receive him, because it cannot see him or know him. But you know him, because he remains with you and is in you.

²⁵ “I have told you this while I am still with you. ²⁶ The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you.

²⁷ “Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid.

Other Readings: Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-35; Romans 8:14-17



1 LECTIO:

Several sections of Jesus’ teaching in the Gospel of John provide some of our clearest understanding of both the Holy Spirit, and of the Trinity. Here again, as Jesus promises the coming of the Holy Spirit, we are struck by the extent to which the Holy Spirit does not draw attention to himself.

Philip’s request is an honourable one for any believer. While the other disciples were often busy fermenting revolt, wanting to call down fire from heaven or even just getting themselves in trouble, Philip is one of those who repeatedly asks perceptive questions. Even while the other disciples in the upper room are getting increasingly anxious about all the talk about Jesus’ death and about the tension building among the religious and civil authorities, for Philip this is still a spiritual quest. He wants to see God: a not infrequent request among spiritual seekers through the ages.

In response, Jesus makes one of his clearest claims of divinity, equating the Son with the Father. When the Holy Spirit is introduced into the mix a few sentences later, it is clear that he too plays a unique role within the Trinity, glorifying the Father by elevating the Son and his teaching.

But the end result is more than just heady theology. This close connection between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and the unique roles which they play together, bring us a peace unlike any other.

2 MEDITATIO:

- Why does it seem appropriate for Jesus to be teaching such deep theology to the frightened, anxious disciples? Wouldn’t it be better to simply comfort them?

3 ORATIO:

In Romans 8:14-17 we learn that the Spirit within us leads us to cry out to God as our Father, pleading for his help. As you face challenges this week, follow the leading of the Spirit in your heart, crying out to God as your loving heavenly Father.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

Jesus says that because of the united work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we need never be worried, upset or afraid.

THREE AND ONE

John 16:12-15

¹²“I have much more to tell you, but now it would be too much for you to bear. ¹³When, 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. ¹⁴He will give me glory, because he will take what I say and tell it to you. ¹⁵All 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: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Psalm 8; Romans 5:1-5



LECTIO:

While a lot of theologians prod and probe at the Trinity from the outside, often trying to explain it in precise, almost clinical or technical terms, Jesus gives us instead a kind of inside view. And while many theories about the Trinity do a relatively great job of explaining the link between the Father and the Son, they tend to come short when trying to figure out where exactly the Holy Spirit fits in. Jesus does it masterfully, pointing out several key elements about the relationships within the Godhead.

We would be amiss not to point out right from the start that, once again, Jesus' teaching here leaves little doubt about the Trinity. Critics have suggested that the concept of the Trinity was a much later development that was not refined until a few centuries after the New Testament was complete. Interestingly, the oldest confirmed manuscript pieces of the New Testament we have are portions of John's Gospel, establishing a very early writing date, and the texts of John leave no doubt that Jesus himself taught the disciples about this unique Trinitarian relationship.

The second point that strikes us is the high place of truth. Jesus wanted to teach his disciples some things about himself and about God that they could not yet bear, so the Holy Spirit would have to do that later: Revealing truth from God that glorifies the Son seems to be at the heart of the Spirit's work. How striking then that so much of the wilder recent Spirit manifestations seem to glorify the Spirit, rather than the Son, and seem to want to focus on conveying feelings rather than solid teaching! Where the Son is glorified and the Father's truth is taught, that is where the Spirit is at work.

MEDITATIO:

- John describes differing links between each of the three members of the Trinity. Try to draw a diagram placing Father, Son and Holy Spirit on each of the three points of the triangle, and writing on the line between each of them the way John describes the link between those two members.

ORATIO:

Thank God for the work of the Spirit, leading us to faith in Christ and to God's truth about his Son.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Romans 5:1-5 also picks up on some of the unique roles of each member of the Trinity, but this time with a focus on our salvation. In your own walk towards faith in Christ, were there moments where you saw this collaborative work of the Father and the Spirit?

A PROBLEMATIC MIRACLE?

Luke 9:11-17

¹¹ When the crowds heard about it, they followed him. He welcomed them, spoke to them about the Kingdom of God, and healed those who needed it.

¹² When the sun was beginning to set, the twelve disciples came to him and said, “Send the people away so that they can go to the villages and farms around here and find food and lodging, because this is a lonely place.”

¹³ But Jesus said to them, “You yourselves give them something to eat.”

They answered, “All we have are five loaves and two fish. Do you want us to go and buy food for this whole crowd?” ¹⁴ (There were about five thousand men there.)

Jesus said to his disciples, “Make the people sit down in groups of about fifty each.”

¹⁵ After the disciples had done so, ¹⁶ Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up to heaven, thanked God for them, broke them, and gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. ¹⁷ They all ate and had enough, and the disciples took up twelve baskets of what was left over.

Other Readings: Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 110; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

LECTIO:

While the four Gospel writers clearly convey Jesus’ miracles as outstanding proofs of his divinity, they also realize that in one sense, the miracles created certain problems for his ministry. While Jesus tries to focus on teaching and preaching, soon after his first miracles, the crowds come to him – some to be healed, and no doubt many just curious to watch the spectacle. It is only a matter of time before Jesus can no longer go anywhere with any sense of privacy; and the ministry which he had begun by teaching small groups and handfuls of individuals in the synagogues, is forced to become an open air affair in large places that can accommodate the large crowds.

We discover in the chapters that follow, that this miraculous feeding compounds the problem. At one point, Jesus will actually question whether the crowd has come to hear his teaching, or to get free bread.

And yet, Jesus feeds the hungry.

He heals the sick.

He frees the demon-possessed.

And it is not simply a matter of proving that he can do it. He wants to do it, in spite of what often appears to be problematic consequences. As the Son of his Father, who also takes pleasure in satisfying the hungry with good things, and providing with abundance, Jesus finds it difficult to be confronted with human need without responding.

MEDITATIO:

- Our reading of the feeding of the five thousand also highlights the celebration of the Eucharist on this day in the Christian calendar. Just as Jesus broke bread on the hillside and fed the crowd, within a few months, in the privacy of the upper room, abandoned by all but his closest followers, Jesus will break bread again and institute our celebration of communion.

While the other Gospels fill in the details and tell us that the bread and fish on the hillside were provided by a young boy, the bread and wine symbolized by our celebration of the Eucharist came at a much greater cost to the Lord Jesus – his broken body and his shed blood.

How startling that just as his response to human need on the hillside was not abated by the consequences of the miracle, his response to our need symbolized in the Eucharist had no limit.

When John introduces the events of the upper room in the 13th chapter of his Gospel, he begins by noting that Jesus, having loved his own, loved them to the end.

ORATIO:

As you ponder the Eucharist this week, and as you have opportunity to partake in the communion service, thank God for the way in which Christ responded to our need, and met it with abundance in the sacrifice symbolized – in spite of the great cost to him.

CONTEMPLATIO:

We are also called to respond to human need and one of the purposes of our celebration of the Eucharist is to help us model Christ’s response to the needs of others. How will you celebrate the Eucharist this week, not just in the liturgy, but also in the practice of your Christian life?

SINGLE-MINDEDNESS

Luke 9:51-62

⁵¹ As the time drew near when Jesus would be taken up to heaven, he made up his mind and set out on his way to Jerusalem. ⁵² He sent messengers ahead of him, who went into a village in Samaria to get everything ready for him. ⁵³ But the people there would not receive him, because it was clear that he was on his way to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ When the disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?"

⁵⁵ Jesus turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶ Then Jesus and his disciples went on to another village.

⁵⁷ As they went on their way, a man said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go."

⁵⁸ Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lie down and rest."

⁵⁹ He said to another man, "Follow me." But that man said, "Sir, first let me go back and bury my father."

⁶⁰ Jesus answered, "Let the dead bury their own dead. You go and proclaim the Kingdom of God."

⁶¹ Someone else said, "I will follow you, sir; but first let me go and say good-bye to my family."

⁶² Jesus said to him, "Anyone who starts to plow and then keeps looking back is of no use for the Kingdom of God."

Other Readings: 2 Kings 19:16b, 19-21; Psalm 16; Galatians 5:1, 13-18

1 LECTIO:

It's almost hard to believe that when Jesus was here, God in the flesh walking the earth, so many people missed him. And many of those who were closest to him, and who should have made the connection, never really did. What's even more striking though, are the things that kept people away.

For the Samaritans, who had minor theological differences from the Jews, something as simple as Jesus' travel itinerary became an issue.

Another man seemed to be particularly concerned about creature comforts, and undoubtedly aware of this, Jesus warned him that his earthly mission was not being carried out in glamorous luxury but with bare basic living arrangements.

The final request came from a man who wanted a little time to put his family affairs in order. This man wasn't asking for a few hours to take care of burial arrangements or to attend the funeral of an already dead father; it seems that he wanted to wait around until his father had died and the estate was settled.

When the true call to discipleship comes, we must follow, regardless of poor timing, the cost or other personal preferences.

2 MEDITATIO:

- Some people think this is one text where Jesus was perhaps unnecessarily harsh on would-be disciples. What do you think? Should he have been more accommodating?

3 ORATIO:

Several of the verses in Psalm 16 express the psalmist's confidence that as he follows the paths of God, God will protect and keep him secure. Use the words of the Psalm as a prayer, expressing your desire to God to follow Christ in discipleship, confident that he will keep you secure and work out the details that trouble you.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

There is some debate in the church today about the extent to which our presentation of the Gospel needs to be accommodating to outsiders, rather than making stringent discipleship requests. Which do you think drew you to the Gospel, accommodating comfort or the call to follow in the difficult Christian life?

SENT WITH A MISSION

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

¹ After this the Lord chose another seventy-two men and sent them out two by two, to go ahead of him to every town and place where he himself was about to go. ² He said to them, "There is a large harvest, but few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest. ³ Go! I am sending you like lambs among wolves. ⁴ Don't take a purse or a beggar's bag or shoes; don't stop to greet anyone on the road. ⁵ Whenever you go into a house, first say, 'Peace be with this house.' ⁶ If someone who is peace-loving lives there, let your greeting of peace remain on that person; if not, take back your greeting of peace. ⁷ Stay in that same house, eating and drinking whatever they offer you, for workers should be given their pay. Don't move around from one house to another. ⁸ Whenever you go into a town and are made welcome, eat what is set before you, ⁹ heal the sick in that town, and say to the people there, 'The Kingdom of God has come near you.' ¹⁰ But whenever you go into a town and are not welcomed, go out in the streets and say, ¹¹ 'Even the dust from your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. But remember that the Kingdom of God has come near you!'

¹⁶ Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

¹⁷ The seventy-two men came back in great joy. "Lord," they said, "even the demons obeyed us when we gave them a command in your name!"

¹⁸ Jesus answered them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ Listen! I have given you authority, so that you can walk on snakes and scorpions and overcome all the power of the Enemy, and nothing will hurt you. ²⁰ But don't be glad because the evil spirits obey you; rather be glad because your names are written in heaven."

Other Readings: Isaiah 66:10-14; Psalm 66:1-7, 17-20; Galatians 6:14-18

LECTIO:

This has proven to be a problematic text for some who don't keep its context in mind and presume that they too are to be handling venomous snakes for instance. But these are not the final instructions Jesus gave to his disciples after his resurrection. Those instructions, still known as the Great Commission, have formed the mandate of the church for over more than 20 centuries. In this text, Jesus is speaking to a small group of 72, a group he is sending out with the very

specific mission of preparing the ground ahead of him as he travels throughout the surrounding areas. Their message is an immediate one, that the Kingdom of God is literally at hand in the person of Jesus. While those details are not filled in, presumably in the weeks that followed this text, Jesus visited each one of the towns which the 72 had visited, making good on the promise, and reaping the harvest that had been prepared by his advance team. While there are clearly things we can learn from Jesus' instructions to this group about their immediate mission, and that we can transfer to our setting, their mission is not ours.

As local churches and communities of faith struggle to make connections with their communities, there is a strong tendency for imitation within the church. When one local church in a faraway city finds a method that seems to work well for them, within a matter of weeks, hundreds of other churches across the country, often in very very different contexts, start imitating the success story. The results are often disastrous.

We need to beware of simply copying somebody else's mission and making it ours. We can learn from the way others have faithfully responded to their own mission, but we need to be sure that we are working at fulfilling the mission God has given us, in our context and in our time.

MEDITATIO:

- Why do you suppose people often just find it easier to copy someone else's mission, or to simply mimick what seems to be working somewhere else?

ORATIO:

Psalm 66 provides beautiful words with which to address thanksgiving to God in prayer for his goodness.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Do you have a clear sense of what your mission is? If not, how might you go about discovering it?

THE ENABLING SAMARITAN

Luke 10:25-37

²⁵ A teacher of the Law came up and tried to trap Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to receive eternal life?”

²⁶ Jesus answered him, “What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?”

²⁷ The man answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’”

²⁸ “You are right,” Jesus replied; “do this and you will live.”

²⁹ But the teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?”

³⁰ Jesus answered, “There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead. ³¹ It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked on by on the other side. ³² In the same way a Levite also came there, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan who was traveling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was filled with pity. ³⁴ He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Take care of him,’ he told the innkeeper, ‘and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him.’”

³⁶ And Jesus concluded, “In your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbor toward the man attacked by the robbers?”

³⁷ The teacher of the Law answered, “The one who was kind to him.”

Jesus replied, “You go, then, and do the same.”

Other Readings: Deuteronomy 3:10-14; Psalm 19:8-11; Colossians 1:15-20

LECTIO:

Unfortunately, the parable of the Good Samaritan, and the central lesson of Christian charity which it advocates, both seem to have fallen on hard times in recent years.

We seem to have become so analytical of poverty, of the indigent and of those in need that we have developed a great fear of enabling. Are we enabling some hidden addictive habit if we give some pocket change to a peddler who crosses our path? Are we condoning poor budgeting practices if we bail out a couple who seem to continuously struggle with their finances and who come to the local church repeatedly for help? Should we let a man who has run out of gas and is hitchhiking on the side of the road walk to the gas station instead of giving him a lift, just to teach him a lesson?

I wonder whether the Good Samaritan worried about enabling.

“What was this man doing on the road to Jericho in the first place? Didn’t he know this was a dangerous road and that you shouldn’t travel alone? He was probably carrying too much money and flashing it around and that’s what attracted the robbers. Why was he on that road so late in the day? This never would have happened if he had been a little more cautious.” No doubt these were among the many excuses that the priest and the Levite used to let themselves off the hook.

The text seems to be very clear and leaves us very few outs. Jesus told the parable in response to a direct question and concluded it with a very direct application: “You go then, and do the same.”

2 MEDITATIO:

- How much do you think we should worry about enabling when we practice charity? Are you among those who prefers to err on the side of pragmatic caution or on the side of generosity?

3 ORATIO:

In many of the Psalms, God is praised for the way he shows care and concern to both the righteous and the sinner. Ask him to help you show to the others the same lovingkindness which you and I have received from his hand.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

Do you think God was concerned about enabling our sin when he first showed his love to us?

ARE YOU A MARY OR A MARTHA?

Luke 10:38-42

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples went on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha welcomed him in her home. ³⁹ She had a sister named Mary, who sat down at the feet of the Lord and listened to his teaching. ⁴⁰ Martha was upset over all the work she had to do, so she came and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to come and help me!"

⁴¹ The Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha! You are worried and troubled over so many things, ⁴² but just one is needed. Mary has chosen the right thing, and it will not be taken away from her."

Other Readings: Genesis 18:1-10; Psalm 15:1-5; Colossians 1:24-28

LECTIO:

Over many years in Christian ministry, I've found few people who feel ambivalent about what appears to be a relatively innocuous little story in the Gospel text. It seems to immediately provoke either knowing nods of saintly approval from the spiritually minded seekers who would love to spend their days in quiet meditation while the roast is burning in the oven, the garbage is piling up in the front hall closet and the unwatched children are precariously swinging from the curtains in the living room. Those on the finance and maintenance committee on the other hand, who have invested decades of their lives to keeping the place running, tend not to take kindly to the suggestions from the "meditators" that they are wasting their time with earthy material things.

Fortunately, the point Jesus is making is not that we all have to be Mary or that we all have to be Martha. After all, where would we be if nobody cooked or washed the dishes? And just as importantly, where would we be if everybody cooked and everybody washed the dishes but nobody prayed, and nobody spent time at the Lord's feet?

We are creatures of extremes. Those of us who are always busy with our hands need to learn to slow down and come to our knees once in a while. And those who spend their days on their knees should get up and roll up their sleeves once in a while!

MEDITATIO:

- Who do you identify with most in this story, Mary or Martha? What can you learn from this passage?
- Consider your own priorities in your daily life. Are you placing a high enough priority on your relationship with God?
- We all have responsibilities that require our time. Consider how you can serve and honour God in the way you fulfil your daily work and responsibilities.

PORATIO:

Psalm 15 begins with a striking question about who can enter the temple to worship. The answer is: those whose lives and actions are pleasing to God. Use the words of the Psalm as a prayerful meditation to help prepare not just your heart, but also your life, for worship.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Are you a Mary or a Martha? Who is the opposite in your family or your close circle of friends who irritates you, tempting you to complain to the Lord?

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Luke 11:1-13

¹One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

²Jesus said to them, "When you pray, say this: 'Father: May your holy name be honored; may your Kingdom come. ³Give us day by day the food we need. ⁴Forgive us our sins, for we forgive everyone who does us wrong. And do not bring us to hard testing.'"

⁵And Jesus said to his disciples, "Suppose one of you should go to a friend's house at midnight and say, 'Friend, let me borrow three loaves of bread. ⁶A friend of mine who is on a trip has just come to my house, and I don't have any food for him!' ⁷And suppose your friend should answer from inside, 'Don't bother me! The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' ⁸Well, what then? I tell you that even if he will not get up and give you the bread because you are his friend, yet he will get up and give you everything you need because you are not ashamed to keep on asking. ⁹And so I say to you: Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰For those who ask will receive, and those who seek will find, and the door will be opened to anyone who knocks. ¹¹Would any of you who are fathers give your son a snake when he asks for fish? ¹²Or would you give him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? ¹³As bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Other Readings: Genesis 18:20-32; Psalm 138:1-3, 6-8; Colossians 2:12-14

LECTIO:

A recent study yielded the startling fact that the vast majority of Christian believers never pray on their own, and only ever pray when they are at church or with other believers. Apparently, for many Christians, prayer is not a personal thing, but just part of a liturgy that must be completed.

In sharp contrast, our text from Luke today makes prayer a very personal thing.

The disciples are prompted to ask Jesus for prayer lessons because they had seen him praying – and this was likely not the first time – and because John the Baptist had taught his disciples to pray. There was something the disciples had seen in

Jesus' life and in the life of John the Baptist and his disciples that they wanted to emulate.

The second very personal link which our text makes with prayer is the way prayer seems to be all about relationships. The person at the door is pleading with his neighbour to help meet a friend's need. Jesus tells his listeners the Heavenly Father responds to our prayers exactly the same way parents meet their children's needs because of their loving relationship. It is little wonder that when Jesus suggests some words which the disciples might use when they pray, the text begins by addressing God as Father.

MEDITATIO:

- One of the strong undercurrents about prayer in this text is about persistence in prayer. Some have suggested that if we have faith in God, we should make our petition once, leave it with God and walk away. Would you agree? How could that view be reconciled with the admonition here in Luke 11 to be insistent in our prayers?

ORATIO:

You have undoubtedly prayed the Lord's Prayer countless times before. Pray it this week while paying special attention to the way your relationship with your heavenly Father supports and undergirds your requests.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Is your prayer life such that it makes other people want to learn to pray?

“YOU FOOL!”

Luke 12:13-21

¹³ A man in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide with me the property our father left us.”

¹⁴ Jesus answered him, “Friend, who gave me the right to judge or to divide the property between you two?” ¹⁵ And he went on to say to them all, “Watch out and guard yourselves from every kind of greed; because your true life is not made up of the things you own, no matter how rich you may be.”

¹⁶ Then Jesus told them this parable: “There was once a rich man who had land which bore good crops. ¹⁷ He began to think to himself, ‘I don’t have a place to keep all my crops. What can I do?’ ¹⁸ This is what I will do,’ he told himself; ‘I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, where I will store the grain and all my other goods. ¹⁹ Then I will say to myself, Lucky man! You have all the good things you need for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself!’ ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night you will have to give up your life; then who will get all these things you have kept for yourself?’”

²¹ And Jesus concluded, “This is how it is with those who pile up riches for themselves but are not rich in God’s sight.”

*Other Readings: Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:21-23; Psalm 90:3-6, 12-17;
Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11*

LECTIO:

This is one of several texts in the Gospels where Jesus seems to almost use a bad word! I remember getting in trouble as a child for calling one of my sisters a fool, but admittedly, I had a little less justification than Jesus does for applying it to the wealthy man in the story!

Jesus saves his strongest words for cases which are really deserving of harshness. He calls certain religious leaders “a brood of vipers,” “hypocrites” and even “whitened sepulchers”! Wow! And here, in one of his strongest and most direct discussions about money, without mincing his words, Jesus labels as a fool a man who had spent a lifetime worrying only about his material possessions. All he needed to do was store all of his wealth in a new larger barn and live worry-free for the rest of his life. Even those of us who take only a passing interest in business news or in the financial pages of the daily newspaper know that even today – and perhaps even more so today – this story rings true. How many people

have lost their homes, their retirement funds and other possessions they relied on for security, either to a flood, to a defrauding con man or to a sudden downturn in the economy...

But a closer reading of the story underlines the fact that the real stupidity was not in placing his trust in wealth or in riches, but in assuming that he still had a lot of years ahead to enjoy his wealth, while God had already decided that his time had come.

We control neither our lives nor our wealth, both are ultimately in the hands of God. This leaves us unable to create our own security and trying to do so labels us with the same harsh word Jesus used for the protagonist in our story.

MEDITATIO:

- Our text in Ecclesiastes 2:18-23 would have some interesting advice for the rich man filling up his barns. Does it sound like the writer of Ecclesiastes would agree with Jesus’ assessment?

ORATIO:

Use the words from Colossians 3:1-5 to inspire a time of prayer with the Lord.

CONTEMPLATIO:

You may not have large new barns full of grain, but we all have things in our lives on which we rely a little too much for security. What are these things in your life? Entrust them to God.

LIVING FOR TODAY?

Luke 12:32-48

³²“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the Kingdom. ³³Sell all your belongings and give the money to the poor. Provide for yourselves purses that don’t wear out, and save your riches in heaven, where they will never decrease, because no thief can get to them, and no moth can destroy them. ³⁴For your heart will always be where your riches are.

³⁵“Be ready for whatever comes, dressed for action and with your lamps lit, ³⁶like servants who are waiting for their master to come back from a wedding feast. When he comes and knocks, they will open the door for him at once. ³⁷How happy are those servants whose master finds them awake and ready when he returns! I tell you, he will take off his coat, have them sit down, and will wait on them. ³⁸How happy they are if he finds them ready, even if he should come at midnight or even later! ³⁹And you can be sure that if the owner of a house knew the time when the thief would come, he would not let the thief break into his house. ⁴⁰And you, too, must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you are not expecting him.”

⁴¹Peter said, “Lord, does this parable apply to us, or do you mean it for everyone?”

⁴²The Lord answered, “Who, then, is the faithful and wise servant? He is the one that his master will put in charge, to run the household and give the other servants their share of the food at the proper time. ⁴³How happy that servant is if his master finds him doing this when he comes home! ⁴⁴Indeed, I tell you, the master will put that servant in charge of all his property. ⁴⁵But if that servant says to himself that his master is taking a long time to come back and if he begins to beat the other servants, both the men and the women, and eats and drinks and gets drunk, ⁴⁶then the master will come back one day when the servant does not expect him and at a time he does not know. The master will cut him in pieces and make him share the fate of the disobedient.

⁴⁷“The servant who knows what his master wants him to do, but does not get himself ready and do it, will be punished with a heavy whipping. ⁴⁸But the servant who does not know what his master wants, and yet does something for which he deserves a whipping, will be punished with a light whipping. Much is required from the person to whom much is given; much more is required from the person to whom much more is given.

Other readings: Wisdom 18:6-9; Psalm 33:1-12, 18-22; Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19

1 LECTIO:

Our text today combines two little sections, both about perspective.

In relation to our resources, we are urged to invest them with an eye on the world beyond ours. As for the way we spend our time, it’s easy to live as if this is all there is and we have no accounts to give to anybody else, but the text urges us to consider another reality beyond this one. While it is tempting to live our lives for the moment, as if the things we see here and now are all there is, our Christian perspective tells us that this is not the case.

The things we have, the days we have to live, both are given to us as gifts from the Father. And the one who has so liberally given, will one day want to know what we have done with the gifts he has provided.

2 MEDITATIO:

- At first many people react negatively to the thought of having to give an account for what they did with their time and with their resources. This text suggests that both our lives and our resources are gifts given to us on loan, as if we were stewards or temporary caretakers. How should that knowledge affect our lives?

3 ORATIO:

Ask God to speak to you from today’s Gospel reading. Maybe he will have something to say about your ‘riches’ or how to be more prepared for his return.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

You may have heard the stories of people who discover they are terminally ill and have only a short time to live. Many of them speak about the way their values change, about dramatic adjustments they make in the way they handle their time and their wealth. What would you change if you knew your time was short?

AN OMINOUS PRESENCE

Luke 12:49-56

⁴⁹“I came to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰I have a baptism to receive, and how distressed I am until it is over! ⁵¹Do you suppose that I came to bring peace to the world? No, not peace, but division. ⁵²From now on a family of five will be divided, three against two and two against three. ⁵³Fathers will be against their sons, and sons against their fathers; mothers will be against their daughters, and daughters against their mothers; mothers-in-law will be against their daughters-in-law, and daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law.”

⁵⁴Jesus said also to the people, “When you see a cloud coming up in the west, at once you say that it is going to rain—and it does. ⁵⁵And when you feel the south wind blowing, you say that it is going to get hot—and it does. ⁵⁶Hypocrites! You can look at the earth and the sky and predict the weather; why, then, don’t you know the meaning of this present time?”

Other Readings: Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10; Psalm 40:2-4, 18; Hebrews 12:1-4

LECTIO:

Many of the texts we have read together in Luke’s Gospel this year have been sources of comfort, giving us encouragement about what the presence of Jesus means for us. Today’s text however is a little more ominous.

First it reminds us that Jesus is not universally loved and accepted. He is a touch point of controversy and debate, and often even just bringing up his name can cause contention and lively discussion. To those who believe that Christian life and bearing witness to our Lord is all sweetness and light, Jesus provides this warning, that he will in fact bring dissension between friends, between family members and at times even between entire nations.

But Jesus’ presence is also ominous because it reminds us of the progressing time line. We rejoiced together during Advent that God had sent us a Saviour. We exalted together when God raised him from the dead after we had crucified him. But as history progresses, the day will come when the babe of the manger, the Saviour from Calvary, will return to be crowned as Lord and judge over all creation.

Sometimes the presence of Jesus, Lord of Lords and King of Kings, rightly makes us tremble.

MEDITATIO:

- Have you ever been rejected or mistreated because of your faith in Jesus? What was your reaction and what did you learn from this experience?
- How do you resolve conflicts with others, especially conflicts with members of your family who do not agree with your beliefs?

ORATIO:

Draw comfort and courage from Psalm 40. Unite with the Psalmist in his gratefulness to God who hears our prayers. Thank God for having helped you, having set your feet on a rock, and for having put a new song in your mouth. Ask him to increase your trust in him.

If people have been mean to you in word or in action because of your faith, ask God to help you forgive and to love them, and pray for them as Jesus advised us to do (Matthew 5:44).

Take advantage of this moment to pray for the members of your family or for friends who do not know Jesus yet.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Some Christians think that as believers our role is to keep the peace at all costs, to de-escalate conflict, even if it means soft-pedaling what we believe. Others always seem to be trying to pick a fight over every little point of doctrinal disagreement. How do we find the appropriate balance, taking a stand when we need to, while being humbly peaceful and conciliatory when we need to?

THE NARROW DOOR

Luke 13:22-30

²²Jesus went through towns and villages, teaching the people and making his way toward Jerusalem. ²³Someone asked him, "Sir, will just a few people be saved?"

Jesus answered them, ²⁴"Do your best to go in through the narrow door; because many people will surely try to go in but will not be able. ²⁵The master of the house will get up and close the door; then when you stand outside and begin to knock on the door and say, 'Open the door for us, sir!' he will answer you, 'I don't know where you come from!'" ²⁶Then you will answer, 'We ate and drank with you; you taught in our town!'" ²⁷But he will say again, 'I don't know where you come from. Get away from me, all you wicked people!'" ²⁸How you will cry and gnash your teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, while you are thrown out! ²⁹People will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down at the feast in the Kingdom of God. ³⁰Then those who are now last will be first, and those who are now first will be last."

Other Readings: Isaiah 66:18-21; Psalm 117; Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13

LECTIO:

Life as a Christian demands a lot of the believer. Today Jesus talks about who will and who won't be allowed into the Kingdom of God. He warns his listeners both then and now to do more than just listen to his teaching.

Sadly, if you are not actively allowing Jesus to impact your everyday life you are not really living as a Christian at all. Christian living involves more than just attending church – it's all to do with your personal relationship with God through Jesus.

For some people, listening to Jesus' teaching became an intellectual exercise. They treated Jesus as just another rabbi, asking theoretical questions like the one in verse 23, and taking it for granted they'd be saved.

Jesus warns them they are in serious danger of losing their chance to enter the Kingdom of God. He compares it to a house with a very small entrance. People are struggling to get in but the owner has closed the door and is only allowing certain people to enter.

Jesus is making his meaning very clear. There has to be a personal entering in to faith in God by believing in Jesus and then a practical application of faith to every part of your life.

Jesus is reminding us there can be no sitting on a fence in matters of faith. If you belong to him, his teaching will impact your life. You may make mistakes but you will be endeavouring to live your life in obedience to him. Anyone who does not repent and choose this option is risking everything, as the day may come when the 'house owner' does not recognise you and allow you to enter in.

MEDITATIO:

- The narrow door refers to a time when an individual repents and makes a personal commitment of faith in God through Jesus. It is not something someone else can do for you as it requires a personal choice. Can you remember the time when you made the choice to follow Jesus? For some people it can be a gradual process taking years. For others there was a special day when they took the decision. If you are not sure, why not talk about it with your priest or minister?

ORATIO:

'Keep on working with fear and trembling to complete your salvation, because God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey his own purpose' (Philippians 2:12-13). In these verses the Apostle Paul exhorts the Philippian believers not to be complacent but to continue their life of faith. Ask the Holy Spirit to make you willing and able to obey God's purposes for your life.

CONTEMPLATIO:

The above reading from Philippians reminds us that God is at work in each one of us. Consider the ways God is working in your life right now. He may show you some ways that surprise you.

ETIQUETTE LESSONS FROM JESUS

Luke 14:1, 7-14

¹One Sabbath Jesus went to eat a meal at the home of one of the leading Pharisees; and people were watching Jesus closely. ...

⁷Jesus noticed how some of the guests were choosing the best places, so he told this parable to all of them: ⁸“When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place. It could happen that someone more important than you has been invited, ⁹and your host, who invited both of you, would have to come and say to you, ‘Let him have this place.’ Then you would be embarrassed and have to sit in the lowest place. ¹⁰Instead, when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that your host will come to you and say, ‘Come on up, my friend, to a better place.’ This will bring you honor in the presence of all the other guests. ¹¹For those who make themselves great will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be made great.”

¹²Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your rich neighbors—for they will invite you back, and in this way you will be paid for what you did. ¹³When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind; ¹⁴and you will be blessed, because they are not able to pay you back. God will repay you on the day the good people rise from death.”

Other Readings: Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29; Psalm 68:4-7, 10-11; Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24

LECTIO:

In contrast to some of the other deeper texts that we have read together in Luke, this one sounds almost too mundane. The same Jesus who has told us about coming cataclysms at the end of the world and about the Creator’s care for the universe, the same person who warns us to prepare to give an account to God in the hereafter, this same Jesus has things to say about the seating arrangement the next time you are invited to a dinner party!

Amazing!

And he also has advice about who you should invite to your next dinner party.

Jesus understands that the deepest recesses of our heart and of our intentions are often betrayed by our smallest gestures.

Yes, the small stuff is important, because it shows everyone, including you, exactly who you are deep down.

MEDITATIO:

- The apostle Peter took Jesus’ words to heart as he also taught, ‘And all of you must put on the apron of humility, to serve one another; for the scripture says, “God resists the proud but shows favour to the humble.” Humble yourselves, then, under God’s mighty hand, so that he will lift you up in his own good time’. (1 Peter 5:5-6)
- Jesus regularly reminded his listeners about humility. Why do you think it is so important for us to keep a humble attitude towards others? Why is pride so dangerous?
- Think about who you invite to your home. Does Jesus’ teaching challenge your choice of guests?

ORATIO:

Ask God to speak to you from today’s reading about humility and hospitality.

Read Psalm 68:1-10. Notice the contrast between God’s majesty and his concern for the poor, the lonely, for widows, orphans and prisoners. Pray for people in these situations. The Holy Spirit may bring specific people to mind. God may also show you something practical you can do to help.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Have you ever had the opportunity to do good, like showing hospitality to someone who would never be able to repay it? Has anyone ever done that for you? Is there someone in your circle of influence right now who would need such a gesture of kindness?

COUNT THE COST

Luke 14:25-33

²⁵Once when large crowds of people were going along with Jesus, he turned and said to them, ²⁶“Those who come to me cannot be my disciples unless they love me more than they love father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and themselves as well. ²⁷Those who do not carry their own cross and come after me cannot be my disciples. ²⁸If one of you is planning to build a tower, you sit down first and figure out what it will cost, to see if you have enough money to finish the job. ²⁹If you don’t, you will not be able to finish the tower after laying the foundation; and all who see what happened will make fun of you. ³⁰‘You began to build but can’t finish the job!’ they will say. ³¹If a king goes out with ten thousand men to fight another king who comes against him with twenty thousand men, he will sit down first and decide if he is strong enough to face that other king. ³²If he isn’t, he will send messengers to meet the other king to ask for terms of peace while he is still a long way off. ³³In the same way,” concluded Jesus, “none of you can be my disciple unless you give up everything you have.”

Other Readings: Wisdom 9:13-18; Psalm 90:3-6, 12, 14-17; Philemon 9-10, 12-17

LECTIO:

In our world of quick credit with no down payments, we are easily convinced to sign long-term payment plans. But here we are jarred when we read the words of Jesus.

Our first reaction is that he is finally successful. There is a large crowd following him. He is in a great position to launch a mega-church. He could rent a large auditorium and get some media consultants.

But Jesus knows better. He can read people’s hearts and he knows that everybody in this crowd is not a committed disciple. Many of them are following him because they want free food. Others are enthralled by the healing spectacles and are following Jesus just to see the next show! It all seems to be such an easy life, walking along, listening to Jesus tell nice stories, watching the stage show and getting in on the free food and the miracle wine.

But Jesus is not interested in fair weather disciples. He wants disciples who have counted the cost, disciples who know that when you follow Jesus, you can’t stop a safe distance away from Calvary. You can’t stop when you get to the entrance of the Garden of Gethsemane. If you go with Jesus, you go all the way.

MEDITATIO:

- The final requirement for being one of Jesus’ disciples is pretty stringent: “None of you can be my disciple unless you give up everything you have.” Does anyone really live up to that standard? Is this what Jesus really expect us to do?

ORATIO:

Even as we examine our hearts to see whether we’ve got what it takes to follow Jesus as a disciple, he knows us even more intimately. As you seek the strength to follow, use the words of the Psalm to open your heart to God, asking him to give you strength where it is lacking.

CONTEMPLATIO:

What do you think is the most challenging thing about being a disciple of Jesus?

HOW MUCH TROUBLE IS ONE SHEEP WORTH?

Luke 15:3-32

³Jesus told them this parable:

⁴“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them—what do you do? You leave the other ninety-nine sheep in the pasture and go looking for the one that got lost until you find it. ⁵When you find it, you are so happy that you put it on your shoulders ⁶and carry it back home. Then you call your friends and neighbors together and say to them, ‘I am so happy I found my lost sheep. Let us celebrate!’ ⁷In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent.

⁸“Or suppose a woman who has ten silver coins loses one of them—what does she do? She lights a lamp, sweeps her house, and looks carefully everywhere until she finds it. ⁹When she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, and says to them, ‘I am so happy I found the coin I lost. Let us celebrate!’ ¹⁰In the same way, I tell you, the angels of God rejoice over one sinner who repents.”

¹¹Jesus went on to say, “There was once a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to him, ‘Father, give me my share of the property now.’ So the man divided his property between his two sons. ¹³After a few days the younger son sold his part of the property and left home with the money. He went to a country far away, where he wasted his money in reckless living. ¹⁴He spent everything he had. Then a severe famine spread over that country, and he was left without a thing. ¹⁵So he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him out to his farm to take care of the pigs. ¹⁶He wished he could fill himself with the bean pods the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything to eat. ¹⁷At last he came to his senses and said, ‘All my father’s hired workers have more than they can eat, and here I am about to starve!’ ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father and say, ‘Father, I have sinned against God and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired workers.’” ²⁰So he got up and started back to his father.

“He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with pity, and he ran, threw his arms around his son, and kissed him. ²¹‘Father,’ the son said, ‘I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.’ ²²But the father called to his servants. ‘Hurry!’ he said. ‘Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. ²³Then go and get the prize calf and kill it, and let us celebrate with a feast!’ ²⁴For this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.’ And so the feasting began.

²⁵“In the meantime the older son was out in the field. On his way back, when he came close to the house, he heard the music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants and asked him, ‘What’s going on?’ ²⁷‘Your brother has come back home,’ the servant answered, ‘and your father has killed the prize calf, because he got him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸The older brother was so angry that he would not go into the house; so his father came out and begged him to come in. ²⁹But he spoke back

to his father, ‘Look, all these years I have worked for you like a slave, and I have never disobeyed your orders. What have you given me? Not even a goat for me to have a feast with my friends!’ ³⁰But this son of yours wasted all your property on prostitutes, and when he comes back home, you kill the prize calf for him!’ ³¹‘My son,’ the father answered, ‘you are always here with me, and everything I have is yours.’ ³²But we had to celebrate and be happy, because your brother was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.”

Other Readings: Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14; Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 17-19; 1 Timothy 1:12-17

LECTIO:

Statisticians, teachers, economists, maybe even the typical pastor, would likely differ with the shepherd’s approach. After all, he’s got 99 perfectly healthy sheep. And this one who has wandered away is likely the troublemaker of the lot, the one who keeps getting lost, and ignoring the shepherd’s call.

“You need to just let the problematic headstrong ones go,” we’d tell the shepherd. “They’re just more trouble than they’re worth.” But the shepherd would disagree. And apparently, so does Jesus.

Thank God! Because truth be told, you and I have often been the wayward ones who keep erring and getting into trouble. We’d really be lost if he wasn’t persistent.

MEDITATIO:

- Exodus 32:7-14 tells the strange story of God arguing with Moses about the fate of his people. Has God really given up on his people, or is he just tempting Moses’ resolve as their leader?

ORATIO:

Psalm 51 expresses what might well be the contrition of a wandering sheep returning to the shepherd and pleading for grace. Use these words as your approach of confession in your prayers this week.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Have you ever helped someone that you were tempted to give up on? Is God’s persistence with you a motivation in your care for others who sometimes push you beyond what you can bear?

SPIRITUALLY SHREWD

Luke 16:1-13

¹Jesus said to his disciples, “There was once a rich man who had a servant who managed his property. The rich man was told that the manager was wasting his master’s money, ²so he called him in and said, ‘What is this I hear about you? Turn in a complete account of your handling of my property, because you cannot be my manager any longer.’ ³The servant said to himself, ‘My master is going to dismiss me from my job. What shall I do? I am not strong enough to dig ditches, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴Now I know what I will do! Then when my job is gone, I shall have friends who will welcome me in their homes.’ ⁵So he called in all the people who were in debt to his master. He asked the first one, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶‘One hundred barrels of olive oil,’ he answered. ‘Here is your account,’ the manager told him; ‘sit down and write fifty.’ ⁷Then he asked another one, ‘And you—how much do you owe?’ ‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he answered. ‘Here is your account,’ the manager told him; ‘write eight hundred.’ ⁸As a result the master of this dishonest manager praised him for doing such a shrewd thing; because the people of this world are much more shrewd in handling their affairs than the people who belong to the light.”

⁹And Jesus went on to say, “And so I tell you: make friends for yourselves with worldly wealth, so that when it gives out, you will be welcomed in the eternal home. ¹⁰Whoever is faithful in small matters will be faithful in large ones; whoever is dishonest in small matters will be dishonest in large ones. ¹¹If, then, you have not been faithful in handling worldly wealth, how can you be trusted with true wealth? ¹²And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to someone else, who will give you what belongs to you?”

¹³“No servant can be the slave of two masters; such a slave will hate one and love the other or will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

Other Readings: Amos 8:4-7; Psalm 113:1-2, 5-8; 1 Timothy 2:1-8



LECTIO:

This is certainly one case where misreading a parable can lead to some pretty strange conclusions. Indeed, in spite of appearances, Jesus is not condoning the dishonesty of the shrewd manager. Parables are not meant to be applied and interpreted in every last detail. They typically teach one central lesson.

In this case, the point is that knowing that his time was short, the manager made use of resources he had temporary access to to create long-term friendships. After he was out on the street, the manager knew that the people he had done these favours for would want to repay him for his kindness. The point of the parable isn’t that we are to cheat our boss, but that we are to use our temporary resources – our material possessions and opportunities – to make a difference in eternity. There is a way we can live and invest our resources in order to create lasting impact for ourselves, and for others.

And while he’s on the subject, Jesus adds what appear to be two little additional bits of wisdom about money. First, he notes that it is through our handling of less important, temporal treasures that we show whether we are ready to handle far more valuable things. Second, if these temporal possessions begin to control us, it is highly likely that we will be lost to God’s control. We can’t serve two masters at the same time!



MEDITATIO:

- Can you think of ways you might “make friends for yourselves with worldly wealth, so that when the time comes, you will be welcomed in the eternal home.”



ORATIO:

Often we presume that if we give generously to others, we will not have enough to meet our own needs. Read the words of Psalm 113 prayerfully as you seek God’s comfort about this concern.



CONTEMPLATIO:

In 1 Timothy 2:1-7 Paul tells Timothy that God really wants everyone to come to a saving knowledge of Christ. Since this is God’s earnest desire, it should have an impact on our behaviour. How should you and I invest our time and resources in order to make this desire of God’s heart a reality?

IF THEY WILL NOT LISTEN...

Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹“There was once a rich man who dressed in the most expensive clothes and lived in great luxury every day. ²⁰There was also a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who used to be brought to the rich man’s door, ²¹hoping to eat the bits of food that fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the feast in heaven. The rich man died and was buried, ²³and in Hades, where he was in great pain, he looked up and saw Abraham, far away, with Lazarus at his side. ²⁴So he called out, ‘Father Abraham! Take pity on me, and send Lazarus to dip his finger in some water and cool off my tongue, because I am in great pain in this fire!’ ²⁵But Abraham said, ‘Remember, my son, that in your lifetime you were given all the good things, while Lazarus got all the bad things. But now he is enjoying himself here, while you are in pain. ²⁶Besides all that, there is a deep pit lying between us, so that those who want to cross over from here to you cannot do so, nor can anyone cross over to us from where you are.’ ²⁷The rich man said, ‘Then I beg you, father Abraham, send Lazarus to my father’s house, ²⁸where I have five brothers. Let him go and warn them so that they, at least, will not come to this place of pain.’ ²⁹Abraham said, ‘Your brothers have Moses and the prophets to warn them; your brothers should listen to what they say.’ ³⁰The rich man answered, ‘That is not enough, father Abraham! But if someone were to rise from death and go to them, then they would turn from their sins.’ ³¹But Abraham said, ‘If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone were to rise from death.’”

Other Readings: Amos 6:1, 4-7; Psalm 146:5-10; 1 Timothy 6:11-16

LECTIO:

We are confronted once again with a parable which tempts us to pay a little too much attention to detail, and to miss the central point.

While this parable has often been used in an attempt to placate the poor about their earthly conditions, suggesting that their poverty here below is somehow ensuring their entry into heaven, that does not seem to be the point the parable is trying to make.

Others delve into the descriptive details of heaven and hades and draw all kinds of strange conclusions about the afterlife which are not really supported by other biblical evidence.

If we keep in mind Jesus’ tendency to drive home the point of the parable as he wraps up the story, it seems that the central focus of this parable is about how individuals pay attention to and are accountable for the spiritual truth they are taught. The rich man’s main crime seems to have been ignoring the suffering of the beggar who sat at his door every day hoping for a scrap of food. Presumably it is this sin that he wants his brothers to be warned about so that they do not wind up in this same place of torment. And he has just the solution. Someone raised from the dead would certainly get the brothers’ attention. But not so says Abraham. If they do not listen to the plain teachings of Moses and the prophets, they won’t listen to anybody else, resurrected or not.

MEDITATIO:

- Abraham’s comment that the brothers would not listen even if someone was raised from the dead seems to be a pretty strong assertion. Is there anything in the Gospel texts that would support that claim?

ORATIO:

Ask God to keep you tender to his leading and prodding about the areas in your life where you are coming short.

CONTEMPLATIO:

If there was something in your life that needed to be corrected, some sin that needed to be addressed, how would God have to speak to you so that you would listen? Would it work if someone back from the dead spoke to you?

FAITH AND DUTY— WHY WE DO THE THINGS WE DO

Luke 17:5-10

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, “Make our faith greater.”

⁶The Lord answered, “If you had faith as big as a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Pull yourself up by the roots and plant yourself in the sea!’ and it would obey you.

⁷“Suppose one of you has a servant who is plowing or looking after the sheep. When he comes in from the field, do you tell him to hurry along and eat his meal?

⁸Of course not! Instead, you say to him, ‘Get my supper ready, then put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may have your meal.’

⁹The servant does not deserve thanks for obeying orders, does he? ¹⁰It is the same with you; when you have done all you have been told to do, say, ‘We are ordinary servants; we have only done our duty.’”

Other Readings: Habakkuk 1:2-3, 2:2-4; Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9; 2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14

LECTIO:

Because we humans can only see the externals, we tend to pay a lot of attention to appearances and to tangible actions, too often without questioning the motives of the heart. The two short bits of text that are grouped together in today’s reading from Luke raise the question of motivation.

In response to the disciples’ request for more faith, Jesus simply responded that even a very small amount of faith can accomplish much. It’s almost as though the size of the faith itself didn’t matter, or certainly nowhere near as much as who the faith is vested in. The unanswered question of course is why the disciples are looking for more faith. What is it exactly that they would like to accomplish with this newfound faith?

But before that question can be asked, Jesus reminds them of the difference between servants and masters.

Some commentators suggest that the disciples were anxious to have a little more faith so that they could tell God exactly what they wanted him to do. Perhaps they had figured out exactly how they wanted him to display his power. Don’t forget, says Jesus, that the servant is under orders and when he obeys, he deserves no special recognition... he has merely done the job expected of him.

Sometimes our desire for mountain-moving faith is nothing more than second-thinking God, figuring out how we would fix the world if we were in control and not mere servants.

MEDITATIO:

- Have you ever wondered about trading places with God? If you were in his position, do you think you would be running the world a little differently? What would you change?

ORATIO:

Prayerfully consider your response to God from this reading and your meditation. In today’s reading from Paul’s letter to Timothy, the apostle encourages the young evangelist to keep alive the gift God gave him. This can speak to us too. Ask the Holy Spirit to nurture these precious gifts of power, love and self control, enabling you to live out your life in humble service to God. The Holy Spirit will also help you endure when times are hard.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Paul talks about his motivation as a servant of Christ in 2 Timothy 1. Why was he willing to suffer so much for the sake of the cause of Christ?

PRAISING GOD IN A LOUD VOICE

Luke 17:11-19

¹¹As Jesus made his way to Jerusalem, he went along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²He was going into a village when he was met by ten men suffering from a dreaded skin disease. They stood at a distance ¹³and shouted, "Jesus! Master! Have pity on us!"

¹⁴Jesus saw them and said to them, "Go and let the priests examine you."

On the way they were made clean. ¹⁵When one of them saw that he was healed, he came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶He threw himself to the ground at Jesus' feet and thanked him. The man was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Jesus spoke up, "There were ten who were healed; where are the other nine? ¹⁸Why is this foreigner the only one who came back to give thanks to God?" ¹⁹And Jesus said to him, "Get up and go; your faith has made you well."

Other Readings: Psalm 98:1-6; 2 Timothy 2:8-13



LECTIO:

The life of a leper was not an easy one. The unsightly skin disease came with an unpleasant odour and oozing sores, and as a result, seclusion of course. The disease made you ceremonially unclean, often cutting you off from friend and family and keeping you in isolation.

As the ten lepers see Jesus and the crowd approaching, they have to keep at the prescribed distance and so they must yell to be heard. No doubt the crowd is pressing in around Jesus and if they are to be heard above this mob, standing a distance away, they must yell. And yell they do. Loud enough that they are heard.

As he so often does, Jesus responds to faith-filled requests for help, but he asks a further measure of faith, instructing them to go to the priests to be examined. (The priests were instructed on how to recognize infectious diseases and would be able to pass judgment on whether the ten lepers were cleansed.) To their credit, the ten lepers seem to head off towards the priest's place immediately, even before they are healed. A pretty audacious step!

Along the way, one of them realizes that he has been healed, and he returns immediately to thank Jesus. Since he is now clean and no longer required to keep his distance, he gets up close and personal and bows at Jesus' feet; strangely enough though, he is still yelling. This time he's praising God with a loud voice. Not only

is he the only one of the ten to return to say thanks, but he also makes a spectacle of himself, praising God at the top of his voice.

MEDITATIO:

- Would you have had enough faith to have started walking towards the priests' place while you could still see the leprosy sores on your skin, or would you have waited until you saw something happen? Why do you think the ten lepers had such faith in Jesus?

ORATIO:

Think about all the ways God has been good to you. Write them down and read your list through each day this week. Respond to God with thanks and praise. The Holy Spirit may well remind you of more things as the week progresses. Ask God to help you to always be grateful for all he has done in your life.

Choose a Psalm each day this week to help you express your praise to God.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Do you thank God as loudly as you make your requests?

PERSISTENT FAITH

Luke 18:1-8

¹ Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to teach them that they should always pray and never become discouraged. ² “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected people. ³ And there was a widow in that same town who kept coming to him and pleading for her rights, saying, ‘Help me against my opponent!’ ⁴ For a long time the judge refused to act, but at last he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or respect people, ⁵ yet because of all the trouble this widow is giving me, I will see to it that she gets her rights. If I don’t, she will keep on coming and finally wear me out!’”

⁶ And the Lord continued, “Listen to what that corrupt judge said. ⁷ Now, will God not judge in favor of his own people who cry to him day and night for help? Will he be slow to help them? ⁸ I tell you, he will judge in their favor and do it quickly. But will the Son of Man find faith on earth when he comes?”

Other Readings: Exodus 17:8-13; Psalm 121:1-8; 2 Timothy 3:14 – 4:2

LECTIO:

This time Luke provides a little more help in interpreting the parable—he gives us the point of the parable right up front. We’re not sure if something had discouraged the disciples or if they had asked a question about prayer, but regardless of the circumstances, Jesus tells them a parable that is meant to encourage them to pray with persistence.

Once again, part of the issue with prayer is focused on the character of the one we are praying to. Jesus suggests that if even the unrighteous judge responded to the prayer of the persistent widow, simply to get her off his back, will not God who cares for his people respond to their pleas and cries. Do you remember Jesus’ earlier illustration about the way even earthly fathers respond with care to the petitions of their children? We are facing the same argument here, but with a contrast. Clearly a father would respond to legitimate requests from his children for food. And even an unrighteous judge will respond to the persistent petitions of a helpless widow. So certainly, God will respond to the prayers of his children.

If God’s part of the equation is not in question, Jesus does allow himself a moment of concern. As life becomes difficult, and the heart of man is prone to discouragement, Jesus wonders whether those of faith will persist to the end.

When the Son of Man returns, will there still be some who will be pounding at the door of heaven, pleading with intensity for God to act on behalf of a needy world?

MEDITATIO:

- If God is omniscient and loving, he hears our prayers the first time and he is already moved by our need, why do you think it is important to be persistent in prayer?

ORATIO:

Psalm 121 expresses the hope of a man who looks to God for help and protection. As you come to God persistently with your petitions this week, use these words to express your confidence and gratitude to God.

CONTEMPLATIO:

If somebody were to watch your prayer life, would they say that you are persistent in prayer?

THOSE WHO HUMBLE THEMSELVES

Luke 18:9-14

⁹Jesus also told this parable to people who were sure of their own goodness and despised everybody else. ¹⁰“Once there were two men who went up to the Temple to pray: one was a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood apart by himself and prayed, ‘I thank you, God, that I am not greedy, dishonest, or an adulterer, like everybody else. I thank you that I am not like that tax collector over there. ¹²I fast two days a week, and I give you one tenth of all my income.’ ¹³But the tax collector stood at a distance and would not even raise his face to heaven, but beat on his breast and said, ‘God, have pity on me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴I tell you,” said Jesus, “the tax collector, and not the Pharisee, was in the right with God when he went home. For those who make themselves great will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be made great.”

*Other Readings: Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18; Psalm 34:2-3, 16-18, 19-23;
2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18*

LECTIO:

Jesus returns once more to the theme of humility. Humility isn't just about the way we deal with others, there also seems to be a need for a certain amount of humility in our approach to God.

Luke helps provide some context to the parable right up front. It's addressed to an interesting group. Luke calls them people who were “sure of their own goodness and despised everybody else.” Beyond that, the story really needs little explanation or added application.

The self-righteous Pharisee stood apart by himself because he thought he was too good for everybody else. The tax collector also stands alone “at a distance,” but he does so because he doesn't think he's worthy to be in with the rest of the worshippers.

The text certainly invites some penetrating questions about our religious rituals and the motivations behind them: do we tithe, pray and fast just so that we can brag about it?

MEDITATIO:

- In 2 Timothy 4:6-8 and 16-18, Paul, at the end of his life, reflects on his service for Christ with a certain sense of accomplishment, and yet there is also a certain sense of humility in what he says. How do the accomplishments Paul lists differ from the bragging list of the self-righteous Pharisee in our story from Luke?

ORATIO:

Reflect on today's Gospel reading. Let God reveal any areas of sin that you need to put right. Consider whether you have taken God's forgiveness for granted. Give thanks for God's mercy and acknowledge your dependence on him.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Are there times where you are tempted to perform religious rituals just to be seen, or just so you can provide God with a list of what you have done?

OUR STATURE IN THE EYES OF GOD

Luke 19:1-10

¹Jesus went on into Jericho and was passing through. ²There was a chief tax collector there named Zacchaeus, who was rich. ³He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was a little man and could not see Jesus because of the crowd. ⁴So he ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus, who was going to pass that way. ⁵When Jesus came to that place, he looked up and said to Zacchaeus, "Hurry down, Zacchaeus, because I must stay in your house today."

⁶Zacchaeus hurried down and welcomed him with great joy. ⁷All the people who saw it started grumbling, "This man has gone as a guest to the home of a sinner!"

⁸Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Listen, sir! I will give half my belongings to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times as much."

⁹Jesus said to him, "Salvation has come to this house today, for this man, also, is a descendant of Abraham. ¹⁰The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

*Other Readings: Wisdom 11:23 – 12:2; Psalm 145:1-2, 8-14;
2 Thessalonians 1:11 – 2:2*

LECTIO:

We keep doing it. No matter how much we try, part of us can't help but judge people by their outward appearances.

And as far as perceptions went, Zacchaeus had several strikes against him. People resented him because of his wealth, but it was made worse because he had accumulated that wealth through his tax collection franchise. This process involved levying taxes from your own people, pocketing a share of it for yourself and remitting the rest to the disliked Roman authorities – which made Zacchaeus both a cheater and a traitor. And he was so good at what he did, he had risen through the ranks and is referred to as *chief* tax collector.

To make matters worse, Zacchaeus wasn't very tall. You can just imagine that this physical challenge, combined with his detested position, must really have made him a popular person around town! I wonder whether there were jokes told about Zacchaeus behind his back, or whether people openly sneered at him.

Zacchaeus certainly would not have been at the top of people's guest list, and they certainly would never have thought of him as a prime candidate for responding positively to Jesus' message about the Gospel.

Thank goodness that Jesus always looks beyond the stereotypes and the outward appearances, as opposed to us humans who easily misjudge others and discount their value.

MEDITATIO:

- Prejudice can be a destructive thing, and it can become particularly divisive within Christian communities. As the world gets smaller, technology makes travel easier, and political upheavals increase migration around the world, chances are that even your own local community of faith looks nothing like it did just twenty years ago. Potluck dinners in the church where I worship with my family has now become one of the most exciting mixes of tastes and smells and traditions. May the story of Zacchaeus today remind us of the importance of openness and understanding towards those who are different from us. And as we work together for the advancement of the Gospel, may God help us to refrain from trying to guess ahead of time who we think might respond.

ORATIO:

The text of Psalm 145 celebrates God's goodness to all those he has created, no matter their appearance or their standing. Use the words of this Psalm as you celebrate God's compassion and grace in your prayers this week.

CONTEMPLATIO:

Paul speaks to the Thessalonian Christians about the End Times because they are concerned about things they have heard. It seems that some people were judging by outward appearances and causing panic in the church. In 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, he prays that God would count them worthy of their calling and help them fulfill the good things they have set their minds to do. Ask God to help you, like Zacchaeus, in spite of sometimes difficult appearances, to live out the commitments you have made to do the right thing.

GOD'S VALUES

Luke 20:27-38

²⁷ Then some Sadducees, who say that people will not rise from death, came to Jesus and said, ²⁸ "Teacher, Moses wrote this law for us: 'If a man dies and leaves a wife but no children, that man's brother must marry the widow so that they can have children who will be considered the dead man's children.' ²⁹ Once there were seven brothers; the oldest got married and died without having children. ³⁰ Then the second one married the woman, ³¹ and then the third. The same thing happened to all seven—they died without having children. ³² Last of all, the woman died. ³³ Now, on the day when the dead rise to life, whose wife will she be? All seven of them had married her."

³⁴ Jesus answered them, "The men and women of this age marry, ³⁵ but the men and women who are worthy to rise from death and live in the age to come will not then marry. ³⁶ They will be like angels and cannot die. They are the children of God, because they have risen from death. ³⁷ And Moses clearly proves that the dead are raised to life. In the passage about the burning bush he speaks of the Lord as 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' ³⁸ He is the God of the living, not of the dead, for to him all are alive."

*Other Readings: 2 Macabbees 7:1-2, 9-14; Psalm 17:1-3, 5-6, 8-15;
2 Thessalonians 2:16 – 3:5*

LECTIO:

The Scribes, the Pharisees and the Sadducees sometimes came together to trap Jesus, but this time the Sadducees are alone because they are the only ones in the group who reject the resurrection. In fact, their theology rejected anything miraculous or supernatural.

The little story they bring to Jesus, which sounds just too neat not to be a little piece of fiction contrived for the occasion, is meant to trap Jesus.

Let's admit at the onset that belief in the resurrection is not easy. This question of who would be married to whom is not the only tricky part of the question about the afterlife, and we, as Christians, understand that there is a significant burden of proof on us if we are going to hang on to this belief.

Surprisingly, Jesus does not respond as forcefully as one would expect in defense of the resurrection. He tells them that even Moses – an authority even the Sadducees would have respected – believed in the resurrection and the afterlife.

But ultimately Jesus knew that the strongest affirmation of the belief in the resurrection would not come until later when he himself would rise from the dead.

MEDITATIO:

- When Paul writes his second letter to the Thessalonian Christians, he knows that they are worried. They had expected Jesus to return very shortly, but many of their Christian friends were dying, some due to persecution, and they were beginning to wonder whether Jesus' promises were still true, and whether the promised Day of the Lord would indeed come. As Paul writes to them to encourage them, he hopes that his words will help them to live courageous lives. (See the text from 2 Thessalonians 2.) How does our confidence in Christ's return help us to lead better lives?

ORATIO:

Pray these verses from 2 Thessalonians (2:16-17, 3:5) and bring any fears to God: 'May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and in his grace gave us unfailing courage and a firm hope, encourage you and strengthen you always to do good and say what is good. May the Lord lead you into a greater understanding of God's love and the endurance that is given by Christ.'

CONTEMPLATIO:

Never forget that as believers, our security and confidence about our future resurrection rests not in ably conceived arguments and crafty debate, but in the resurrection of Christ himself, the firstfruits of those who will follow.

WHEN TROUBLE COMES

Luke 21:5-19

⁵Some of the disciples were talking about the Temple, how beautiful it looked with its fine stones and the gifts offered to God. Jesus said, ⁶“All this you see—the time will come when not a single stone here will be left in its place; everyone will be thrown down.”

⁷“Teacher,” they asked, “when will this be? And what will happen in order to show that the time has come for it to take place?”

⁸Jesus said, “Watch out; don’t be fooled. Many men, claiming to speak for me, will come and say, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time has come!’ But don’t follow them. ⁹Don’t be afraid when you hear of wars and revolutions; such things must happen first, but they do not mean that the end is near.”

¹⁰He went on to say, “Countries will fight each other; kingdoms will attack one another. ¹¹There will be terrible earthquakes, famines, and plagues everywhere; there will be strange and terrifying things coming from the sky. ¹²Before all these things take place, however, you will be arrested and persecuted; you will be handed over to be tried in synagogues and be put in prison; you will be brought before kings and rulers for my sake. ¹³This will be your chance to tell the Good News. ¹⁴Make up your minds ahead of time not to worry about how you will defend yourselves, ¹⁵because I will give you such words and wisdom that none of your enemies will be able to refute or contradict what you say. ¹⁶You will be handed over by your parents, your brothers, your relatives, and your friends; and some of you will be put to death. ¹⁷Everyone will hate you because of me. ¹⁸But not a single hair from your heads will be lost. ¹⁹Stand firm, and you will save yourselves.

Other Readings: Malachi 3:19-20; Psalm 98:5-10; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12

1 LECTIO:

Jesus makes what must have been some very troubling announcements for the disciples. At the beginning of this portion, he announces the destruction of the beloved Temple in Jerusalem. With our historical perspective of course we realize that this portion of his predictions would come true within a matter of a few decades when Jerusalem was sacked in 70 A.D.

The most striking aspect of our text today is the way Jesus deflects the disciples’ questions. They want to know about these great world events and when they will happen. They want to talk about international politics and the macro economics and astronomical phenomena happening in the skies above.

But Jesus quickly brings the discussion down to the micro level, to questions about how they must live their lives and comport themselves. He warns of the things they must do personally to be ready for these terrible times of persecution.

Just like the disciples, we too are often very concerned about what God is doing out there on the world scene, about the way he sometimes seems to tolerate evil dictators far too long, about the great world events swirling around us... but Jesus keeps bringing the discussion back to our level. As troubles arise, and even when persecution begins, my concern should be my own heart, my own life and the way I am striving to live faithfully in troubled times.

2 MEDITATIO:

- The destruction of the Temple was a terrible event for the Jewish religious worship of the day. They had always assumed that their rituals were so important to God that he would never again allow the Temple to be destroyed and the offerings on the altar to be discontinued. What a shock the destruction of Jerusalem must have been. The Christian Church has also met similar shocks. We have a tendency over time to make sacred some outward manifestations of our faith – maybe a building or an individual – and when these come to an end, we find ourselves in need of readjustment. Are there external material things you are hanging on and giving undue importance to that God might have to take away so that you can focus on him instead?

3 ORATIO:

Psalm 98 is a wonderful text to use in your prayers this week. It celebrates the victories and the wonderful deeds of power that God has performed before all the people – and the resurrection of Christ is certainly among them.

4 CONTEMPLATIO:

As we head into difficult times to come, ask God to help you prepare your heart and your resolve to live as a faithful disciple of Christ, in spite of the circumstances.

BEHOLD THE KING!

Luke 1:68-79

⁶⁸ “Let us praise the Lord, the God of Israel!

He has come to the help of his people and has set them free.

⁶⁹ He has provided for us a mighty Saviour,
a descendant of his servant David.

⁷⁰ He promised through his holy prophets long ago

⁷¹ that he would save us from our enemies,
from the power of all those who hate us.

⁷² He said he would show mercy to our ancestors and remember his sacred covenant.

⁷³⁻⁷⁴ With a solemn oath to our ancestor Abraham

he promised to rescue us from our enemies
and allow us to serve him without fear,

⁷⁵ so that we might be holy and righteous before him
all the days of our life.

⁷⁶ “You, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High God.

You will go ahead of the Lord
to prepare his road for him,

⁷⁷ to tell his people that they will be saved by having their sins forgiven.

⁷⁸ Our God is merciful and tender.

He will cause the bright dawn of salvation to rise on us

⁷⁹ and to shine from heaven on all those who live in the dark shadow of death,
to guide our steps into the path of peace.”

Luke 23:35-43

³⁵ The people stood there watching while the Jewish leaders made fun of him:
“He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah whom God has chosen!”

³⁶ The soldiers also made fun of him: they came up to him and offered him
cheap wine, ³⁷ and said, “Save yourself if you are the king of the Jews!”

³⁸ Above him were written these words: “This is the King of the Jews.”

³⁹ One of the criminals hanging there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the
Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

⁴⁰ The other one, however, rebuked him, saying, “Don’t you fear God? You
received the same sentence he did. ⁴¹ Ours, however, is only right, because we are
getting what we deserve for what we did; but he has done no wrong.” ⁴² And he said
to Jesus, “Remember me, Jesus, when you come as King!”

⁴³ Jesus said to him, “I promise you that today you will be in Paradise with me.”

Other Readings: 2 Samuel 5:1-3; Psalm 122:1-7; Colossians 1:12-20

LECTIO:

In our final readings from Luke today, the lectionary very masterfully places two powerful texts side by side. The first is what might be considered the final Old Testament prophecy about the coming Messiah. It is recorded in the New Testament, but it is in fact spoken before the birth of Christ, by Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. The words of his prophecy confirm that the hopes of the coming Messiah and of what he will accomplish have not abated.

We are then confronted with another text about kingship, messiah-ship and sovereignty, but this part of the text comes as the prophecies are almost fulfilled. Within a matter of moments after this second text ends, Jesus will yield his spirit into his Father’s hands, but only after having uttered those fateful words... “It is finished!”

How ironic that once again God has done his greatest work in apparent humility and frailty. In the broken body of one who was misjudged as a criminal, hung on a cross alone in the dark, spit upon and abused, insulted and derided. It is here in these tragic painful final moments at Calvary that Jesus fulfills the Messianic promises and accomplishes our redemption.

We rightly crown him as our victorious king today, not just because of who he is, but also because of the great triumph he has accomplished.

MEDITATIO:


- Pause at the foot of the cross. Acknowledge your sinfulness. Rejoice that the grace of God is available to redeem sinners like us.
- How did you recognize Jesus as your Saviour? Were you given a blinding moment of grace when you knew the truth like the criminal? Or has your understanding been a gradual process bringing you to faith over months or years?
- Think ahead to when Jesus will return in power and glory as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Meditate on this glorious hope.

ORATIO:

Colossians 1:12-20 is one of the most beautiful hymns of praise to the sovereign Christ in the New Testament. Use the words of that text as praise in your prayers this week.

CONTEMPLATIO:

We are very anxious to see Christ exercise his kingly rule over a troubled world, but are we as anxious to submit our own hearts and lives to his authority?



“Your word is a lamp to guide me
and a light for my path.”

Psalm 119:105
Good News Bible

