

Sunday Gospel Readings
lectio divina

Year A: Year of Matthew



Canadian Bible Society

www.biblesociety.ca

Alain Faucher is a professor of Biblical Exegesis at Laval University (Quebec) and Dean of the Faculty. Ordained a priest of the Catholic Church in 1978, he has a degree, among others, from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. He served as editor of the deuterocanonical books of the “Parole de Vie” translation, and contributed to the development and writing of the *Bible expliquée*.

Member of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of St. Hyacinthe, **Ghislaine Salvail** is frequently invited to lead retreats and biblical and spiritual sessions for various groups.

With a solid Biblical training, she writes short devotional columns on day-to-day realities highlighting the key message. The sensitivity and simplicity of her writings touch the heart of the readers.

Patrice Bergeron is a priest in the Diocese of Montreal. He has a degree in Biblical studies from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, and has studied one semester at the Biblical School of Jerusalem in Israel.

Felix Adouayom is from Togo, where he was pastor and president of the Methodist Church for many years. He now lives in Montreal where he has joined the United Church and works in the field of international medical aid, particularly to francophone Africa.

and

Andrée Marcoux lives in Quebec City where she has been leading Mess’AJE catechism classes for adults for many years. She was trained in theology and exegesis by the founders of this catechism, professors at the University of Lille, France, and at universities in Quebec. She is the mother of two daughters and a grandmother.

Bible Text ‘Good News Translation’, second edition
© 1992 American Bible Society, New York. Used with permission.

Acknowledgement: Thanks to the American Bible Society www.americanbible.org for granting permission to adapt material from Encuentro Con La Biblia/Encounter With the Bible for use in the introduction.

© Canadian Bible Society, 2013 | www.biblesociety.ca

ISBN 978-0-88834-993-4
301021096

Printed in Canada

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. When Pope Francis (Cardinal Bergoglio) spoke at the Eucharistic Congress in Quebec in 2008, he presented his teaching as a *Lectio divina*.

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

1 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.

2 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.

3 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

4 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.

1 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.

2 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.

3 ORATIO

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.

4 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.*

RESPONSIBLE SERVANTS

Mark 13.33-37

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

Other Readings: Isaiah 2.1-5; Psalm 122.1-2, 4-9; Romans 13.11-14

LECTIO

Today marks the beginning of a new liturgical year. We will start reading from the Gospel according to Mark, and will do so for several Sundays. There is continuity, however, with messages from previous Sundays. For the fourth consecutive Sunday, in this Gospel, Jesus is telling his disciples about his second coming, which will take place in the ‘fullness of time.’ Taken in relation to the full Gospel account, the verses from the reading this first Sunday of Advent come just before the events leading to the death of Jesus. They precede the religious leaders’ conspiracy, the anointing with perfume, Judas’ betrayal and the Passover meal. We can therefore easily infer that today’s reading refers to a question of life or death.

Masters exert their authority by delegating responsibilities to their servants. The doorkeeper has specific instructions and monitors movement between the living quarters and the outside. The architecture of large houses at the time required this strategic function. But no one knows when the master will return, and if he returns unexpectedly, this may result in an unfortunate scenario, as his servants may be asleep and not performing their duties. In the Mediterranean society of the time, such a scenario would constitute a grave discredit to the honour of both servant and master. Both would be disgraced, the former for failing to perform his duties, and the latter for not being treated with the seriousness he deserves by the servants.

The passage from the Liturgy’s Sunday Gospel readings is well crafted, and the introduction is a two-fold call to action; the double invitation can be explained by the uncertainty over the time of Jesus’ return. The conclusion reminds us of the call to stay alert, which is extended to all. The body of the pericope is a parable at the core of which is the call to all listeners. The second person pronouns engage the audience with the parable. Fiction and reality come together, and the audience is intensely engaged in Jesus’ request. The parable thus introduces an element that can be adapted to various contexts.

2 MEDITATIO

- “Jesus was telling his disciples about the time of his coming.” Clearly, this is not the first coming, which we will be celebrating over Christmas at the end of this month. But what ‘coming’ is he referring to? It’s impossible to answer this first question by referring only to the Gospel reading from the first Sunday of Advent. The few verses that we have read from the Gospel of Mark describe only one feature of this coming: that the moment and time of his return are not known. The call to persevere is thus based on an absolute confidence in Jesus’ teachings and in the assurance that he will come back in the full glory proclaimed at each Eucharist.

3 ORATIO

Grant me the grace to trust in you. The brevity of Jesus’ invitation calls for a response built on credibility.

Teach me to remain steadfast in the face of daily trials and tribulations. The wait that Jesus talks about means that I have to take my personal duties seriously at all times. Show me that keeping watch is not a distraction from routine responsibilities.

I celebrate the joy that comes from actions rooted in the hope of the Lord’s coming.

4 CONTEMPLATIO

Reflections by Bishop Gianfranco Ravasi, *Celebrare e vivere la Parola*, Milan, Ancora, 1987, pages 251-252. English translation below.

Advent is a dynamic liturgical period; it is a time to wait, a time to hope and a time to stay alert. Advent is also a metaphor for Christian life, which is characterized by moving, searching and waiting. It is a call to resist inaction, indifference and apathy. Advent is not a time for laziness, boredom and gloom but, rather, a call to undertake a journey with a goal, a call for action and a call to lead a life with a purpose because Christ is a “permanent city ... which is to come” (Hebrews 13.14).

Advent is also a celebration of God’s movement. Quite often, we experience his silence and his distance, but every now and then, God appears along the most unusual roads, in the most unexpected circumstances, and at odd hours (in the evening, at night, at dawn or at an unknown hour, as the Gospel says). We must have ears to hear and eyes to see. Faith is attention, surprise and tension, but, above all, it is the joyous certainty of the faithful love of a God who has taken the first steps, and who does not leave us on our own.

Alain Faucher

THE HEART OF THE MESSENGER

Mark 1.1-8

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

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

³ Someone is shouting in the desert,

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

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

⁶ John wore clothes made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He announced to the people, “The man who will come after me is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to bend down and untie his sandals. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”
Other Readings: Isaiah 11.1-10; Psalm 72.1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17; Romans 15.4-9

LECTIO

Our text this Sunday comes from the beginning of the shortest of the four Gospels. It’s fascinating to note how Saint Mark begins his story about Jesus. His first word brings to mind the first book of the Bible, and echoes a new Genesis: “The beginning...” But the beginning of what? The beginning of a gospel. A gospel? In those times, the term “gospel” was commonly used to announce favour shown to a people by their rulers, or a happy event.

Here, the word “gospel” is a bit nebulous. Does it refer to the person of Jesus or to the content of his message? We need to keep this lack of precision in mind if we are to appreciate the rest of the account. What is clear though is that the rest of the account builds on the identity of Jesus, which is revealed from the very first verse: Jesus is chosen by God (Christ) and is the Son of God.

These titles of high honour highlight the contrast with the other verses in today’s reading. The other verses show us John the Baptist, who preaches a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He has a good reputation, since Jerusalem and all Judea come to him in full confidence, even though his workplace is outside the area where people usually live. Are these verses on the subject of John the Baptist superfluous? Not at all, because in verses 7-8 is found the foundation on which crucial declarations confirming the status of Jesus are built. Most unexpected though is John’s self-deprecating statement in comparison to someone (Jesus) who has not yet even stepped on the stage!

In what way was the work of John the Baptist important for the life of God’s people? A person’s sin is a public dishonour to God even when the sin is committed in private.

God’s honour must therefore be restored through a public act. Baptism by immersion makes people part of a transformed group, reconciled with God.

The mention of the spirit of holiness which will be a hallmark of Jesus’ work (verse 8) is a reference to his ministry as a divine judge, who will separate things that don’t really fit together. This separation took place when the world was created, and also during sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem. It will again be at the core of the following chapters of Mark’s Gospel

MEDITATIO

- I would not necessarily choose to spend time on John the Baptist. Anxious as I am to get to Christmas, I’m surprised to read a Gospel that pays so much attention to a secondary character. I need to be convinced that the time spent on this “supporting actor” is time well spent in my search for Jesus Christ. In fact, this man John, this prophet, has a vital role: he gives credibility to Jesus.
- Am I still able to listen and get the most from a bold testimony about Jesus? More importantly, can I too be a go-between, a link that makes contact with Jesus easier?
- This meditation could transform the nature of my Christmas celebrations. There’s a world of difference between a celebration centred on my feelings and one that gives first place to the real hero of Christmas! This Sunday is a good opportunity to do some soul searching on this topic, which can be a bone of contention in some families or groups...

ORATIO

I’m happy that people can recognize Jesus’ unique contribution to the reconciliation of humanity with God.

I extend spiritual support to those who seek to know Jesus by reading in full one of the four Gospels. Such an effort helps get a coherent picture of Jesus’ unique contribution.

I include in my prayer during this early time of preparation for Christmas those who are aware of how far they are from God. Some of them seem to take pride in the fact, while others suffer.

I find myself inspired by those who are preparing to celebrate Christmas by honouring Jesus’ true identity.

CONTEMPLATIO

Jesus needed intermediaries, helpers, and a trailblazer before he himself arrived on the scene. When I commit myself to follow the Son of God, am I looking to steal the show? Or do I make way for the one who is the source of life, forgiveness, and reconciliation? Am I seeking a first place that isn’t mine or am I happy to be in second or third place?

Alain Faucher

OUR MISSION: TO TESTIFY

John 1.6-8

¹God sent his messenger, a man named John, ⁷who came to tell people about the light, so that all should hear the message and believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came to tell about the light.

Other Readings: Isaiah 35.1-6, 10; Psalm 146.6-10; James 5.7-10

LECTIO

One more Advent Sunday considers the ministry of John the Baptist. The lectionary uses a blend of two passages from the Gospel of John. Today's reading includes three verses from the prologue to the fourth Gospel, describing John the Baptist. These three verses are then linked to a more specific description of John's testimony to the authorities in the Holy City of Jerusalem.

Christmas is drawing near. Our practical thinking tells us to go straight to the heart of the matter, without wasting time on secondary characters. This was not the case at the time of Jesus. In Mediterranean social dynamics, a witness is given the same honour as is given to a charitable or philanthropic person. Such is the role of John, the central character in today's Gospel. His name brings to mind the reality of the divine declarations to which he gives witness. In Hebrew, in fact, John means "God is gracious," or "God has bestowed his gift."

The first reading helps us describe Jesus' identity more clearly. The prophet Isaiah uses solid clues to sustain the hope of the exiled people, whose return to their ancestral homeland was proving difficult. Words are not enough, so the prophet gives precedents which validate God's promises. The poor, the broken-hearted, people in captivity, and prisoners found themselves facing a great year of God's favour. This special time no doubt refers to the Year of Jubilee described in Leviticus.

The verses from Isaiah form an important link in the reflections of those early Christians about Jesus. They needed to express the great hope for transformation resulting from the Resurrection. They wanted to establish a connection between what Jesus accomplished and the type of deliverance that occurred every fifty years during the great Jubilee. It comes as no surprise then that the Gospel of Luke (which recounts the birth of Jesus) has Jesus reading these comforting verses of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth. Jesus reads them in public at the beginning of his work in Galilee.

2 MEDITATIO

- At first, the "indirect" story about Jesus seems to be of little interest, as are the negative assertions of John ("I am not..."), when our to-do and must-do lists are full to the brim. This indirect approach however, is often all we have to recognize the signs of our faith in the supercharged excitement of the last ten or so days before Christmas.
- Jesus depends on witnesses to introduce him. This, in itself, is good news – his own words are thus reinforced, amplified, and multiplied by the words of others. This strategy is a wonderful source of support for us today for the activities that bring hope during the Holidays, activities for which we're responsible. Our own testimony takes the form of practical and dynamic charity, care for those who are isolated, and a renewed drive for those daily, and occasionally demanding, commitments.
- Giving testimony is our duty. This can be both risky and powerful for God. He gives us the freedom to find words that go beyond simply the "seasonal" greetings, those empty phrases we find in Christmas cards, but which don't really bring much change...

3 ORATIO

Our prayer today can benefit a variety of people, including those who give and receive charity during this season, and those involved in longer term efforts to improve the living conditions of the poor.

We also ask the Lord to support us in the difficult task of speaking out on his behalf. So many people want to celebrate Christmas but don't really want to receive the Jubilee!

4 CONTEMPLATIO

Interestingly, the testimony of John the Baptist calls us to take up the baton of witness in sincerity. At the heart of our Christmas preparations is our witness to the deep truth of the celebrations. This truth is too often clouded by the concerns of people who are, for the most part, unaware of or indifferent to the very nature of this important annual event. As we follow the example of John the Baptist, our celebration of Christmas can display our testimony, just as his own words once did.

Let's not waste time talking about the background noise the season can produce. Instead, let's allow our actions speak of Jesus. Our charitable activities affirm discreetly that Jesus is the Lord whom we await every day. The Saviour that we celebrate at Christmas also lights up our ordinary days!

Alain Faucher

GOD WANTS TO TAKE FLESH

Luke 1.26-38

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

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

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

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

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

Other Readings: Isaiah 7.10-14; Psalm 24.1-6, 7, 10; Romans 1.1-7

LECTIO

In the first reading, King David's well-meant projects are thwarted by God. God prefers to dwell in righteous people rather than be hemmed in by the four walls of a temple, albeit majestic. God isn't interested in a temple made of stones. He decides rather to take Mary as a "dwelling," as an "Ark of the Covenant." He decides to inhabit a body in order to (one day) continue living in our world through our bodies, which are the temples of his Spirit.

God therefore uses very humble means like Mary, like us... But at the same time, God uses Mary to renew his covenant with humanity, and creation as a whole. The Spirit hovers over Mary, just as on the day the world was created.

Mary is shocked by the angel's greeting. The angel addresses her using words that had been spoken to the Jewish people by the prophet Zephaniah, announcing that God would one day make his home in the midst of Jerusalem. God told Mary that she, a young girl from the little backwaters of Nazareth, would give the world a holy son, holy with God's holiness. It takes a lot of trust and faith to accept such remarks...

2 MEDITATIO

- God wants to be with us. That's his plan. This is a time of faith for us, just as it was for Mary. Mary's faith paves the way for our faith, our experience of confidence in God.
- God is the one leading the way, and we must accept his will. May the lights of the holiday season be as well the sign of a God who enjoys living among us.
- This year, will we have enough faith to believe that God can act through our words, our laughter, our welcome, to live in our homes, as he chooses, in this twenty-first century of Christianity?

3 ORATIO

I pray for my guests that they may find in my welcome a sign of God's kindness.

I pray for believers who become uneasy with the influx of seasonal worshippers, that they may marvel at the resounding message of God's presence.

I pray for those who panic as the holiday season draws close, that amid the burden of activities and responsibilities, they may find meaning in God's presence.

I pray for those who benefit from our generosity during the holiday season, that they may detect some sign of the presence of God in their life.

4 CONTEMPLATIO

My gifts have been purchased, but not yet wrapped. I wonder if I'll have time to finish. I'm through with my appointments, but I still have so much to prepare for this holiday season that I wonder if I'll have the energy to celebrate.

My problem during the holiday season is both a lack of time and a lack of faith. I need faith to believe that the holiday season is worth it when I see an uncle who's had one glass too many, when I hear an aunt speak ill of those not present, or a cousin complaining that she was left out of a will. Yes, it does take faith to believe that we're preparing to celebrate a great decision—God wanting to love humanity right to the end. When I watch the goings on, it takes a lot of faith to believe, in the midst of the parties and the guests' reactions, that God desired to live among us humans.

Is our world a place worthy of God? To describe our world exactly, we need to place King Herod in the manger, with his wealth, his boasting, and his brutality that was as terrible as what we witness in the present day. Do the angels and shepherds, the sheep, and carols mean anything when we know how intolerable the injustice, covetousness, and the culture of war is to God? Is it possible that such a world is suitable for a God who is so perfect? The answer from the Word of God is "yes," if and only if our faith is focused on Jesus.

Alain Faucher

THE WORD HAS THE LAST WORD

Luke 2.15-20

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 62.11-12, Psalm 97.1, 6, 11-12; Titus 3.4-7

LECTIO

This passage from the Gospel brings two messages into contrast: on the one hand are the words of the Emperor – which people had to comply with – forcing them to move from one place to another for some administrative purpose. On the other hand are the divine and glorious words delivered by the messengers, which make the shepherds move, but not before touching their hearts. They rejoice, then they get together and go to find the baby.

The shepherds did not have the stylized elegance of statues in a church manger scene! They were despised by the Jewish people, who carefully practised their religion to the letter. Because of the nature of their work, they could not observe the Sabbath rest and many other customs of their religion. Being away from their family left their wives on their own, exposed to many dangers. For these reasons, shepherds received little respect and were despised; they were seen as undesirable outcasts, people better left alone.

But suddenly, due to the will and the work of heaven, the shepherds become, among men and women, the first of the new believers, the first to be invited to receive God's salvation, the first human beings to be offered a life reconciled with God. The shepherds of the first Christmas represent us. We were scattered but we can now come together before God. Most of all, we were sinners, but we are now saved sinners. All this was made possible by the birth of a child! Imagine what could happen when he attains adulthood!

After his death and resurrection, believers gave Jesus extraordinary titles – titles that the Book of Isaiah had dedicated to the future saviour: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, and Prince of Peace. The child's name was to be "Jesus" (in Hebrew, Yeshua: Yahwe saves!), a name that would sum up all the hope resting in him. The name of Jesus is a declaration of both faith and of hope!

MEDITATIO

- This young Yeshua, the baby Jesus, accomplished a feat that no other human being could. God our Father knew what he was doing when he caused him to take on a body among us. Humanity, the masterpiece of God's magnificent creation, found fulfilment in a real contact with the divine. God uses a helpless infant to open the horizons of the future forever. Through a small baby, he can restore communication in our broken relationships with family and friends. Through Jesus, God can improve our human condition, bringing warmth and brotherhood to our lukewarm communities.

ORATIO

My prayer goes out to the past, present, and future on this day of celebration observed by so many people. I am thinking of people who have built me up, of people who need me. I also include in my prayer people who no longer know how to pray and those who don't have time to pray due to holiday demands.

CONTEMPLATIO

In this Christmas season, may we understand that Jesus, the baby in the manger, has a name above all other names. May we understand that we should no longer turn our back on Jesus, because he can change our lives all year round. Godless consumer society divides and isolates. Jesus gathers us together and saves us. He gathers us around himself tonight, around his plans, his vision of life, throughout the year. He gathers us in his church, which is a new kind of communication, a new way of living together beyond blood ties, beyond or in spite of race and nationality barriers, beyond prejudice, beyond personal opinions.

Alain Faucher

TIME FOR A KEY DECISION

*Luke 2.22-28, 33-40**

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

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

³³ The child's father and mother were amazed at the things Simeon said about him. ³⁴ Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "This child is chosen by God for the destruction and the salvation of many in Israel. He will be a sign from God which many people will speak against ³⁵ and so reveal their secret thoughts. And sorrow, like a sharp sword, will break your own heart."

³⁶⁻³⁷ There was a very old prophet, a widow named Anna, daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She had been married for only seven years and was now eighty-four years old. She never left the Temple; day and night she worshiped God, fasting and praying. ³⁸ That very same hour she arrived and gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to set Jerusalem free.

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

**The full reading is Luke 2.22-40*

Other Readings: Ecclesiasticus 3.2-6, 12-14; Psalm 128.1-5; Colossians 3.12-21

LECTIO

The introduction of Jesus in the Temple is unique to the third Gospel. In this Gospel, several strategies come into play to show the baby Jesus as the one who brings God's plans to completion and fulfils the greatest expectations of his people.

Several expressions underscore the importance of time: a set day, the wait for death, the long period of widowhood... Why this insistence on time? Also, many rules of the Jewish religion are mentioned. Why the insistence on such outdated customs? Because they underscore the beginning of a new covenant between God and his people. The Jewish customs mentioned at the beginning of the Gospel refer, in fact, to the books of

the Torah (Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers). The only custom that is not is the physical presentation of the child, which is not mentioned anywhere in the source books of Judaism. The public gesture by Jesus' parents expresses both continuity with and a break from the "then" of God's people and the "now" of the fulfilment of the promises. The verse about the sword that pierces the heart of Mary, the first believer, is a paradox of similar intensity.

The Gospel also refers repeatedly to certain locations: Jerusalem, the Temple, etc. Why this insistence on places? Within a few lines, we witness two unexpected encounters in the Temple court at Jerusalem. This place is the ultimate sign of the presence of the God of Israel among his people. Luke uses a specific Greek term for the Holy City which refers to Jerusalem as the city of peace. This sets the ideal scene for the fulfilment of the ancient promises given to the people through a number of prophets. The passages contain references to several of these messengers of the Lord God. The Gospel draws from the words or from the life of Samuel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Malachi, and Daniel.



MEDITATIO

- In the child Jesus, a relationship between God and humanity becomes possible. To represent the overall nature of this new context of salvation, an elderly man and a woman announce truths never before heard. God has intervened in the history of humanity, and it is now time to make a decisive choice. And this choice is like a double-edged sword: with the blessing comes the moment when we must take a stand.
- We must take up the torch from other believers, from those who sang songs of hope in the Old Testament. How can we, in our situations, welcome Jesus and shine his light on the hearts of others? The Gospel proposes several solutions. It is filled with references to the experiences of the first people of God. If we become more familiar with the Old Testament, we will have a clearer understanding of the stark newness introduced when the Son of God took human form. Jesus is God's last word. If we are to hear this Word – both passionate and dynamic – we have to understand the language that pronounced it.



ORATIO

Like Mary, I relive the decisive moment when I received the faith. Faith is like a sharp object that forces us to make decisions. I'm grateful to God for giving me the chance to experience daily manifestations of the salvation provided in Jesus.



CONTEMPLATIO

Are we disappointed in our families? And yet godliness is their destiny. Regardless of the circumstances, my family is the first place where God's holiness seeks to take root. Didn't the most holy of families experience anguish, struggle, and confusion? So there's hope yet for our unstable and indecisive families!

Alain Faucher

THE ENTIRE WORLD GATHERED AT THE MANGER

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; Psalm 72.1-2, 7-8, 10-13; Ephesians 3.2-3, 5-6

LECTIO

Matthew is the only Gospel-writer who tells the story of the visit by the wise men to the manger. His account has great symbolic value. He makes reference to the Old Testament to inform us that Jesus is truly the One who fulfills the Scriptures. This reference explains the presence of the wise men and gives meaning to their unusual gifts. Their presence places them directly in the prophecies of Isaiah (60.1-6). The number three fits in with the three gifts presented to the Child: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

MEDITATIO

- What does the Star tell us? According to the belief systems of the time, the destiny of a child being born into the world was closely connected to the stars in the sky. This belief may no longer be held today but there are other signs, such as the signs of the zodiac which are no more reliable than the movement of stars in the heavens. And yet, some people use them to predict the birth of the newborn. Symbols and signs speak to those who will read and heed them.

ORATIO

Psalms 72 offers us a prayer that is well suited to today's festivities:

*Teach the king to judge with your righteousness, O God;
share with him your own justice,
so that he will rule over your people with justice
and govern the oppressed with righteousness.*

CONTEMPLATIO

The heavenly Jerusalem Isaiah is talking about is where the glory of the Lord shines forth. It is the symbolic place for the great spiritual gathering of the entire universe. People from every race are invited to this divine assembly. The Epiphany of the Lord is the sign of this openness to all humanity. This celebration ratifies the first Covenant between God and Israel.

Ghislaine Salvail, sjsh

A SURPRISING BAPTISM

Matthew 3.13-17

¹³ At that time Jesus arrived from Galilee and came to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ But John tried to make him change his mind. "I ought to be baptized by you," John said, "and yet you have come to me!"

¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so for now. For in this way we shall do all that God requires." So John agreed.

¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he came up out of the water. Then heaven was opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ Then a voice said from heaven, "This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased."

Other Readings: Isaiah 42.1-4, 6-7; Psalm 29.1-4, 9-10; Acts 10.34-38

1 LECTIO

In this passage of the Gospel where we read the account of Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist, God's word takes centre stage. Matthew presents the event as a theophany, that is, a divine manifestation; this is also the meaning of the word Epiphany. This manifestation is a call for us to acknowledge Jesus as the Beloved Son of the Father, which in turn, makes us sons and daughters of God, and Jesus becomes our brother.

2 MEDITATIO

- By being baptized, Jesus acts in perfect conformity with the will of God his Father. Early Christians had a hard time accepting and understanding that Jesus had to be baptized by his cousin, the Baptist. It's as if Jesus were submitting to John; and yet for God, this act was in conformity with the mission of his Son, who became incarnate in our world. Jesus had to show solidarity with all those that John was calling to repentance. He came so that all may have Life and that they may have it in abundance. This calls for a change of mind, *metanoïa*.

3 ORATIO

Let us listen to God's voice ringing out from heaven: "This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased." Let us join the early Christians and repeat the following passage from the Acts of Apostles: "... Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all." That's our statement of faith today.

4 CONTEMPLATIO

The word "righteousness" ("all that God requires" in the Good News Bible) as used by Matthew refers to a way of life in conformity with the will of our Father in Heaven. Consider the Son, a paragon of righteousness, a paragon of conformity with all that his Father desires. As disciples, we are called upon to follow Jesus, our brother, our role model.

Ghislaine Salvail, sjsh

HE TAKES AWAY OUR SINS

John 1.29-34

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "There is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰ This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'A man is coming after me, but he is greater than I am, because he existed before I was born.' ³¹ I did not know who he would be, but I came baptizing with water in order to make him known to the people of Israel."

³² And John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and stay on him. ³³ I still did not know that he was the one, but God, who sent me to baptize with water, had said to me, 'You will see the Spirit come down and stay on a man; he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ I have seen it," said John, "and I tell you that he is the Son of God."

Other Readings: Isaiah 49.3, 5-6; Psalm 40.1, 3, 6-9; 1 Corinthians 1.1-3

LECTIO

The exact meaning of the expression *Lamb of God* is rather difficult to define. There are two schools of thought about this concept: the Greek and the Latin. For the Greek Fathers, *Lamb of God* refers to the figure of the suffering Servant presented by the prophet Isaiah: "Because of our sins he was wounded, beaten because of the evil we did" (Is 53.5). He compares him to a "lamb about to be slaughtered" (Is 53.7). The Latin Fathers, on the other hand, see it as a reference to the Passover Lamb the Hebrews sacrificed before they left Egypt and whose blood they used to mark the doorposts of their houses. Like this lamb, Jesus was slain on the eve of the Passover. His blood, which was shed on the wooden cross, is now a source of life and freedom for Christians. The Latin Fathers hold that he is the real Passover Lamb.

MEDITATIO

- In the Gospel of Matthew, we see a moving testimony by John the Baptist who baptized Jesus on the banks of the Jordan, well before Jesus had even begun his ministry. When he saw Jesus coming to him, John made the following significant statement: "There is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Later, in the Gospel of John, the Baptist uses this term twice (1.29, 36). The other Gospels make no reference to this concept but it appears 28 times in the Book of Revelation.

ORATIO

*May the grace and peace of God be with you.
What a beautiful blessing, Lord!
May it be on my lips,
May it be in my heart,
And may it be visible in my actions. Amen!*

CONTEMPLATIO

John the Baptist sees Jesus coming to him, and recognizes him immediately. Does Jesus come towards me today, into my life? Through the members of my family? Through the outstretched hand of a poor? In the Word? In the Eucharist? Am I a credible witness for the Lamb? If the answer is yes, I must show it in both word and action.

Ghislaine Salvail, sjsh

THROW THE NET ON ANOTHER SIDE

Matthew 4.12-23

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he went away to Galilee. ¹³ He did not stay in Nazareth, but went to live in Capernaum, a town by Lake Galilee, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali. ¹⁴ This was done to make come true what the prophet Isaiah had said,

¹⁵ "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,

on the road to the sea, on the other side of the Jordan, Galilee, land of the Gentiles!

¹⁶ The people who live in darkness will see a great light.

On those who live in the dark land of death the light will shine."

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach his message: "Turn away from your sins, because the Kingdom of heaven is near!"

¹⁸ As Jesus walked along the shore of Lake Galilee, he saw two brothers who were fishermen, Simon (called Peter) and his brother Andrew, catching fish in the lake with a net. ¹⁹ Jesus said to them, "Come with me, and I will teach you to catch people." ²⁰ At once they left their nets and went with him.

²¹ He went on and saw two other brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in their boat with their father Zebedee, getting their nets ready. Jesus called them, ²² and at once they left the boat and their father, and went with him.

²³ Jesus went all over Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the Good News about the Kingdom, and healing people who had all kinds of disease and sickness.

Other Readings: Isaiah 8.23 – 9.3; Psalm 27.1, 4, 13-14; 1 Corinthians 1.10-13, 17

LECTIO

As he was leaving the desert, Jesus heard that his cousin had been arrested, so he left his hometown of Nazareth and went to Capernaum, a town in the land of the Gentiles. And yet it was in this town of Galilee that Jesus preached for this first time. From then on, he began a new way of life, as he became a traveling preacher. Matthew shows in his account how Jesus' decisions fulfilled the Scriptures: "The future will bring honour to this region, from the Mediterranean eastward to the land on the other side of the Jordan, and even to Galilee itself, where the foreigners live. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. They lived in a land of shadows, but now light is shining on them." (Is 9:1-2). Matthew chooses to personalize this light by writing, "THE light will shine." But he leaves the meaning given by the prophet intact. He recognizes in Isaiah's text that this light that rises refers to the star that the wise men followed, the star that led them to the newborn Saviour.

2 MEDITATIO

- Isaiah tells us that the Lord covered Galilee, the land (or crossroads) of the Gentiles, *with glory or honour*. Why should we be surprised? Because this region, hitherto ignored, had an unsavoury reputation. It was located in the north of Palestine and was a real melting pot where foreigners came to earn a living. As a result, unions were sealed through mixed marriages, and people there had an accent easily recognizable. During Jesus' trial before Caiaphas we hear someone referring to this accent. The Christian message must spread beyond all borders and be delivered without discrimination on the grounds of race or culture. Actually, Jesus sent his disciples to Galilee, this land of foreigners, after his Resurrection.

3 ORATIO

I will make you fishers of men.

Through these words, Lord,
You uproot your own,
from their family environment,
from the culture of their village,
from their ancestral profession.
Help me forsake my old habits,
my strict routines,
my predefined paths
to reach out to others.

Amen.

4 CONTEMPLATIO

Jesus, God's messenger, is Joy. The Church is the custodian of this Christlike joy. Is it really Christ's joy that we spread? Is this Church, of which I'm a member, a joyful Church?

Ghislaine Salvail, sjsh

GOD'S BLESSINGS WERE UPON HIM

Luke 2.22-40

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

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

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

³⁰ With my own eyes I have seen your salvation,

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

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

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

³⁴ Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "This child is chosen by God for the destruction and the salvation of many in Israel. He will be a sign from God which many people will speak against ³⁵ and so reveal their secret thoughts. And sorrow, like a sharp sword, will break your own heart."

³⁶⁻³⁷ There was a very old prophet, a widow named Anna, daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She had been married for only seven years and was now eighty-four years old. She never left the Temple; day and night she worshiped God, fasting and praying. ³⁸ That very same hour she arrived and gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to set Jerusalem free.

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

Other Readings: Malachi 3.1-4 ; Psalm 23.7-10 ; Hebrews 2.14-18



LECTIO

Mary and Joseph fulfil what the Law of Moses commands. The law required the new mother of a male child to present the child at the Temple forty days after his birth and to offer a sacrifice for purification. The law required that the child be "redeemed" or "bought back" for he belonged to God (Nb 18.15-16).



MEDITATIO

- We must continue to receive salvation throughout our lives. We should welcome it by trying to see it at work around and beyond us, with the eyes of our heart. For God's salvation to be accomplished, we need to be involved in works of liberation, compassion, and reconciliation. These acts bring about salvation. What have I done recently or what will I do tomorrow in this respect?



ORATIO

Let us recall in prayer these words of thanksgiving by old Simon:

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

*With my own eyes I have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples:
A light to reveal your will to the Gentiles
and bring glory to your people Israel.*

Amen!

(Luke 2.29-32)



CONTEMPLATIO

Matthew does not mention Jesus' redemption, but in verse 23, he quotes the law of Exodus: "Every first-born male is to be dedicated to the Lord." Note too that all attention is focused on the aged Simon. The Holy Spirit had assured him that he would not die before he has seen the Messiah. This promise is fulfilled the very day Jesus' parents present the child in the Temple. The prophet's prayer proclaims Jesus' mission: to be the Light of the world. I will meditate on this mystery.

Ghislaine Salvail, sjsh

YOUR LIGHT MUST SHINE!

Matthew 5.13-16

¹³ “You are like salt for the whole human race. But if salt loses its saltiness, there is no way to make it salty again. It has become worthless, so it is thrown out and people trample on it.

¹⁴ “You are like light for the whole world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl; instead he puts it on the lampstand, where it gives light for everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.

Other Readings: Isaiah 58.7-10; Psalm 112.4-9; 1 Corinthians 2.1-5

LECTIO

Jesus truly has a way with words, a gift for painting word pictures, which makes his teachings easy to assimilate! Salt improves the flavour of food, and was also the only known food preservative used in the old days. It was also used during sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem. What about light? Light is indispensable. Thus, if Jesus' disciples are to be “salt and light” in the world, it is because they give flavour to life, they ‘preserve’ this world and act as a light for their brothers and sisters.

MEDITATIO

- We are often saddened that our Churches are empty, that few people among us really believe in Christ and let the Gospel guide their life. And yet, today's Gospel seems to have anticipated this situation. A pinch of salt is enough to add flavour to a dish. A city built on a hilltop may not cast a strong light, but the light is enough to guide a night traveller. A single lamp hanging on a lamppost lights an entire household. Although Jesus' disciples are few in number, they can still add more meaning to life, more humanity and brotherhood to this world. Jesus does not invite us, through this teaching, to convert the entire world, but rather, simply to play our role to the best of our ability and to remain as “salt”.

ORATIO

I marvel that the Lord can entrust to me and my Christian brothers and sisters such a big role in this world. He asks us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, no less! Despite my insignificance, he counts on my witness so that men and women may turn to God and give glory to our Father in Heaven. I ask the Lord to give me the grace to go on being salt and light so that, through my humble contribution, a great many more people can find his love.

CONTEMPLATIO

To be salt and light means ensuring that my words, my actions, and my whole life speak about the Gospel and express the love of God who dwells in me and gives me life. Does my current life and practice proclaim the Gospel? When people look at my life, can they tell that I'm a disciple of Jesus? I wonder about the quality of my witness for Christ. In what way does the Lord call me to further change, to go beyond myself so as to release more flavour, to shine more brightly?

Patrice Bergeron

BUT NOW I TELL YOU . . .

*Matthew 5.20-34, 37**

²⁰ I tell you, then, that you will be able to enter the Kingdom of heaven only if you are more faithful than the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees in doing what God requires.

²¹ “You have heard that people were told in the past, ‘Do not commit murder; anyone who does will be brought to trial.’ ²² But now I tell you: whoever is angry with his brother will be brought to trial, whoever calls his brother ‘You good-for-nothing!’ will be brought before the Council, and whoever calls his brother a worthless fool will be in danger of going to the fire of hell. ²³ So if you are about to offer your gift to God at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift to God.

²⁵ “If someone brings a lawsuit against you and takes you to court, settle the dispute with him while there is time, before you get to court. Once you are there, he will hand you over to the judge, who will hand you over to the police, and you will be put in jail. ²⁶ There you will stay, I tell you, until you pay the last penny of your fine.

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But now I tell you: anyone who looks at a woman and wants to possess her is guilty of committing adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ So if your right eye causes you to sin, take it out and throw it away! It is much better for you to lose a part of your body than to have your whole body thrown into hell. ³⁰ If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away! It is much better for you to lose one of your limbs than for your whole body to go to hell.

³¹ “It was also said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a written notice of divorce.’ ³² But now I tell you: if a man divorces his wife, for any cause other than her unfaithfulness, then he is guilty of making her commit adultery if she marries again; and the man who marries her commits adultery also.

³³ “You have also heard that people were told in the past, ‘Do not break your promise, but do what you have vowed to the Lord to do.’ ³⁴ But now I tell you: do not use any vow when you make a promise...

³⁷ Just say ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ – anything else you say comes from the Evil One.

**The full reading is Matthew 5.17-37*

Other Readings: Ecclesiasticus 15.15-20; Ps 119.1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34; 1 Cor 2.6-10

LECTIO

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount continues and here in particular, Jesus shows himself to be the master. Drawing from the wisdom of the ancients claimed to have been handed down from Moses (“You have heard that people were told in the past...”), Jesus dares to

propose a new interpretation (“But now I tell you...”) that goes far beyond the Law of Moses. It is relatively easy not to commit a sin (murder, adultery) under the old law but it is quite another thing to uproot the causes of sin (anger, lust) from one’s heart. Although the Sermon begins gently (with the Beatitudes and a call to be salt and light), this Sunday, listeners will size up the radical nature of the life to which the Lord calls us. The Gospel is not just a shiny cover of superficial humanism; it is indeed a way of joy and freedom. If it is well lived, it transforms us into a witness to God’s love, but this road is rough and calls for a deep transformation of our being.

MEDITATIO

- The tone in this passage – especially if we listen to the full Sunday reading – is judicial. The theme touches on lawsuits and penalties handed down by a court, which we can surmise to be God’s court on Judgement Day. If we interpret these passages too literally, it would clearly cause us anguish: “Will I be among the people cast into a fiery hell?” There is no need to panic by exaggerating the scope of this language. Jesus uses traditional rabbinic language, which purposely employs strong images that appeal to the listeners’ imagination, and therefore helps them to remember the lesson. We will thus understand that following Jesus is a serious matter that needs passionate commitment. Fortunately, other Gospel passages balance the picture of God, and portray him as more gentle and merciful.

ORATIO

Listening to this teaching of Jesus, who would feel worthy of entering the Kingdom of Heaven? Does my righteousness really surpass that of the Scribes and the Pharisees? If I only count on my humble human strength, this seems impossible. But with God, all things become possible. I seek help from the Holy Spirit who alone is able to transform me deeply, to wipe out all in me that keeps me away from the ideal of holiness that Jesus has for me.

CONTEMPLATIO

Far from being frightened, I remember that if God is going to one day judge us on what we have accomplished in life, his judgement will be rendered with mercy. As evidence, I recall the meetings between Jesus and Matthew the tax collector, his meeting with the sinful woman, with the adulterous woman, with Zacchaeus, with the penitent thief, and with many others. I remember how much their lives were changed by their encounter with Jesus and how they were turned toward God. Let us take care to meet with him and the scale of our life will also tilt toward the Kingdom.

Patrice Bergeron

LOVE AS GOD LOVES

Matthew 5.38-48

³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹ But now I tell you: do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, let him slap your left cheek too. ⁴⁰ And if someone takes you to court to sue you for your shirt, let him have your coat as well. ⁴¹ And if one of the occupation troops forces you to carry his pack one kilometre, carry it two kilometres. ⁴² When someone asks you for something, give it to him; when someone wants to borrow something, lend it to him.

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your friends, hate your enemies.’ ⁴⁴ But now I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may become the children of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun to shine on bad and good people alike, and gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil. ⁴⁶ Why should God reward you if you love only the people who love you? Even the tax collectors do that! ⁴⁷ And if you speak only to your friends, have you done anything out of the ordinary? Even the pagans do that! ⁴⁸ You must be perfect – just as your Father in heaven is perfect!

*Other Readings: Leviticus 19.1-2, 17-18; Psalm 103.1-4, 8, 10, 12-13;
1 Corinthians 3.16-23*

LECTIO

As we continue our reading of the Gospel of Matthew, we will no doubt prefer this passage from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount to the one from last Sunday. Not that putting it into practice is less demanding, but rather, its tone is more positive. Jesus’ words this Sunday propel us forward, invite us to go the extra mile in love, and draw us towards an ideal: becoming perfect as is our Heavenly Father. Now, that’s something! To love as God does, no less! Because God forgives and never seeks vengeance, you too should turn the other cheek and give away your coat. Because God is never stingy with his gifts, imitate his generosity and give more than you have to! Because God loves your enemy as much as he loves you, go as far as praying for your enemy, and this will turn your hatred into love and your resentment into peace.

2 MEDITATIO

- Now, there’s a nugget of wisdom! There have been many wise people in the history of humanity but has any of them gone as far as Jesus in their exhortation to love? Here, Jesus invites his disciples to triumph over pride and vanity, the passions at the root of most of the evil plaguing humanity. If everyone on earth lived by this passage from the Gospel, it would put an immediate end to all conflicts, wars, vendettas, malice, injustice, and poverty. This one page of the Gospel provides the answer for achieving peace on earth, and the ingredients for a new world that Jesus calls the Kingdom of Heaven. There’s only one rule: love the way God loves.

3 ORATIO

What if I start living according to this page of the Gospel and practise what Jesus is inviting me to do? I entrust to God in prayer all those who have hurt me, caused me pain in the past or in the present, and those I find hard to love. And I ask the Holy Spirit to transform my heart and turn me into a more generous person.

4 CONTEMPLATIO

To be as perfect as is the Heavenly Father... To forgive instead of seeking revenge... To give to those who ask me... To love even my enemies. But how do I do this? Of the three calls from today’s Gospel, which one is the most difficult for me to put into practice? This is no doubt the one that the Holy Spirit wants me to work on further. And that is what I resolve to do.

Patrice Bergeron

NO NEED TO ADD TO THE TROUBLES EACH DAY BRINGS

Matthew 6.24-34

²⁴ “No one can be a slave of two masters; he will hate one and love the other; he will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

²⁵ “This is why I tell you not to be worried about the food and drink you need in order to stay alive, or about clothes for your body. After all, isn’t life worth more than food? And isn’t the body worth more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds: they do not sow seeds, gather a harvest and put it in barns; yet your Father in heaven takes care of them! Aren’t you worth much more than birds? ²⁷ Can any of you live a bit longer by worrying about it?

²⁸ “And why worry about clothes? Look how the wild flowers grow: they do not work or make clothes for themselves. ²⁹ But I tell you that not even King Solomon with all his wealth had clothes as beautiful as one of these flowers. ³⁰ It is God who clothes the wild grass – grass that is here today and gone tomorrow, burnt up in the oven. Won’t he be all the more sure to clothe you? How little faith you have!

³¹ “So do not start worrying: ‘Where will my food come from? or my drink? or my clothes?’ ³² (These are the things the pagans are always concerned about.) Your Father in heaven knows that you need all these things. ³³ Instead, be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and with what he requires of you, and he will provide you with all these other things. ³⁴ So do not worry about tomorrow; it will have enough worries of its own. There is no need to add to the troubles each day brings.

Other Readings: Isaiah 49.14-15; Psalm 62.1-2, 5-8; 1 Corinthians 4.1-5

LECTIO

Worries, preoccupations, anxiety, . . . These are some of the burdens we drag around like a millstone which stops us from being free and happy. And like a good psychologist, Jesus wants to set us free. His secret? Get back to the basics (seek the Kingdom and its righteousness) and have faith in the providence of a God who watches over us and all his creation. Like small children who, in the arms of their father or mother, are not afraid and fall asleep confidently, may our worries be stilled with this God who knows what we need better than we do and who will ensure that we never want for what we need. Let us trust in him.

2 MEDITATIO

- In today’s fast-paced world, much of our energy is expended in a costly search for consumer goods that we think we need to make us happy: a new car, a winter holiday in the south, a new wardrobe each new season . . . Often we do not realize how much pressure this quest creates in us, until one day, a life event (illness, professional burnout, etc.) brings us back to the basics. How many people have said, after a life-threatening incident, that they now see life from a different point of view, having come back to what is truly important, and appreciating more the things that add real value to life? There is no need to wait for an unpleasant event to open our eyes. Jesus warns us that life is much more than what we confine it to. It’s up to us to live for what is important – the Kingdom of God and his righteousness.

3 ORATIO

How has God provided for me at every turn in my life? I know that God has always watched and will always watch over me. May my prayer be an act of trust in God the Father and in his provision. May my prayer find me resting in God. Today’s Psalm will help me find the words that calm my soul.

4 CONTEMPLATIO

The Gospel invites me to live for what really matters. How do I make of my life a search for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness? What needlessly burdens my life?

Patrice Bergeron

A GOD WHO IS LIKE US

Matthew 4.1-11

¹ Then the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the Devil. ² After spending 40 days and nights without food, Jesus was hungry. ³ Then the Devil came to him and said, "If you are God's Son, order these stones to turn into bread."

⁴ But Jesus answered, "The scripture says, 'Human beings cannot live on bread alone, but need every word that God speaks.'"

⁵ Then the Devil took Jesus to Jerusalem, the Holy City, set him on the highest point of the Temple, ⁶ and said to him, "If you are God's Son, throw yourself down, for the scripture says:

'God will give orders to his angels about you;
they will hold you up with their hands,
so that not even your feet will be hurt on the stones.'"

⁷ Jesus answered, "But the scripture also says, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

⁸ Then the Devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in all their greatness. ⁹ "All this I will give you," the Devil said, "if you kneel down and worship me."

¹⁰ Then Jesus answered, "Go away, Satan! The scripture says, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him!'"

¹¹ Then the Devil left Jesus; and angels came and helped him.

Other Readings: Genesis 2.7-9, 3.1-7; Psalm 51.1-4, 10-12, 15; Romans 5.12-19

LECTIO

Jesus' retreat into the desert takes place between two events: his baptism by John at the Jordan, where John reveals that Jesus is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," and the start of his life committed to sharing the Good News.

MEDITATIO

- "After forty days... Jesus was hungry." This is a surprising statement from Matthew, and leads us to put forward that Jesus not only chose to master his body before beginning his ministry, but also to recognize the humble needs of humanity - hunger and thirst – two needs tied to our human condition. This is what some people refer

to as "the limits of the incarnation" in reference to Jesus. Witnessing for the Word calls for effort and self-denial. Do I care about keeping my body in shape and in good health? If I'm not healthy, can I testify about how to endure suffering as a Christian? I meditate about Jesus' choices when he went into and came out of the desert.

ORATIO

Here's my heart Lord,
I open it to you like an unfinished book.
I still have to write a few more chapters,
but already several mistakes to delete.
How I would love to have your name,
engraved at the bottom of each page.
I join the psalmist in prayer:

*Be merciful to me, O God,
because of your constant love.
Because of your great mercy
wipe away my sins!
Wash away all my evil
and make me clean from my sin! (Ps 51)*

CONTEMPLATIO

Temptation is part of life, and everyone is exposed to it at one time or another. Temptation comes in many subtle forms and ways. The spirit of evil is always eager to win souls for its destructive purpose. Jesus had to face the Evil One's crafty tactics. Can I identify the source of my temptations, my hurt pride, or my unsuppressed greed? Of my constant need to be number one, the winner, even if others have to pay its price? I retreat to my inner desert to identify the songs of the sirens and not allow myself to be enticed by these enchanting melodies.

Ghislaine Salvail, sjsh

SHOW ME YOUR FACE

Matthew 17.1-9

¹ Six days later Jesus took with him Peter and the brothers James and John and led them up a high mountain where they were alone. ² As they looked on, a change came over Jesus: his face was shining like the sun, and his clothes were dazzling white. ³ Then the three disciples saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. ⁴ So Peter spoke up and said to Jesus, "Lord, how good it is that we are here! If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

⁵ While he was talking, a shining cloud came over them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased – listen to him!"

⁶ When the disciples heard the voice, they were so terrified that they threw themselves face downwards on the ground. ⁷ Jesus came to them and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid!" ⁸ So they looked up and saw no one there but Jesus.

⁹ As they came down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Don't tell anyone about this vision you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from death."

Other Readings: Genesis 12.1-4; Psalm 33.4-5, 18-20, 22; 2 Timothy 1.8-10

LECTIO

Six days after Jesus informed his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and come back to life, three of his closest disciples saw their teacher change before their eyes. The passage talks of "a high mountain". In the Bible, mountains represent the place where God reveals himself. Jesus is accompanied by Moses and Elijah, who represent the Law and the Prophets. God the Father finally reveals to Peter, James, and John that the person they had decided to follow was his own dear Son and God tells them to listen to him because he has invested all his joy in him.

MEDITATIO

- Jesus takes his close disciples aside, a gesture that is reminiscent of another reality: to hear any inner revelation, we must take a step back, back from our hectic lifestyle. The mind must be freed from the burden of everyday routine and the shackles of old habits in order to grasp the revelation. However, an inner revelation can also be the reward or the fruit of patience, or it can be the answer to an intense longing. It is then, and only then, that the traits of the Resurrected One can be recognized in unexpected events or on shining faces. What do you think the disciples felt?

ORATIO

Jesus, Son of the Most High God,
we want to see your shining face,
but our mind is darkened,
our faith is timid and our desires fleeting.
But Lord, you can see into my heart:

*Save me from death;
keep me alive in times of famine.
I put my hope in you;
you are my protector and my help.
I am glad because of you;
I trust in your holy name.
(Ps 32)*

CONTEMPLATIO

To us believers, there are always aspects of Christ that speak more to us than others. Some people see him as the caring shepherd carrying the lost sheep on his shoulders. Others sink deep into contemplating Jesus on the cross. And yet others will imagine him by the lake preparing breakfast for his disciples. Which image speaks to me the most? We are each also touched by one or more of Jesus' words. Which words help me most in my life? It is important to set aside time to contemplate the person of Jesus and to listen to him speak to the ears of my heart. This awareness cements my faith and strengthens my ties with Jesus.

Ghislaine Salvail, sjsh

A BOTTOMLESS WELL

John 4.5-15, 25-26, 39-42*

⁵ In Samaria he came to a town named Sychar, which was not far from the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw some water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink of water." ⁸ (His disciples had gone into town to buy food.)

⁹ The woman answered, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan – so how can you ask me for a drink?" (Jews will not use the same cups and bowls that Samaritans use.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered, "If only you knew what God gives and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would ask him, and he would give you life-giving water."

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you haven't got a bucket, and the well is deep. Where would you get that life-giving water?" ¹² It was our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well; he and his sons and his flocks all drank from it. You don't claim to be greater than Jacob, do you?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "All those who drink this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring which will provide him with life-giving water and give him eternal life."

¹⁵ "Sir," the woman said, "give me that water! Then I will never be thirsty again, nor will I have to come here to draw water."

²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah will come, and when he comes, he will tell us everything."

²⁶ Jesus answered, "I am he, I who am talking with you."

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans in that town believed in Jesus because the woman had said..., "He told me everything I have ever done."... ⁴¹ Many more believed because of his message, ⁴² and they said to the woman, "We believe now, not because of what you said, but because we ourselves have heard him, and we know that he really is the Saviour of the world."

**The full reading is John 4.5-42, this is a shortened version.*

Other Readings: Exodus 17.3-7; Psalm 95.1-2, 6-9; Romans 5.1-2, 5-8

LECTIO

An unusual scene takes place in the heart of Samaria, under the hot noontime sun, when Jesus meets a lone Samaritan woman, a well-known sinner. This long passage

seems to have been written only to break down taboos that stopped people from living. The exchange between Jesus and the woman at the well presents a significant addition to the need to draw water. This meeting and this place will always be unforgettable.

MEDITATIO

- When Jesus asks the woman to give him a drink of water, he knows his own human limitations. He is really one of us. When he needs someone to give him water to quench his thirst, he is not afraid to talk to a woman. By doing so, he gives dignity to all of us. Jesus rejects the division between the people of Sychar, a cosmopolitan town. He recognizes each person's right to live in peace in his or her own city. We have a lot to learn, remember, and understand from this long passage that takes place at a well, a well of bottomless learning. Can we grasp what source of pure water ran through this woman's heart? We have to meditate at length over this passage, which is as deep as the well of Samaria, not so that we can drain it but so that we can understand it better.

ORATIO

The people were very thirsty. (Ex 17,3)

Lord, because you understand thirsty people,
people who see their previously fertile lands,
laid waste and devastated,
Help them.

Help us not to be stubborn

as our ancestors were in the desert. (Ps 95)

Amen!

CONTEMPLATIO

Do I sometimes see God seated on the edge of the well in Samaria, looking like a poor person? What an image! Can I hear him tell me: "If you only knew what God gives!" I try to identify my real thirst and the gifts that God, in his goodness, has given me throughout my life. What source of pure water has run through my heart, as it has in the Samaritan woman's heart?

Ghislaine Salvail, sjsh

EYES OPEN BUT BLIND

John 9.1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38*

¹ As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been born blind.

⁶ After he said this, Jesus spat on the ground and made some mud with the spittle; he rubbed the mud on the man's eyes ⁷ and said, "Go and wash your face in the Pool of Siloam." (This name means "Sent".) So the man went, washed his face, and came back seeing.

⁸ His neighbours, then, and the people who had seen him begging before this, asked, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?"

⁹ Some said, "He is the one," but others said, "No he isn't; he just looks like him." So the man himself said, "I am the man."

¹³ Then they took to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ The day that Jesus made the mud and cured him of his blindness was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ The Pharisees, then, asked the man again how he had received his sight. He told them, "He put some mud on my eyes; I washed my face, and now I can see."

¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "The man who did this cannot be from God, for he does not obey the Sabbath law."

Others, however, said, "How could a man who is a sinner perform such miracles as these?" And there was a division among them.

¹⁷ So the Pharisees asked the man once more, "You say he cured you of your blindness – well, what do you say about him?"

"He is a prophet," the man answered.

³⁴ They answered, "You were born and brought up in sin – and you are trying to teach us?" And they expelled him from the synagogue.

³⁵ When Jesus heard what had happened, he found the man and asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

³⁶ The man answered, "Tell me who he is, sir, so that I can believe in him!" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have already seen him, and he is the one who is talking with you now."

³⁸ "I believe, Lord!" the man said, and knelt down before Jesus.

**This is a shortened form of today's reading. The full reading is John 9.1-41.*

Other Readings: 1 Samuel 16.1, 6-7, 10-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5.8-14



LECTIO

In Jerusalem, the holy city, healing a man who had been born blind causes dissent among those who witness the healing, and draws the ire of the authorities outside the Temple. This healing results in a teaching that would break a long-standing law known as the "Law of Retribution": disability is punishment for the sins committed by the disabled person, his parents, or even his ancestors.



MEDITATIO

■ *"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"* Jesus is asking us this question today. Will he hear: "I believe, Lord...?" The man who makes this simple profession of faith "knelt down before Jesus." What kind of internal healing can we pray for on our knees? What kind of illness will make us bow down and ask to be set free? Blindness often stems from a stubbornness in our convictions, our doubts, our ignorance, and our blind spots.



ORATIO

Paul tells us that: Since you have become the Lord's people, you are in the light.

A light that shows us our own evil.

A light that allows us to go down on our knees.

Lord, enlighten my life, and light my daily path.

Lead me to green pastures to rest my soul.

Guide me along the paths of righteousness

that I may honour your name

as long as I live. (Ps 23)

Amen!



CONTEMPLATIO

I come before Jesus Christ the healer and offer myself to him, with open arms and a repentant heart. I close my eyes as though I were blind. I listen and pay attention because I no longer see. I hear your footsteps coming closer, and I picture you putting mud on my eyes. I open my eyes... and appreciate the light. And I hear myself telling you: Thank you, Lord!

Ghislaine Salvail, sjsh

RETURN TO A REMARKABLE LIFE

John 11.3-7, 17, 20-27, 33-45*

³ The sisters sent Jesus a message: "Lord, your dear friend is ill."

⁴ When Jesus heard it, he said, "The final result of this illness will not be the death of Lazarus; this has happened in order to bring glory to God, and it will be the means by which the Son of God will receive glory."

⁵ Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ Yet when he received the news that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was for two more days. ⁷ Then he said to the disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had been buried four days before.

²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "If you had been here, Lord, my brother would not have died!" ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask him for."

²³ "Your brother will rise to life," Jesus told her.

²⁴ "I know," she replied, "that he will rise to life on the last day."

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and all those who live and believe in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷ "Yes, Lord!" she answered. "I do believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

³³ Jesus saw her weeping, and he saw how the people who were with her were weeping also; his heart was touched, and he was deeply moved. ³⁴ "Where have you buried him?" he asked them.

"Come and see, Lord," they answered.

³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ "See how much he loved him!" the people said.

³⁷ But some of them said, "He gave sight to the blind man, didn't he? Could he not have kept Lazarus from dying?"

³⁸ Deeply moved once more, Jesus went to the tomb, which was a cave with a stone placed at the entrance. ³⁹ "Take the stone away!" Jesus ordered.

Martha, the dead man's sister, answered, "There will be a bad smell, Lord. He has been buried four days!"

⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believed?"

⁴¹ They took the stone away. Jesus looked up and said, "I thank you, Father, that you listen to me. ⁴² I know that you always listen to me, but I say this for the sake of the people here, so that they will believe that you sent me." ⁴³ After he had said this, he called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ He came out, his hands and feet wrapped in grave clothes, and with a cloth round his face. "Untie him," Jesus told them, "and let him go."

⁴⁵ Many of the people who had come to visit Mary saw what Jesus did, and they believed in him.

**This is a shortened form of today's reading. The full reading is John 11.1-45.*

Other Readings: Ezekiel 37.12-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8.8-11

LECTIO

John's is the only Gospel telling the story of Lazarus, brother to Martha and Mary, coming back to life. Broadly speaking, Jesus' friend Lazarus did not resurrect because at some point he did die again. Be that as it may, this event heralds the resurrection of the righteous in the last days. As such, faith teaches us that Lazarus' return from the dead is being accomplished for each and every one of us each time we come out of our tombs by confessing our sins.

MEDITATIO

- We experience the kind of grief that overcame this household in Bethany whenever we lose a family member or a loved one. We have felt this grief at a certain point in life. Perhaps the pain is still sharp? Jesus, where were you when death came knocking? Faith teaches me that those who die are not that far away.

ORATIO

Father, my life and death are in your hands.

We will not perish or disappear forever.

My life and death are God's treasure,
and will not be lost forever.

Thank you, Lord for caring about the person I am.

Thank you for taking care of me forever.

Amen!

CONTEMPLATIO

I remember the people that death has taken from me. I talk to them feeling assured that they can hear me. I call out their names. I picture the place where their soul rests in peace. I ask God to comfort me, to console me, to heal my pain.

Ghislaine Salvail sjsh

ABANDONED AT GETHSEMANE

Matthew 26.36-41 – 27.45-66*

³⁶Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee. Grief and anguish came over him, ³⁸and he said to them, "The sorrow in my heart is so great that it almost crushes me. Stay here and keep watch with me."

³⁹He went a little farther on, threw himself face downward on the ground, and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, take this cup of suffering from me! Yet not what I want, but what you want."

⁴⁰Then he returned to the three disciples and found them asleep; and he said to Peter, "How is it that you three were not able to keep watch with me for even one hour?"

⁴¹Keep watch and pray that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

^{27.45}At noon the whole country was covered with darkness, which lasted for three hours. ⁴⁶At about three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud shout, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?"

Other Readings: Isaiah 50.4-7; Psalm 22.7-8, 16-19, 22-23; Philippians 2.6-11

LECTIO

This is the most tragic passage from the Passion of Christ. We hear the Son of God beseeching his disciples to stay close to him while he goes a short distance away to pray. In this now famous garden, Jesus is already abandoned. After celebrating the Passover, the three disciples are overcome by sleep, and Jesus is left alone. And yet his request was very clear: "Stay here." Christ, in human anguish, cries to the Father. He even asks that the cup of suffering he is about to drink be taken from him. But he finally surrenders and says: "Yet not what I want, but what you want." This prayer has remained a precious part of the Church's treasure.

MEDITATIO

- Lord, this need to be "with" us speaks volumes of your humanity and suffering. It shows us how deeply you feel the fear of the tragic death that awaits you. Today, this request to have your close disciples near appeals to your Church. You are calling

each of us to stay with you until the end of the world. I pray for all those members of the Church who feel distant, hurt, and victimized.

ORATIO

Psalm 22 is particularly fitting as today's prayer. Let us remind ourselves of a few verses:

*All who see me make fun of me;
they stick out their tongues and shake their heads.
"You relied on the Lord," they say.
"Why doesn't he save you?
If the Lord likes you, why doesn't he help you?"*

*I will tell my people what you have done;
I will praise you in their assembly:
Praise him, you servants of the Lord!*

CONTEMPLATIO

At the moment Jesus begins to feel the sufferings that he will freely accept in order to save the world, he draws an outline of the Lord's Prayer. This is the prayer that he taught his disciples who followed him closely. Let us contemplate this Christ, the Son of God, lying prostrate, sweating blood and water, imploring his Father: "your will be done!" Let us make these words our own as though we were hearing them from the mouth of Jesus himself overcome with fear and pain. Let us add, in faith: "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven because your suffering has saved us."

Ghislaine Salvail, sjsh

A SERVANT HEART

John 13.1-15

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹² After Jesus had washed their feet, he put his outer garment back on and returned to his place at the table. "Do you understand what I have just done to you?" he asked.

¹³ "You call me Teacher and Lord, and it is right that you do so, because that is what I am. ¹⁴ I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet. You, then, should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you.

Other Readings: Exodus 12.1-8, 11-14; Psalm 116.12-13, 15-18; 1 Corinthians 11.23-26



LECTIO

These events are set within the context of the Passover meal. Our Old Testament reading (Exodus 12.1-8, 11-14) reminds us of the huge significance this feast had for Jews. It was a feast remembering God's miraculous deliverance of his people.

John is the only gospel writer to give us this precious example of Jesus washing the disciples' feet.

Jesus' actions must have stunned the disciples. Normally the host provided water for guests entering the house to wash their own feet (Luke 7.44). Sometimes a servant or slave might attend to the task. Very occasionally, disciples might wash their teacher's feet. But never the other way round. This is unprecedented.

Peter protests strongly but then submits even though he still misunderstands Jesus' purpose and wants complete purification. In this practical action, Jesus demonstrates a very important lesson to the disciples and to us – we must serve one another just as he serves us. Humility and servanthood are marks of true discipleship.

What Jesus is really looking for is humility – the only doorway to the gift of salvation. We cannot gain salvation by our own actions; only accepting the humble sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross can redeem us.



MEDITATIO

- Imagine Jesus washing your feet. How would you feel? What would you say to him?
- How willing are you to follow Jesus' example and serve others? In what practical ways can you do this?
- Judas sat at the table and no doubt allowed Jesus to wash his feet. So Jesus humbled himself before his betrayer (verse 11). What does this tell us about Jesus, and indeed about Judas too?



ORATIO

Make Psalm 116 your prayer for the next day or two. Consider Jesus' feelings and actions as you read these words. Listen to what the Holy Spirit might say to you and consider the words of the Psalmist in verse 12,

"What can I offer the Lord for all his goodness to me?"



CONTEMPLATIO

Reflect on Christ's love, humility and painful death for us. Consider too his never ending desire to draw us into fellowship with the Trinity.

UBS

GREATER LOVE HAS NO MAN

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.

GREATER LOVE HAS NO MAN

John 18.1 – 19.42

Other Readings: Isaiah 52.13-53.12; Psalm 31.1, 5, 11-12, 14-16, 24; Hebrews 4.14-16, 5.7-9

LECTIO

John's account of Jesus' passion begins with his betrayal and arrest at night. Judas leads the Roman soldiers and temple guards to a garden where Jesus often met with his disciples. However John makes it clear that Jesus is not taken by surprise and does not seek to evade his arrest, "Jesus knew everything that was going to happen to him, so he stepped forward..." (18.4).

Jesus is taken before Annas and Caiaphas the High Priest. John doesn't give as much detail as the other gospel writers about Jesus' trial before the Jewish authorities (see Matthew 26.57-67, Mark 14.53-65, Luke 22.54-55, 63-71) but notes it was Caiaphas who advised the Jewish authorities that "it was better that one man should die for all the people" (18.14).

The Jewish authorities have passed their sentence but require Roman permission to implement it. So they take Jesus to Pilate, who finds no reason to sentence Jesus to death. In fact he says this to the people no fewer than three times (18.38, 19.4, 6) and tries to release Jesus. But when the crowd openly call into question Pilate's allegiance to the Emperor he gives in and hands Jesus over to be crucified.

John also includes some details not found in the other three Gospels. One of these is an instruction from Jesus on the cross to "the disciple he loved" – this is traditionally regarded as a reference to John himself – to look after his mother (John 19.26-27). He alone records Jesus' tender words and care for his mother.

Another such detail is the description of the soldier piercing Jesus' side with a spear instead of breaking his legs as in the case of the other two men crucified with him (19.32-34). John explains, "this was done to make the scripture come true," referring to Zechariah 12.10.

We learn also that when Jesus' side was pierced 'blood and water poured out'. On a literal level this is conclusive proof that Jesus was dead, answering sceptics who later tried to deny the resurrection on the basis that Jesus was not actually dead. Some also suggest that on a symbolic level the blood and water represent Holy Eucharist or Holy Communion and baptism.

After Jesus is crucified Joseph of Arimathea asks Pilate if he can bury Jesus. Pilate gives his permission and Joseph, along with Nicodemus, prepares Jesus' body for burial and then buries him in a new tomb (19.38-40). They were both important Jewish council members and secret disciples of Jesus. John is the only gospel writer to mention Nicodemus' involvement here. He also records the meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3 which includes one of the Bible's most famous verses, John 3.16, "For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life."

MEDITATIO

- What do we learn about Jesus from this Passion narrative? What touches you most and why?
- In answering Pilate Jesus says, "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" (18.37). What is the 'truth' Jesus is speaking about? Are you continuing to listen to Jesus?
- Jesus endured the pain and humiliation of death on the cross. What difference does this make to the way you live your life?
- What did Jesus mean when he said, 'it is finished'? What is the significance of this for you today?

ORATIO

Prayerfully read Isaiah 52.13 – 53.12. Worship the suffering servant who was pierced for our faults and crushed for our sins. Give thanks for all Jesus accomplished on the cross for you. Surrender your burdens and sins to the loving Lord who paid the price so you can be free.

CONTEMPLATIO

"Let us have confidence, then, and approach God's throne, where there is grace. There we will receive mercy and find grace to help us just when we need it" (Hebrews 4.16).

Read Hebrews 4.14-16 and 5.7-9. These verses encourage and strengthen us to "hold firmly to the faith" (verse 14).

Meditate on Jesus our high priest who understands our human weaknesses but lived on earth without sin and is "the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him" (verse 9).

THERE THEY WILL SEE ME

Matthew 28.1-10

¹After the Sabbath, as Sunday morning was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ²Suddenly there was a violent earthquake; an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled the stone away, and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴The guards were so afraid that they trembled and became like dead men.

⁵The angel spoke to the women. "You must not be afraid," he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has been raised, just as he said. Come here and see the place where he was lying. ⁷Go quickly now, and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from death, and now he is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see him!' Remember what I have told you."

⁸So they left the tomb in a hurry, afraid and yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Peace be with you." They came up to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. ¹⁰"Do not be afraid," Jesus said to them. "Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

Other Readings: Isaiah 12.2-6 ; Psaume 118.1-2, 16-17, 22-23; Romans 6.3-1

LECTIO

Before the empty tomb, two women "afraid and yet filled with joy". Sitting on a rolled away stone, the angel of God with "clothes white as snow". Guards on duty, "so afraid that they trembled and became like dead men". This scene has been depicted in popular imagery thousands of times through the ages. But faith in the Resurrection is beyond all these images. It is God's revelation, gift, and grace.

MEDITATIO

- The stone rolled away by the angel of the Lord is a visible sign of God's victory over death. Only those who believe can see and rejoice in it. The two women do not witness the Resurrection because the event transcends the history of humanity. More than two thousands years later, how must I reread this account? Can I look beyond the images? Is my faith pure enough, solid enough, for me to affirm that this Jesus who was raised from the dead always goes before me in my daily Galilee? Because you said: "There you will see me."

ORATIO

Jesus alive forever!
 Jesus present forever!
 Jesus walking along our paths!
 Jesus, our resurrection!
 Jesus, our salvation!
 Jesus, fulfilling the Scriptures!
 Blessed are you, Lord! Hallelujah!
 Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

CONTEMPLATIO

My weaknesses, my uncertainties, and my doubts are pushed aside like the stone in front of the tomb. I bring these weaknesses, these cracks in the stone of my heart to the Father. I offer them on the altar of this same stone. I hear the angel of the Lord telling me: "You must not be afraid! I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified." I tell the Lord my desire to seek him where he is: among my brothers and sisters, in humanity.

Ghislaine Salvail, sjsh

A MEMORABLE ABSENCE

John 20.19-31

¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." ²² Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

²⁴ One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (called the Twin), was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So 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."

²⁶ A 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." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands; then stretch out your hand and put it in my side. Stop your doubting, and believe!"

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

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

³⁰ In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. ³¹ But 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 2.42-47; Psalm 118.2-4, 13-15, 22-24; 1 Peter 1.3-9

LECTIO

It is now a week after the death of Jesus and the women have announced his Resurrection to the disciples. But the disciples are still afraid, as attested by the locked doors. Jesus, however, defies these human precautions, and appears among them. All the twelve disciples are there, with the exception of Thomas. His absence will lead to a powerful declaration of faith.

2 MEDITATIO

- I meditate on the absence of Thomas. Why isn't he with the other disciples? Does he have family problems? Work-related obligations? But that is not the issue. All that Jesus asked was for the disciples to wait for him in Galilee. Where does Jesus find me when I'm not at work, at home, at school, at Church? I respond to the Teacher's desire: I'm in Galilee. But when I return to my prayer time, do I have the assurance that Jesus was with me as I went about my activities? If I have doubts, I call out to "My Lord and my God". I seek his forgiveness for seeking proof of his presence because, in reality, God is always present wherever we let him in...

3 ORATIO

Lord, you who walked through locked doors,
come and knock on the door of my heart.

Lord, you who wanted to be among us
in our fears and our joys,
come and grant us peace.

Lord, be with us all our days.

Amen!

4 CONTEMPLATIO

I close my eyes, aware that I belong to a generation of people that believe without seeing. The age I belong to is a new one for the Church, an age that began after Christ's Ascension. The age I belong to is the time for a new beatitude: "Happy are those who believe without seeing."

Ghislaine Salvail, sjsh

OPENED EYES

Luke 24.13-35

¹³ On that same day two of Jesus' followers were going to a village named Emmaus, about 11 kilometres from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and they were talking to each other about all the things that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed, Jesus himself drew near and walked along with them; ¹⁶ they saw him, but somehow did not recognize him. ¹⁷ Jesus said to them, "What are you talking about to each other, as you walk along?"

They stood still, with sad faces. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have been happening there these last few days?"

¹⁹ "What things?" he asked.

"The things that happened to Jesus of Nazareth," they answered. "This man was a prophet and was considered by God and by all the people to be powerful in everything he said and did. ²⁰ Our chief priests and rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and he was crucified. ²¹ And we had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free! Besides all that, this is now the third day since it happened. ²² Some of the women of our group surprised us; they went at dawn to the tomb, ²³ but could not find his body. They came back saying they had seen a vision of angels who told them that he is alive. ²⁴ Some of our group went to the tomb and found it exactly as the women had said, but they did not see him."

²⁵ Then Jesus said to them, "How foolish you are, how slow you are to believe everything the prophets said! ²⁶ Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and then to enter his glory?" ²⁷ And Jesus explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther; ²⁹ but they held him back, saying, "Stay with us; the day is almost over and it is getting dark." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ He sat down to eat with them, took the bread, and said the blessing; then he broke the bread and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. ³² They said to each other, "Wasn't it like a fire burning in us when he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?"

³³ They got up at once and went back to Jerusalem, where they found the eleven disciples gathered together with the others ³⁴ and saying, "The Lord is risen indeed! He has appeared to Simon!"

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

Other Readings: Acts 2.14, 22-23; Psalm 16.1-2, 5, 7-11; 1 Peter 1.17-21



LECTIO

It is the third day after Jesus' death. The tomb is open and Jesus' body is missing. Despite Jesus' promise that he would rise on the third day these two disciples seem to have given up hope and leave for Emmaus.

Jesus joins them but they do not recognize him. He explains how the Messiah's death and resurrection are essential to God's purposes and have been revealed in the scriptures. It is only when he breaks bread with them that their eyes are opened.

They rush back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples. They arrive to find that Jesus has also appeared to Simon. So at this point in Luke's account there are three eyewitnesses to the risen Christ. Many more will join them before Jesus ascends to heaven.



MEDITATIO

- Jesus revealed himself to these two disciples when they were discouraged. What can we learn from this?
- What other lessons can you learn from this passage?



ORATIO

Thank Jesus that he has paid the price for your sin through his death and resurrection. Invite him to come alongside you and reveal more of himself to you. Pray for those you know who are feeling discouraged or have doubts about their faith.



CONTEMPLATIO

The two disciples walked about 11 kilometres back to Jerusalem, mostly at night, to encourage their fellow disciples. Consider your response to the good news of the gospel and how you can share it with others.

UBS

LISTEN TO THE SHEPHERD

John 10.1-10

¹ Jesus said, "I am telling you the truth: the man who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The man who goes in through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him; the sheep hear his voice as he calls his own sheep by name, and he leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought them out, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice. ⁵ They will not follow someone else; instead, they will run away from such a person, because they do not know his voice."

⁶ Jesus told them this parable, but they did not understand what he meant.

⁷ So Jesus said again, "I am telling you the truth: I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All others who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate. Whoever comes in by me will be saved; they will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only in order to steal, kill, and destroy. I have come in order that you might have life – life in all its fullness.

Other Readings: Acts 2.14, 36-41; Psalm 23.1-6; 1 Peter 2.20-25

LECTIO

To help us understand this passage more clearly we also need to read the following verses in John 10.11-18. In verses 1-5 Jesus tells the parable of the shepherd. He explains the meaning in verses 7-16.

Jesus uses two "I am" statements with two metaphors to describe himself. In verse 7 he describes himself as 'the gate' and in verse 11 he refers to himself as the "good shepherd".

The people listening to Jesus would have been familiar with the idea of God as the shepherd and the Jewish people as his sheep. So in identifying himself as the good shepherd, Jesus identifies himself directly with God and his role in protecting and caring for his sheep.

Jesus adds that the shepherd knows each of his sheep by name and leads them. The sheep recognize his voice so they follow him out of the sheepfold, presumably to pastures where they can be fed. In verses 11-16 Jesus alludes to the fact that he will one day lay down his life for the sake of his flock. He also refers to "other sheep", possibly Gentile converts, which will be added to form one flock.

In addition to being the good shepherd Jesus also describes himself as the gate for the sheep. The gate is the only legitimate way into the sheepfold. It is only through Jesus that we can become part of God's flock. This is summed up in John 14.6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me." (We will look at this passage further next Sunday.)

Jesus also compares his mission with that of false prophets and "messiahs". The latter steal, kill and destroy. By glorious contrast Jesus brings life – "life in all its fullness" (verse 10).



MEDITATIO

- Why do you think Jesus used these two metaphors to describe himself? What does each metaphor tell you about him?
- What have you learnt about Jesus and your relationship with him today?
- Do you see Jesus as your shepherd? When do you experience him leading you? What spiritual food and water does he provide for you?
- Do you need to make any changes to allow you to hear your shepherd's voice more clearly in the future?



ORATIO

Psalm 23 is probably the best known of all the Psalms. Read through it verse by verse and use it as a personal prayer to God.



CONTEMPLATIO

Reflect on this verse from 1 Peter 2.25,

"You were like sheep that had lost their way, but now you have been brought back to follow the Shepherd and Keeper of your souls."

UBS

THE WAY

John 14.1-12

¹“Do not be worried and upset,” Jesus told them. “Believe in God and believe also in me. ² There are many rooms in my Father’s house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so. ³ And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am. ⁴ You know the way that leads to the place where I am going.”

⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going; so how can we know the way to get there?”

⁶ Jesus answered him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me. ⁷ Now that you have known me,” he said to them, “you will know my Father also, and from now on you do know him and you have seen him.”

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.

Other Readings: Acts 6.1-7; Psalm 33.1-2, 4-5, 18-19; 1 Peter 2.4-9

LECTIO

This conversation takes place about the time of the Passover meal in Jerusalem. Jesus knows that his imminent arrest and crucifixion will be a severe trial for his disciples.

Jesus doesn’t say so explicitly but verses 2-4 seem to be referring to heaven. Jesus knows that after his crucifixion he will rise from the dead and join his Father in heaven.

The promise for his disciples is that after they die they too will join him in heaven, but Jesus doesn’t make this plain.

Jesus’ answer to Thomas – that he is the way, the truth, the life and the only way to the Father – probably didn’t make things any clearer for them at the time.

In his exchange with Philip, Jesus focuses on his unity with God the Father. This is a difficult concept for the disciples to understand. In fact, it has taken centuries of the Church’s meditation and reflection to scratch the surface of the mystery of the Trinity. But Jesus points out that whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father: in Jesus we can see what God the Father is like.

Our reading ends today with Jesus’ intriguing statement that his followers will do greater things than he does. This is linked to the gift of the Holy Spirit which we will read more about in the coming weeks.

It is helpful to remind ourselves of the advice Jesus gives his disciples right at the outset of this conversation:

“Do not be worried and upset...believe in God and believe also in me.”



MEDITATIO

- How is Jesus the way, the truth, the life and the only way to the Father?
- How has Jesus proved to be the way for you personally? How does this affect your everyday life?
- What can we learn from this passage about trusting in God? How can you apply this in your daily life?



ORATIO

Psalm 33 speaks about God’s faithfulness. Read the whole Psalm and then respond to him in prayer. Like the disciples we don’t always understand everything but we can be confident that God is faithful and good.



CONTEMPLATIO

“Come to the Lord, the living stone rejected by people as worthless but chosen by God as valuable. Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple, where you will serve as holy priests to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ. For the scripture says, ‘I chose a valuable stone, which I am placing as the cornerstone in Zion; and whoever believes in him will never be disappointed.’”

Consider these verses below from 1 Peter 2.4-6. Think about Jesus as the cornerstone of God’s Kingdom. Ask God how you can be a ‘living stone’ in his temple.

A PRICELESS GIFT

John 14.15-21

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 for ever. 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.

¹⁸ “When I go, you will not be left all alone; I will come back to you. ¹⁹ In a little while the world will see me no more, but you will see me; and because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ When that day comes, you will know that I am in my Father and that you are in me, just as I am in you.

²¹ “Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. My Father will love those who love me; I too will love them and reveal myself to them.”

Other Readings: Acts 8.5-8, 14-17; Psalm 66.1-7, 16, 20; 1 Peter 3.15-18

LECTIO

This reading from John takes us right to the heart of the Passover supper and Jesus' final instructions for his most intimate friends and disciples.

Jesus has some important points to make about his relationship with the disciples and what will happen when he goes away and the Father sends the Holy Spirit to them.

The Holy Spirit will come with an important guarantee, his permanent presence with every disciple (verses 16-17). The world, or non-believers, cannot receive the Holy Spirit because they cannot see or know him. But the disciples will. The Holy Spirit is called “another Helper”, that is in addition to Jesus himself.

In many ways the world stands in opposition to the disciples and Jesus but John chooses not to develop that theme here.

Jesus doesn't go into any details about his return but leaves the disciples with the promise that “I will come back for you.” So his resurrection and return is promised here in verse 18. These verses reveal the deep concern Jesus has for his beloved disciples in the face of the coming storm.

Woven throughout this lesson in love is Jesus' invitation to his disciples to live out their love for him. But he knows the disciples need all the help they can get. So Jesus turns to his Father to ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit on behalf of his disciples.

The Holy Spirit loves those who love Jesus and who keep his commandments. He also acts as advocate, helper and teacher, sustaining the disciples along the sometimes challenging path of obedience to Jesus and his commandments.

All these themes are woven into a rich tapestry of teaching. In these few verses, which are part of a much longer passage of teaching, complex ideas are spelt out with great simplicity and clarity.

MEDITATIO

- The Holy Spirit has various roles but Jesus pinpoints perhaps the most important in verse 17, to reveal “the truth about God”. We constantly need to be reminded about what God is really like because our view of God can so easily be distorted. Love and obedience will flow more easily the deeper our understanding of God's nature. Take some time to reflect on this.
- What part does the Holy Spirit play in your relationship with God? What do you do to sustain this relationship? When are you most aware of the Holy Spirit's guidance?

ORATIO

The liturgy today uses Psalm 66, or part of it, to sing God's praises. Use some verses from this psalm to praise God, or maybe speak or write your own song of praise. Alternatively, try drawing a simple picture to express your praise.

Reflect on the events of the last week. Praise God for his presence with you throughout all that has happened, whether good or bad.

CONTEMPLATIO

Which of the themes in today's teaching particularly touched your heart and spirit? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what God wants you to see and how you need to respond.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Matthew 28.16-20

¹⁶ The eleven disciples went to the hill in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshipped him, even though some of them doubted. ¹⁸ Jesus drew near and said to them, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age."

Other Readings: Acts 1.1-11; Psalm 47.1-2, 5-8; Ephesians 1.17-23

1 LECTIO

These are the final words of the Gospel of Matthew. They complement the narrative in Matthew 10, when Jesus sends the twelve disciples out, as a training exercise, on their first short mission.

The two passages in chapters 10 and 28 are best read together in order to get to grips with what the early disciples understood when Jesus sent them out with their great commission. In the first commission the disciples' mission is limited to "the lost sheep of the people of Israel" and they are specifically told not to visit Gentile territory or Samaritan towns. But after the resurrection the restrictions are removed and Jesus instructs his disciples to share the good news with all peoples everywhere.

This encounter has all the characteristics of a resurrection narrative: a meeting in a chosen place between Jesus and his chosen disciples; and a mixed reaction as some doubted they were seeing the Lord while others worshipped. In this account there is no mention of Jesus proving he is real and not a ghost; the focus is on the task ahead for the disciples.

Jesus states that he has been given "all authority in heaven and earth" and the implication is clear that his is a God-given authority. Based on this authority, he tells the disciples to go "to all peoples everywhere".

His commission involved evangelizing all people of the world and "making them my disciples". Discipleship is entered into through baptism in the name of the Trinity – "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit". Believers become members of a church, though this word is not used. Then begins the process of teaching these new disciples to understand and live the teachings Jesus gave in the years before his passion and death.

At this point, Jesus does not give the disciples a list of instructions on how to carry out the commission, but as we read in Acts 1 the Holy Spirit is poured out to enable the disciples to fulfil the mission.

The Gospel ends with a promise: Jesus will be with them until the end of time. Jesus doesn't spell out how, he simply gives the assurance. His promise, like his message, is for us today and it is eternal.

2 MEDITATIO

- What do you understand by the great commission?
- Who do you see around you taking part in the great commission?
- How do you play your part in achieving the commission?
- How does Jesus fulfil his promise to be with us today?

3 ORATIO

Go deeper into the power and wonder of the great commission by prayerfully reading Acts 1.1-11. Ask God to speak to you about someone with whom you can share Jesus' words. Remember Jesus promises to be with us and has sent the Holy Spirit to help us.

4 CONTEMPLATIO

Read Ephesians 1.17-23 slowly several times and soak up these amazing verses. Verse 17 echoes what we read last week in John 14.17 about the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing God to us so that we know him.

Take a few moments to reflect on the authority that has been given to Jesus and let this strengthen your faith:

"Christ rules there above all heavenly rulers, authorities, powers, and lords; he has a title superior to all titles of authority in this world and in the next. God put all things under Christ's feet and gave him to the church as supreme Lord over all things." Ephesians 1.21-22

GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

John 20.19-23

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. ²⁰ After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you." ²² Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Other Readings: Acts 2.1-11; Psalm 104.1, 24, 29-31, 34; 1 Corinthians 12.3-7, 12-13

LECTIO

Though the Feast we are celebrating is Pentecost Sunday, which occurs about fifty days after Easter Sunday, our Gospel reading today focuses on an encounter with the Holy Spirit on the very day Jesus rose from the dead.

It is the third day after Jesus' death. The disciples are afraid of the Jewish authorities so they keep a very low profile, hiding away behind locked doors.

The rest of our text tells what the risen Jesus says and does next. He greets them all by saying, "Peace be with you," a normal greeting among the Jews. He says nothing about his ordeal or the fact that the disciples abandoned him after his arrest.

Then he shows them his hands and side, still bearing the visible signs of his crucifixion; his resurrected body still bore the marks of his suffering. Jesus probably intended to show that he was real – changed and yet the same. The signs of his suffering made it plain he was not a ghost; he lived and stood among them.

Then comes the commission, or mission (verse 21), which is almost a continuation of his own mission from the Father. Surprisingly, we discover the disciples are despatched to bring forgiveness of sins rather than to preach. Although reconciliation with God through repentance and forgiveness is of course the very essence of the Gospel.

Christian churches interpret verse 21 differently but for the Catholic Church this is the basis of the Church's authority to forgive sins after they have been confessed. Jesus gives no description of how the Church is to organize the dispensation of forgiveness. Nor is there any indication of the rite the Church was to set up. Jesus only says if the Church forgives the sins of men and women then so will God. And if the Church denies this pardon, then God will not forgive the sins either.

Through its long history, the Catholic Church has administered this sacrament in various ways. But at all times it is God's gift given to an individual in need of forgiveness administered through the Church.

But before giving this commission Jesus breathes on the disciples and says "Receive the Holy Spirit". So this authority should only be exercised through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

MEDITATIO

- Picture the scene, the disciples hidden away from the prying eyes of the world. They are scared. Fear hangs in the air and suddenly there is Jesus standing in the room. Think about what this encounter must have meant for the disciples.
- Consider the parallel between Jesus breathing on the disciples to receive the Holy Spirit and God breathing life into man at Creation (Genesis 2.7).
- How do you feel about Jesus giving the Church the authority to forgive sins?

ORATIO

Ask the Holy Spirit to shine his loving light into your heart and to guide you as you seek forgiveness for your sins, perhaps in confession. These words from 1 John 1.9 offer encouragement:

"But if we confess our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right, he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing."

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you live a life that is pleasing to God.

CONTEMPLATIO

Read Acts 2.1-11 and try to imagine the scene when the Holy Spirit came in power on the disciples and thousands were added to the church in one day.

Then read 1 Corinthians 12 and consider the work of the Holy Spirit in your life today.

UBS

FOR GOD SO LOVED

John 3.16-18

¹⁶ For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its saviour.

¹⁸ Those who believe in the Son are not judged; but those who do not believe have already been judged, because they have not believed in God's only Son.

Other Readings: Exodus 34.4-6, 8-9; Daniel 3.52-56; 2 Corinthians 13.11-13

LECTIO

These few verses are among the best known in the Bible. For some these words have opened the doorway into life as a Christian believer.

As we take a closer look at them it is actually not at all clear who is speaking here, and the Greek text can be interpreted in different ways. It could be Jesus himself continuing his conversation with Nicodemus (verses 1-13) or it could be the gospel writer adding his own comments.

The two preceding verses help to deepen our appreciation of this passage. They refer to the Son of Man being lifted up so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. ("Lift up" has two meanings, referring both to the cross and to Jesus' ascension to heaven.) A direct reference is made to the account in Numbers 21.6-9 where the Israelites sinned and were punished by poisonous snakes. Moses intercedes for them and God instructs him to make a snake and put it on a pole. Those who looked on the bronze snake were healed and their lives saved. The symbol of the snake on a pole remains a symbol of healing in some countries today and is used by various medical organisations. The parallel is clear: all human beings are smitten with a deadly disease but there is a cure – believing in Jesus and his victory over sin on the cross.

These verses give us a wonderful insight into God the Father and the Son. God is not indifferent to the plight of people as some believe. He loves us and demonstrated his love through his Son's birth on earth and death on the cross. This is repeated in 2 Peter 3.9, "...he wants everyone to turn from sin and no one to be lost" (CEV).

Jesus' primary purpose is to bring salvation rather than judgement; nevertheless, we will be judged by our response to him. Believing and following Jesus causes us to live in the light. But those who choose to remain in darkness have to bear the consequences.

MEDITATIO

- How do these verses speak to you?
- Take some time to reflect on God's love for you personally and indeed for everyone. How do you respond to this?
- How might you explain these verses to someone who is interested in becoming a Christian?

ORATIO

"The Lord God came down in a cloud and stood beside Moses there on the mountain. God spoke his holy name, 'the Lord.' Then he passed in front of Moses and called out, 'I am the Lord God. I am merciful and very patient with my people. I show great love, and I can be trusted. I keep my promises to my people forever, but I also punish anyone who sins...' Exodus 34.5-7 (Contemporary English Version)

Respond to God in worship and thanksgiving. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any sin you need to confess. Intercede for those who need to receive God's love and forgiveness.

CONTEMPLATIO

Reflect on the following verses from 1 John 4.10-14. What do you think about them?

"This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven. Dear friends, if this is how God loved us, then we should love one another. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in union with us, and his love is made perfect in us. We are sure that we live in union with God and that he lives in union with us, because he has given us his Spirit. And we have seen and tell others that the Father sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world."

UBS

LIVING BREAD

John 6.51-58

⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live for ever. The bread that I will give him is my flesh, which I give so that the world may live."

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

⁵³ Jesus said to them, "I am telling you the truth: if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in yourselves. ⁵⁴ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them to life on the last day.

⁵⁵ For my flesh is the real food; my blood is the real drink. ⁵⁶ Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood live in me, and I live in them. ⁵⁷ The living Father sent me, and because of him I live also. In the same way whoever eats me will live because of me.

⁵⁸ This, then, is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the bread that your ancestors ate. They later died, but those who eat this bread will live for ever."

*Other Readings: Deuteronomy 8.2-3, 14-16; Psalm 147.12-15, 19-20;
1 Corinthians 10.16-17*

LECTIO

John chapter 6 opens with Jesus miraculously providing physical bread (and fish) for over 5,000 people. In the synagogue the next day Jesus teaches extensively on the living bread sent by God to give eternal life.

Today's Gospel reading comes at the end of this teaching and focuses on the 'Eucharist'. Strictly speaking, the term "Eucharist" means "giving thanks" and it refers to the ceremony held on the Lord's Day (Sunday) when the consecrated bread and wine is received. Catholics believe that when the words of blessing or consecration are pronounced over the bread and wine they become the body and blood of Christ. Other Christians understand it differently, seeing this as a symbol of remembrance of the Last Supper.

Catholics describe the change of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ as "transubstantiation". It is a "mystery of faith". The Gospel accounts do not enter into these theological discussions. It was St Thomas Aquinas who first gave the interpretation used by the Catholic Church.

The overall teaching in John 6.25-59 remains more general. Jesus declares, "I am the bread of life" (verses 35 & 48). Jesus contrasts the manna that God provided for the Israelites in the wilderness – which met their physical needs – with faith in the Son of Man, which meets their spiritual need for salvation. Jesus refers several times to 'coming down from heaven' (verses 38, 41, 51, 58) to show his message has its origin with God, who lives in heaven.

Verse 40 sums up God's heart in this teaching: "For what my Father wants is that all who see the Son and believe in him should have eternal life."

MEDITATIO

- Reflect on the significance of Jesus describing himself as the bread of life.
- Is Jesus *your* bread of life? What practical difference does this make to you?
- How important is celebrating the Eucharist or Holy Communion in your Christian life?

ORATIO

Humbly come before God in prayer. Give thanks to God for sending his Son as "the bread of life" so that we can live in fellowship with the Trinity and, through faith in Jesus, inherit eternal life. Marvel at this wonderful gift.

CONTEMPLATIO

While they were eating, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples.

"Take and eat it," he said; "this is my body."

Then he took a cup, gave thanks to God, and gave it to them.

"Drink it, all of you," he said; "this is my blood, which seals God's covenant, my blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Matthew 26.26-28

Take time each day this week to give thanks that Jesus' death paid the price so you can receive forgiveness.

DO YOU LOVE ME?

John 21.1-19

¹After this, Jesus appeared once more to his disciples at Lake Tiberias. This is how it happened. ²Simon 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.

³Simon 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. ⁴As the sun was rising, Jesus stood at the water's edge, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵Then he asked them, "Young men, haven't you caught anything?"

"Not a thing," they answered.

⁶He 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.

⁷The 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. ⁸The 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. ⁹When they stepped ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there with fish on it and some bread. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

¹¹Simon 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. ¹²Jesus said to them, "Come and eat." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³So Jesus went over, took the bread, and gave it to them; he did the same with the fish.

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

¹⁵After 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." ¹⁶A 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." ¹⁷A 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. ¹⁸I 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

UBS

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

Matthew 10.37-42

³⁷ Those who love their father or mother more than me are not fit to be my disciples; those who love their son or daughter more than me are not fit to be my disciples. ³⁸ Those who do not take up their cross and follow in my steps are not fit to be my disciples. ³⁹ Those who try to gain their own life will lose it; but those who lose their life for my sake will gain it.

⁴⁰ Whoever welcomes you welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Whoever welcomes God's messenger because he is God's messenger, will share in his reward. And whoever welcomes a good man because he is good, will share in his reward. ⁴² You can be sure that whoever gives even a drink of cold water to one of the least of these my followers because he is my follower, will certainly receive a reward.

Other Readings: 2Kings 4.8.11, 14-16a; Psalm 89.1-3; Romans 6.3-4., 8-11

LECTIO

Addressing the crowd that surrounds him, Jesus speaks of the requirements inherent in discipleship. Many are those who simply follow him because he is a popular preacher. But the disciples also know that trouble follows Jesus closely. They are already experiencing some form of persecution from the religious authorities.

In any relationship there comes a time when you have to decide whether you are serious or not. This is precisely what Jesus is talking about today. Christian life is not for those who seek popularity or who want to have a good time, free from all responsibility.

The more Jesus speaks of the requirements of discipleship, the harder they seem to become. Apparently anything good can stand in the way of our relationship with God! Jesus invites us to understand that nothing should come between us – mother or father, husband or wife, children, our needs or desires. The same applies to Christ's relationship with the Father.

How overwhelming! We must be ready to give up our lives and 'bear the cross,' be crucified in our daily lives. It's a painful reality. Our call is to do the will of Jesus, whatever the cost may be. Our selfish ways must be subject to the will of God. This mindset must be deeply ingrained in us in order to gradually conform us to the image of Christ.

This is why Jesus uses such vivid and strong images to help us count the cost of embarking on the adventure of discipleship.

According to John 6.43-71, people were shocked by the teachings of Jesus and many left him. Jesus explains clearly that, humanly speaking, it is impossible to follow him. Only, by the Spirit of God, can we be his disciples. And in John 6.65, Jesus affirms, "no one can come to me unless the Father makes it possible for him to do so".

2 MEDITATIO

- What touches you most in these verses? Is there a specific part of your life which is in disagreement with Jesus' teaching?

3 ORATIO

Humble yourself in the presence of God for a few moments. Ask him to help you submit your life to him. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you strength and grace to follow Jesus, in all circumstances. Keep your eyes on Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5.23-24 encourages us:

"May the God who gives us peace make you holy in every way and keep your whole being — spirit, soul, and body — free from every fault at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you will do it, because he is faithful."

4 CONTEMPLATIO

Consider the example that Jesus himself set for us by living a life completely in submission to the Father. He also knew God the Father's absolute love for him.

Meditate on the sufferings of Jesus on the cross. He made it possible for us to live a life free from sin and pleasing to God.

GENTLENESS AND HUMILITY

Matthew 11.25-30

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, “Father, Lord of heaven and earth! I thank you because you have shown to the unlearned what you have hidden from the wise and learned. ²⁶ Yes, Father, this was how you wanted it to happen.

²⁷ “My Father has given me all things. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸ “Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest. ³⁰ For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light.”

Other Readings: Zechariah 9.9-10; Psalm 145.1-2, 8-11, 13-14; Romans 8.9, 11-13

LECTIO

Jesus performed most of his miracles in the towns of Galilee. But their hearts remained closed, as Isaiah had prophesied: “Who would have believed what we now report? Who could have seen the Lord’s hand in this?” (Is 53.1). However, to this question, Jesus can answer, “At that time” and give praise to the Father: “You have shown to the unlearned what you have hidden from the wise and learned” (Mt 11.25). And turning to people, he calls them to “Come to me; come with childlike openness. No one but me can reveal the Father to you. And learn not only from my mouth but from my example, because I am ‘gentle and humble’” (Eph 4.20-21).

In Jesus, we find two seemingly contradictory realities: rest and yoke. A yoke is a heavy wooden bar used to harness two oxen. It is a symbol of submission and service. But the Lord’s yoke is light. His yoke is yielding to the will of the Father, which was Jesus’ sole desire. In the same vein, those who are redeemed exchange tiredness and the heavy loads of sin (verse 28) with the eager devotion of love (2 Cor 8.3-5). Jesus said: “Happy are those who are humble” (Mat 5.5). The humble have the privilege of being like him!

2 MEDITATIO

- What are the two key words in this passage? Have we experienced gentleness and humility? Meditate on the contrast between resting and bearing a yoke. Which one dominates our hyperactive world? How can you experience the rest that Jesus offers?

3 ORATIO

Lord, teach us gentleness and humility so that this world may find peace, the real peace that comes from you. Help us carry your light yoke and may our heart find daily rest.

4 CONTEMPLATIO

The Old Testament lauds the immense kindness and goodness of God (Ps 145). Moses is a true example of real gentleness—a virtue, not a weakness—humble submission to God, rooted in faith in his love. This humble meekness characterizes the “others,” whom God will save, and the King who will give peace to the nations (Zech 9:9-10). The one who is teachable in the hands of God is meek towards others, and especially towards the poor. Meekness is the fruit of the Spirit and a gift of the Wisdom from above.

Meekness was one of Christ’s attributes. It also spread to his disciples and should inspire the conduct of pastors today. Meekness is a great glory to a woman, and ensures happiness in her home. Even when facing persecution, a true Christian shows serene meekness, which testifies that “the Lord’s yoke is easy.” This yoke is love.

Félix Anani Adouayom et Andrée Markoux

THE SOWER

*Matthew 13.1-9, 18-23**

¹ That same day Jesus left the house and went to the lakeside, where he sat down to teach. ² The crowd that gathered round him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it, while the crowd stood on the shore. ³ He used parables to tell them many things.

“Once there was a man who went out to sow corn. ⁴ As he scattered the seed in the field, some of it fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some of it fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil. The seeds soon sprouted, because the soil wasn’t deep. ⁶ But when the sun came up, it burnt the young plants; and because the roots had not grown deep enough, the plants soon dried up. ⁷ Some of the seed fell among thorn bushes, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ But some seeds fell in good soil, and the plants produced corn; some produced a hundred grains, others sixty, and others thirty.”

⁹ And Jesus concluded, “Listen, then, if you have ears!”

¹⁸ “Listen, then, and learn what the parable of the sower means. ¹⁹ Those who hear the message about the Kingdom but do not understand it are like the seeds that fell along the path. The Evil One comes and snatches away what was sown in them. ²⁰ The seeds that fell on rocky ground stand for those who receive the message gladly as soon as they hear it. ²¹ But it does not sink deep into them, and they don’t last long. So when trouble or persecution comes because of the message, they give up at once. ²² The seeds that fell among thorn bushes stand for those who hear the message; but the worries about this life and the love for riches choke the message, and they don’t bear fruit. ²³ And the seeds sown in the good soil stand for those who hear the message and understand it: they bear fruit, some as much as a hundred, others sixty, and others thirty.”

**This is a shortened form of today’s reading. The full reading is Matthew 13.1-23.*

Other Readings: Isaiah 55.10-11; Psalm 65.9-13; Romans 8.18-23

LECTIO

The people’s hearts had become hard, and they had closed their eyes and ears (verse 15). This is why this message is concealed in a parable, and this is how Jesus will henceforth talk to the people. His teachings will be reserved for his disciples alone. Verses 18 and 36-37 prove that the Lord is always willing to explain to his people what they are willing to understand.

The Bible contains numerous passages that are difficult and obscure for our limited natural mind (Dt 29:29). But we will receive an explanation at the right time if we really want to know (Pro 28.5). We should therefore not be discouraged when we don’t understand passages or expressions immediately. Let us ask God to explain his Word and to give us an understanding of the Scriptures.

Israel’s rejection of Jesus as the Messiah has another consequence. Since there is no fruit for the Lord to harvest among his people, he will now sow the Good News in the

rest of the world. In another part of the Bible, this is referred to as the “the word he plants in your hearts” which has power to save souls (James 1.21). But though there is only one type of seed, all do not receive the Word in the same way. How did you receive it?

Among those who hear the Word, the Lord, in his perfect knowledge of the human heart, distinguishes four categories of people. The first group is compared to the well-trodden earth along the path, which has become hardened from people walking over it. Is our heart like this path trampled upon over and over again by the world, so much so that the Word cannot get through? Other groups, like the “rocky ground” are shallow minds. Their conscience has not been deeply tilled by a conviction of sin. As such, the fleeting emotion felt upon hearing the Gospel is but the appearance of faith.

Real faith has (invisible) roots; but it is recognized by its visible fruit. Faith without actions is dead like seeds sown in thorn bushes (James 2.17). But the seeds can also fall in good soil, where the stalk will grow and produce when the right season comes. The parable of the weeds teaches us that not only has the enemy stolen the good seeds whenever possible (verse 19), but he has also sown weeds when everyone was asleep. Spiritual sleep puts us at the mercy of all kinds of bad influences. That is why we are constantly reminded to be awake (Mark 13.37; 1 Pe 5.8; etc.).

MEDITATIO

- Why do you think Jesus was forced to speak to the people of Israel in parables? What is the first consequence of this attitude on the part of the people of Israel? Can you summarize the parable in your own words and then resolve to take action? How can you tell whether a seed has fallen in rocky or in good soil? Would you like Jesus to speak to you directly or in parables? What will your choice be – to fall asleep or to stay awake for Christ?

ORATIO

Lord, I give my heart to you. Use it, like fertile soil, in order to spread your Word. Lord, it is no longer I who live, but you in me. Add oil to my lamp so that it may shine in the whole world and so that my heart will produce a good crop.

CONTEMPLATIO

God always keeps his promise. He shows his all-powerfulness in Isaiah 55.10-11. Every word uttered by God must be fulfilled, just as it did when the world was created (Genesis 1). God accomplishes what he wants, with or without us. Since God’s words do not go back to him without having reached their goal, our conduct must be irreproachable before him so that we can receive words of blessing from him and not words of curse .

Félix Anani Adouayom et Andrée Markoux

CAN GOOD SEEDS AND WEEDS CO-EXIST?

Matthew 13.24-30, 36-43*

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: "The Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ One night, when everyone was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. ²⁶ When the plants grew and the ears of corn began to form, then the weeds showed up. ²⁷ The man's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, it was good seed you sowed in your field; where did the weeds come from?' ²⁸ 'It was some enemy who did this,' he answered. 'Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?' they asked him. ²⁹ 'No,' he answered, 'because as you gather the weeds you might pull up some of the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let the wheat and the weeds both grow together until harvest. Then I will tell the harvest workers to pull up the weeds first, tie them in bundles and burn them, and then to gather in the wheat and put it in my barn.'"

³⁶ When Jesus had left the crowd and gone indoors, his disciples came to him and said, "Tell us what the parable about the weeds in the field means."

³⁷ Jesus answered, "The man who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸ the field is the world; the good seed is the people who belong to the Kingdom; the weeds are the people who belong to the Evil One; ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed the weeds is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvest workers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are gathered up and burnt in the fire, so the same thing will happen at the end of the age: ⁴¹ the Son of Man will send out his angels to gather up out of his Kingdom all those who cause people to sin and all others who do evil things, ⁴² and they will throw them into the fiery furnace, where they will cry and grind their teeth. ⁴³ Then God's people will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom. Listen, then, if you have ears!

**This is a shortened form of today's reading. The full reading is Matthew 13.24-43.*

Other Readings: Wisdom 12.13, 16-19; Psalm 86.5-6, 9-10, 15-16; Romans 8.26-27

LECTIO

In the six "Parables of the Kingdom of Heaven" that follow the parable of the Sower, Jesus describes various facets of his Kingdom, which is not of this world.

The *parable of the mustard seed*, which grows into a big tree, describes the external form of the Kingdom of Heaven after the rejection of the king, while the *parable of the yeast* emphasizes secret labour that changes the nature of the dough. It's time for the church to be responsible. After a shaky start, at least on the part of some disciples, Christianity took root and developed into what it is today. Churches grew in number and it is to these that the parables of the mustard seed and of the yeast are addressed.

The word 'weed' comes from the Greek word *zizania*. It derives from colloquial Latin *ebriacus*, meaning drunk, a reference to its inebriating properties. It's a genus of grass that looks like wheat in the initial phase of growth. The difference between the two plants is the colour of their husks. This explains the disciples' question to the Lord. It becomes increasingly obvious and eventually possible to pull out weeds, as the parable says.

MEDITATIO

- Among those who are known as Christians, some persevere but others wander away. Sometimes, living together is not easy. The weeds represent those who obey the Evil One. Quite often, we try to spot the good seed around us and know which are the weeds that can be thrown into the furnace. But who sorts the good seed from the weeds? Who reaps? Who excludes those judged unworthy? Certainly not the servants. It is God's angels, or rather, God himself, who is master of the seed and of the harvest.
- Jesus says to us: "Do not judge others, so that God will not judge you" (Mt 7.1). "Let the wheat and the weeds both grow together until harvest" teaches us that we need to be patient and to trust in God. He is the master of time. The good seed is strong enough to grow in spite of the weeds. Only our God, in all his goodness and mercy, gives us the strength to co-exist with weeds.

ORATIO

Lord, we pray that we will grow into big trees in your field and that our fruits and foliage will be a source of blessing for the world. Teach us to recognize the good seed and not to confuse it with weeds. Help us to be devoted Christians and to follow in Jesus' footsteps, according to our deepest desire. Lord, help us not to get mixed up with the weeds.

CONTEMPLATIO

How can we reflect on these verses from Matthew, which talk about angels throwing those who do evil into the furnace? We must make the right choice because God loves us. For he is Yahweh "the Lord, a compassionate and merciful God, patient, always faithful and ready to forgive" (Ex 34.6). There is always a chance that a soul who is a prisoner of darkness will be touched by the arrow of God's grace, even invisible and silent, even at the very last minute. Matthew concludes by saying: "Then God's people will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom."

What Good News! St. Augustin reminds us that in the beginning, many people are like weeds, then they turn into good seed. Had they not been tolerated with patience when they were bad, they would not have undergone this amazing transformation.

Félix Anani Adouayom et Andrée Markoux

HIDDEN TREASURE, THE PEARL, THE FISH

Matthew 13.44-52

⁴⁴ “The Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man happens to find a treasure hidden in a field. He covers it up again, and is so happy that he goes and sells everything he has, and then goes back and buys that field.

⁴⁵ “Also, the Kingdom of heaven is like this. A man is looking for fine pearls, ⁴⁶ and when he finds one that is unusually fine, he goes and sells everything he has, and buys that pearl.

⁴⁷ “Also, the Kingdom of heaven is like this. Some fishermen throw their net out in the lake and catch all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸ When the net is full, they pull it to shore and sit down to divide the fish: the good ones go into their buckets, the worthless ones are thrown away. ⁴⁹ It will be like this at the end of the age: the angels will go out and gather up the evil people from among the good ⁵⁰ and will throw them into the fiery furnace, where they will cry and grind their teeth.

⁵¹ “Do you understand these things?” Jesus asked them.

“Yes,” they answered.

⁵² So he replied, “This means, then, that every teacher of the Law who becomes a disciple in the Kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who takes new and old things out of his storeroom.”

*Other Readings: 1 Kings 3.5, 7-12; Psalm 119.57, 72, 76-77, 127-130;
Romans 8.28-30*

LECTIO

The short parables of the treasure and the pearl illustrate two wonderful truths: first, the high value that Christ places on his Church and the high price he paid to acquire it; he sold everything he had to the point of giving his life. And second, the joy he feels in acquiring this treasure.

In verse 47 the Gospel net is cast into the sea of people. The Lord had announced to his disciples that he would make them fishers of men. Here now are the servants at work, but the fish are not all good... nor are all so-called Christians, in fact, true believers! It is the Word which helps tell them apart: the good fish is known by its scales and fins (Lv 11.9-11), true Christians by their confidence in the God of Jesus Christ who gives them the strength and courage to make good decisions and thus resist the various currents and the ups and downs in this world that would seduce them away from the Kingdom of God.

Verse 52 speaks to us of another treasure, one that disciples of Jesus find in the Word of God and from which they can take “new and old things”.

Alas! This chapter ends as did the previous, noting the lack of faith of the crowds; they only see Jesus as “the carpenter’s son”, which means that his grace cannot be extended to them, “because they did not have faith.”

MEDITATIO

- What are the values, the elements that count most for us in our life? Why? Where are our treasures, our pearls, hidden? Do they really bring us joy? As for Jesus, he is full of joy because of God’s work in action when we return to him. It is the Word of God that is the true treasure, the sought-after pearl, the true net that will make us all real fishers of men.

ORATIO

The Word of God is more than a treasure of this world and more than a pearl and more than a net. The Word of God is “all in all,” it is Christ himself who gives us the gift of his life. “Come and see” (John 1.39), says Jesus. God of all goodness, teach us to quench our thirst, to feed ourselves on your Word, for it is truth.

CONTEMPLATIO

In this world, troubled by so much violence, only the treasures of love in the risen Christ can reach the toughest of hearts. In this world where, thanks to technology, everything moves at high speed, talking about God’s love is quite complicated. We can, however, manage it with God’s help. O Lord, my portion! I promise to obey your laws (Ps 119.57). Lord, teach me your way. Lead me in the path of righteousness.

Félix Anani Adouayom et Andrée Markoux

JESUS FEEDS THE CROWDS

Matthew 14.13-21

¹³ When Jesus heard the news about John, he left there in a boat and went to a lonely place by himself. The people heard about it, so they left their towns and followed him by land. ¹⁴ Jesus got out of the boat, and when he saw the large crowd, his heart was filled with pity for them, and he healed those who were ill.

¹⁵ That evening his disciples came to him and said, "It is already very late, and this is a lonely place. Send the people away and let them go to the villages to buy food for themselves."

¹⁶ "They don't have to leave," answered Jesus. "You yourselves give them something to eat!"

¹⁷ "All we have here are five loaves and two fish," they replied.

¹⁸ "Then bring them here to me," Jesus said. ¹⁹ He ordered the people to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, and gave thanks to God. He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰ Everyone ate and had enough. Then the disciples took up twelve baskets full of what was left over. ²¹ The number of men who ate was about 5,000, not counting the women and children.

Other Readings: Isaiah 55.1-3; Psalm 145.8-9, 15-18; Romans 8.35, 37-39

LECTIO

In chapter 11 we learned that Herod had imprisoned John the Baptist because he had rebuked the king for having taken his brother's wife. Now this faithful witness pays for the truth with his life since he had the courage to denounce the king's conduct. His death is the subject of amusement and even celebration at the royal court; it is the terrible price paid for pleasure enjoyed by the rich (Ja 5:5-6). Herod's distress was only momentary and false; verse 5 shows that for a long time he had been cherishing the secret desire to see John die. Hatred of the truth and of those who announce it are one and the same (Ga 4.16). To the human eye, John's fate is tragic and horrible; in God's eyes it is the victorious finish to "John's mission" (Acts 13.25).

The passage clearly shows that Jesus did not let the news of his precursor's death go unnoticed. It seems that in his sadness he wants to be alone (verse 13). Is this not a foreshadowing of his own rejection and death? In any event, the crowds surround him and his heart of compassion goes out to them. For them he performs a great miracle: the first multiplication of bread. What does this miracle mean? Jesus himself, in John's

Gospel (6.26-27), sets up a parallel between food for the body, food that spoils, and that which the Son of Man gives which remains for eternal life. His teaching and his word are ideal food for those who take them as the foundation for life.

MEDITATIO

- Why does Jesus withdraw from the crowds? Why do they follow him? What does he want to teach to his disciples through this miracle? Today, how do we find nourishment in Jesus and in his Word? He gives food to his enemies who are plotting his death. Can we do that?

ORATIO

Lord, give us strength to love and provide for the needs of those who persecute us. Together, let us work to improve the lives of those who suffer. Let us be proactive, not waiting for the needy to fall on their knees at our feet before we feed them or before giving them any other help needed to survive.

CONTEMPLATIO

Psalm 145 celebrates God's care toward all his creatures. Verses 15 and 16 clearly declare that God gives them food at the right time. In this way, our God is neither selfish nor cheap. He is generous.

Who, then can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble, or hardship, or persecution, or hunger, or poverty, or danger, or death? (Rm 8.35-39).

Félix Anani Adouayom et Andrée Markoux

PETER WALKS ON WATER

Matthew 14.22-33

²² Then Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people away. ²³ After sending the people away, he went up a hill by himself to pray. When evening came, Jesus was there alone; ²⁴ and by this time the boat was far out in the lake, tossed about by the waves, because the wind was blowing against it.

²⁵ Between three and six o'clock in the morning Jesus came to the disciples, walking on the water. ²⁶ When they saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. "It's a ghost!" they said, and screamed with fear.

²⁷ Jesus spoke to them at once. "Courage!" he said. "It is I. Don't be afraid!"

²⁸ Then Peter spoke up. "Lord, if it is really you, order me to come out on the water to you."

²⁹ "Come!" answered Jesus. So Peter got out of the boat and started walking on the water to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind, he was afraid and started to sink down in the water. "Save me, Lord!" he cried.

³¹ At once Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of him and said, "How little faith you have! Why did you doubt?"

³² They both got into the boat, and the wind died down. ³³ Then the disciples in the boat worshipped Jesus. "Truly you are the Son of God!" they exclaimed.

Other Readings: 1 Kings 19.9, 11-13; Psalm 85.8-13; Romans 9.1-5

LECTIO

This incident of the boat in the midst of the storm is a picture of the place where the Lord's redeemed find themselves right now. While he seems absent in his heaven, praying and interceding for them, believers have to toil across the troubled sea of this world. When the enemy brings opposition, he acts like the wind and waves that render almost useless all the efforts of those who row the boat. But doesn't Jesus come to meet his own? His familiar voice reassures the poor disciples: "Courage! It is I. Don't be afraid!" Faith resting on his word (come!) brings Peter face to face with the one who loves him. Suddenly his faith gives way and he sinks. What happened? Peter took his eyes off his master and focused on the violence of the wind. Then, he cried to the Lord, who immediately came to his rescue. Jesus next heads for Gennesaret where he will perform many miracles.

2 MEDITATIO

- Can you remember the exact moment when you decided to no longer doubt Jesus and to follow him? Did he save you in a danger-filled situation where you actually recognized his saving presence?

3 ORATIO

Focus your gaze on Jesus. Sing to him: "Yes the Lord is good, indeed the Lord is good. He has done great things for us."

4 CONTEMPLATIO

Read 1 Kings 19.4-13 as you end your meditation.

"Answer me when I pray, O God, my defender! When I was in trouble, you helped me. Be kind to me now and hear my prayer" (Ps 4.1). Jesus gave a beautiful illustration of this Psalm to Peter. He made what was written real. You too, cry out to God and he will answer you at once in words and deeds. But if God's answer seems long in coming, ask yourself about your personal relationship with him.

Félix Anani Adouayom et Andrée Markoux

JESUS ANSWERS THE PLEA OF A STRANGER

Matthew 15.21-28

²¹ Jesus left that place and went off to the territory near the cities of Tyre and Sidon.
²² A Canaanite woman who lived in that region came to him. "Son of David!" she cried out. "Have mercy on me, sir! My daughter has a demon and is in a terrible condition."
²³ But Jesus did not say a word to her. His disciples came to him and begged him, "Send her away! She is following us and making all this noise!"
²⁴ Then Jesus replied, "I have been sent only to the lost sheep of the people of Israel."
²⁵ At this the woman came and fell at his feet. "Help me, sir!" she said.
²⁶ Jesus answered, "It isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."
²⁷ "That's true, sir," she answered, "but even the dogs eat the leftovers that fall from their masters' table."
²⁸ So Jesus answered her, "You are a woman of great faith! What you want will be done for you." And at that very moment her daughter was healed.

Other readings : Isaiah 56.1-6; Psalm 67.1-2, 4-5, 7; Romans 11.13-15, 29-32

LECTIO

Jesus heads for the region of Tyre and Sidon. These pagan cities, he had said, were less guilty than those of Galilee where he had performed most of his miracles (Mt 11.21-22). Yet they had no part in the blessings of the "Son of David" (verse 22); they were strangers to the covenants of the promise (Eph 2.12). This was our case as well, let's not forget, we Gentiles. The Lord, speaking in a way uncommon for him, begins by emphasizing this fact to the poor Canaanite woman who comes begging for her daughter's healing. Although this woman is aware of her total unworthiness, she has determination and faith in Jesus. When we take our place before God as a child, grace can shine in all its splendour. In fact, if mankind had the least right or merit on their side, it would no longer be grace but something owing to them (Rom 4.4). To take the best measure of this grace and its greatness toward us, let us continually bring to mind our doubts, our lack of faith, our inability to have full faith. Here, this woman, an outcast, argues with full trust and Jesus sees that: "You are a woman of great faith! What you want will be done for you." Jesus thus agrees that this is a matter of faith not only for the lost sheep of Israel but also for foreigners. And what causes him to act is the compassion in his heart for these crowds (verse 32; 14.14).

MEDITATIO

- There is a very important word in the *lectio*. It is the word *foreigner*. What does it mean to you? How do you perceive and understand it? What conditions of life does a foreigner have? Does our God engage in racial segregation? This woman believed some important things about Jesus. What were they?

ORATIO

God, enable me to discover all that we gain through your love. Through your incarnation and your redemption, I am no longer a foreigner in your house. Help me to remember and properly appreciate the privilege of being your child, of calling you "Father."

CONTEMPLATIO

Isaiah 56.3-7: "A foreigner who has joined the Lord's people should not say, 'The Lord will not let me worship with his people.' A man who has been castrated should never think that he can never be part of God's people. The Lord says to such a man, 'If you honor me by observing the Sabbath and if you do what pleases me and faithfully keep my covenant, then your name will be remembered in my Temple and among my people longer than if you had sons and daughters. You will never be forgotten.' And the Lord says to those foreigners who become part of his people, who love him and serve him, who observe the Sabbath and faithfully keep his covenant: 'I will bring you to Zion, my sacred hill, give you joy in my house of prayer, and accept the sacrifices you offer on my altar. My Temple will be called a house of prayer for the people of all nations.'" We all have our place in God's house with no distinction whatsoever.

Félix Anani Adouayom et Andrée Markoux

I WILL GIVE YOU THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Matthew 16.13-20

¹³ Jesus went to the territory near the town of Caesarea Philippi, where he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴ "Some say John the Baptist," they answered. "Others say Elijah, while others say Jeremiah or some other prophet."

¹⁵ "What about you?" he asked them. "Who do you say I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ "Good for you, Simon son of John!" answered Jesus. "For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven."

¹⁸ And so I tell you, Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven; what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven."

²⁰ Then Jesus ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Other Readings: Isaiah 22.19-23; Psalm 138.1-3, 6, 8; Romans 11.33-36

LECTIO

The question the Lord asks his disciples teaches us that opinions about him are split, and it is so still today. But you, reader, can you say who Jesus is and what he represents for you? The Father reveals to Simon what he gloriously confesses: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." This is the unshakeable foundation on which the Lord will build his Church, in which every believer, like Simon, will become a living stone. How could the forces of evil prevail against what belongs to Christ and what he himself builds? And the Lord will honour his disciple with a special mission: by preaching the Good News, he will open the gates of the Kingdom to Jews and Gentiles alike (Acts 2.36; 10.43).

Jesus' question: "What about you? Who do you say I am?" calls the disciples to make a personal decision.

2 MEDITATIO

- Who is Jesus? Who is he to you? Have you confessed Jesus as your personal Saviour and Lord? What do you feel when people speak to you about the sufferings and death of Jesus? Are you prepared to follow Jesus whatever the cost, however high the price to be paid? What is the key that will give you access to the Kingdom of God? What do you need to do to have it?

3 ORATIO

Peter did his part by confessing Jesus. You too do your part. In complete humility tell Jesus who he is to you. It is through a deep spiritual work and serious soul searching that we come to true and sincere confession.

4 CONTEMPLATIO

At every step, in every act, Jesus confirms the Scriptures. He told Peter he would give him the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. Isaiah 22.19-23 specifies that promise in these words: "The Lord will remove you from office and bring you down from your high position." The Lord said to Shebna, "When that happens, I will send for my servant Eliakim son of Hilkiah. I will put your official robe and belt on him and give him all the authority you have had. He will be like a father to the people of Jerusalem and Judah. I will give him complete authority under the king, the descendant of David. He will have the keys of office; what he opens, no one will shut, and what he shuts, no one will open. I will fasten him firmly in place like a peg, and he will be a source of honor to his whole family."

The key plays several roles in your life here and hereafter. It is your job to receive it and know how to use it for the good of the entire human family.

Félix Anani Adouayom et Andrée Markoux

DISCIPLES MUST CARRY THEIR CROSS AND FOLLOW JESUS

Matthew 16.21-27

²¹ From that time on Jesus began to say plainly to his disciples, "I must go to Jerusalem and suffer much from the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. I will be put to death, but three days later I will be raised to life."

²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "God forbid it, Lord!" he said. "That must never happen to you!"

²³ Jesus turned around and said to Peter, "Get away from me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my way, because these thoughts of yours don't come from God, but from human nature."

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget self, carry his cross, and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save his own life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ Will people gain anything if they win the whole world but lose their life? Of course not! There is nothing they can give to regain their life. ²⁷ For the Son of Man is about to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will reward each one according to his deeds.

Other Readings: Jeremiah 20.7-9; Psalm 63.1-5, 7-8; Romans 12.1-2

LECTIO

Jesus began by spelling out to his disciples his intentions and the deep meaning of his mission. In answer to one question from Jesus, Peter answered, as we saw before, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Did he really understand the implications of his answer? Jesus announces his coming death to his friends. What a contrast! A friend, who says that he loves us and will protect us, declares he is going to die. Absurd, isn't it! What is interesting is that he doesn't stop there. He announces his resurrection on the third day, telling them in this way that he will not leave them as orphans. At that moment, human blindness kept the disciples from understanding the love being shown to the whole human family in this sacrifice. Instead of accompanying their master in this sacrifice, they start to doubt. Peter who had just recognized him as the Christ, the living Son of God, becomes a tool of Satan. He tries to turn Christ away from his path of obedience. But he is seen for who he is and rebuked. Jesus is moving ahead, the leader in total self-denial, and he doesn't try to hide what it means to follow in his footsteps (ch.10 v. 37-40). Are we ready to follow him no matter the cost (Phil 3.8)?

MEDITATIO

- Was Peter right in saying that such a thing must never happen to Jesus? What do you feel when you see the sufferings and death of Jesus? Are you prepared to follow Jesus no matter the cost? Consider the importance Jesus places on his death and the benefits it will confer on humanity.

ORATIO

Let us allow the prophecies to be accomplished. Our selfishness and personal interests should not overshadow the interests of all. Jesus, if my behaviour proves to be a stumbling stone for the growth of your Kingdom, make me aware of it. I commit myself to being available, to being a simple conduit for your message of salvation. The phrase "no matter the cost" underlines the commitment of the disciple at his Lord's side.

CONTEMPLATIO

We can never stifle the Word of God. If we try, it will become ever more present and undeniable. Jeremiah can help us with this. Read Jeremiah 20.7-9. Christians must take a stand, always and everywhere, to defend the sacrifice of Jesus for humanity. Romans 12.1-2 further clarifies the commitment of the Christian: "So then, my friends, because of God's great mercy to us I appeal to you: Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer. Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God—what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect."

Félix Anani Adouayom et Andrée Markoux

BROTHERLY ADVICE

Matthew 18.15-20

¹⁵ If your brother sins against you, go to him and show him his fault. But do it privately, just between yourselves. If he listens to you, you have won your brother back. ¹⁶ But if he will not listen to you, take one or two other persons with you, so that 'every accusation may be upheld by the testimony of two or more witnesses,' as the scripture says. ¹⁷ And if he will not listen to them, then tell the whole thing to the church. Finally, if he will not listen to the church, treat him as though he were a pagan or a tax collector.

¹⁸ "And so I tell all of you: what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.

¹⁹ "And I tell you more: whenever two of you on earth agree about anything you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them."

Other Readings: Ezekiel 33.7-9; Psalm 95.1-2, 6-9; Romans 13.8-10

LECTIO

The Lord offers principles for settling disputes between brothers (verses 15-17). To that we can add his teaching on forgiveness (verse 22; Eph 4.32 and Col 3.13). It is for him, however, also an opportunity to once again mention the theme of community by giving us an all-important verse, or rather, a promise: "Where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them." (verse 20). His presence will be even in the weakest gathering of believers who are assembled in Jesus' name. Can there be no blessing when he who is its source is there in the midst of those who believe in him? The promise here is particularly connected to the authority vested in the community (binding and loosing) and to the prayer of two or three. Unfortunately, some Christians seem to have forgotten the importance of prayer meetings. The parable of the servant with the ten thousand talents (a remarkable sum) reminds us of the enormous debt which God has forgiven us in Christ (Ezra 9.6). What are the small injustices we may have to suffer compared to that? Divine forgiveness makes us responsible, in turn, to forgive and show mercy.

2 MEDITATIO

- Do you owe a debt to someone, or maybe to a bank? How do you feel about that? Is your conscience clear? Have you ever asked anyone for help? Have you ever looked the other way when someone needed help from you? Have you refused someone's attempt to make peace with you? What will you do now?

3 ORATIO

My God, help me always to forgive others as you have forgiven me. I will never tire of forgiving and will not set a maximum number of times for forgiving, because your love is so high no one can ever reach its summit; it is so wide no one can hold it; and so deep no one can see its end. Oh, what love! In Psalm 103, the psalmist is thankful for the happiness he has found in God's forgiveness.

4 CONTEMPLATIO

Read. No comment.

Romans 13.8-10: "Be under obligation to no one—the only obligation you have is to love one another. Whoever does this has obeyed the Law. The commandments 'Do not commit adultery; do not commit murder; do not steal; do not desire what belongs to someone else'—all these, and any others besides, are summed up in the one command, 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' If you love others, you will never do them wrong; to love, then, is to obey the whole Law."

Félix Anani Adouayom et Andrée Markoux

FORGIVE WITHOUT MEASURE

Matthew 18.21-35

²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, if my brother keeps on sinning against me, how many times do I have to forgive him? Seven times?”

²² “No, not seven times,” answered Jesus, “but seventy times seven, ²³ because the Kingdom of heaven is like this. Once there was a king who decided to check on his servants’ accounts. ²⁴ He had just begun to do so when one of them was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. ²⁵ The servant did not have enough to pay his debt, so the king ordered him to be sold as a slave, with his wife and his children and all that he had, in order to pay the debt. ²⁶ The servant fell on his knees before the king. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay you everything!’ ²⁷ The king felt sorry for him, so he forgave him the debt and let him go.

²⁸ “Then the man went out and met one of his fellow-servants who owed him a few dollars. He grabbed him and started choking him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he said. ²⁹ His fellow-servant fell down and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back!’ ³⁰ But he refused; instead, he had him thrown into jail until he should pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were very upset and went to the king and told him everything. ³² So he called the servant in. ‘You worthless slave!’ he said. ‘I forgave you the whole amount you owed me, just because you asked me to. ³³ You should have had mercy on your fellow-servant, just as I had mercy on you.’ ³⁴ The king was very angry, and he sent the servant to jail to be punished until he should pay back the whole amount.”

³⁵ And Jesus concluded, “That is how my Father in heaven will treat every one of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

Other Readings: Ecclesiasticus 27.30–28.7; Psalm 103.1-4, 9-12; Romans 14.7-9

LECTIO

“If your brother sins...” This sad reality is describing the life of the Church in a world of repeated scandals. The Church is, of course, not a gathering of angels but of sinners. Whoever in the Church suffers because of the sin of his brother is himself or herself in danger of spiritual death. “Watch out!” or in other words, “Watch out for each other.” The danger consists of not recognizing the guilt of a fellow sinner as a distressing situation where two things are needed: admonition and forgiveness. Obviously this is no longer in our own power but conduct belonging to the new life. With this attitude, people can remain faithful to their brother, always ready to hope for him and to come to his assistance, always ready and happy to welcome him back

when he asks for forgiveness. The Church is allowed no other attitude but God’s in extending pardon well beyond those seven times per day (Eph 4.32). The very existence of the Church or of a healthy and peaceful community rests in forgiveness accepted and extended.

2 MEDITATIO

- By examining your conscience, compare what others have done to you, those wrongs that perhaps, have brought you to break off relationships, and all those wrongs you have done and continue to do... to others. What does this parable teach you? Make a wise decision right now to forgive, before it is too late.

3 ORATIO

Learn to do to others the good you want done to you. Pray for the welfare of others. Learn to share instead of keeping everything for yourself.

4 CONTEMPLATIO

By seeking to attack our brothers or sisters, we attack Jesus himself, the author of their life. And when we do good to them, Jesus applauds us and places us at his right hand. Whatever we do, good or bad, we do it to ourselves.

Mt 25.40-41: “To the people on his right, the King will reply, ‘I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these followers of mine, you did it for me!’ Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Away from me, you that are under God’s curse! Away to the eternal fire which has been prepared for the Devil and his angels!’”

Félix Anani Adouayom et Andrée Markoux

GOD'S GENEROSITY IS BEYOND UNDERSTANDING

Matthew 20.1-16

¹ The Kingdom of heaven is like this. Once there was a man who went out early in the morning to hire some men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them the regular wage, a silver coin a day, and sent them to work in his vineyard. ³ He went out again to the market place at nine o'clock and saw some men standing there doing nothing, ⁴ so he told them, 'You also go and work in the vineyard, and I will pay you a fair wage.' ⁵ So they went. Then at twelve o'clock and again at three o'clock he did the same thing. ⁶ It was nearly five o'clock when he went to the market place and saw some other men still standing there. 'Why are you wasting the whole day here doing nothing?' he asked them. ⁷ 'No one hired us,' they answered. 'Well, then, you also go and work in the vineyard,' he told them.

⁸ "When evening came, the owner told his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with those who were hired last and ending with those who were hired first.' ⁹ The men who had begun to work at five o'clock were paid a silver coin each. ¹⁰ So when the men who were the first to be hired came to be paid, they thought they would get more; but they too were given a silver coin each. ¹¹ They took their money and started grumbling against the employer. ¹² 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'while we put up with a whole day's work in the hot sun – yet you paid them the same as you paid us!'

¹³ " 'Listen, friend,' the owner answered one of them, 'I have not cheated you. After all, you agreed to do a day's work for one silver coin. ¹⁴ Now take your pay and go home. I want to give this man who was hired last as much as I have given you. ¹⁵ Don't I have the right to do as I wish with my own money? Or are you jealous because I am generous?' "

¹⁶ And Jesus concluded, "So those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last."

Other Readings: Isaiah 55.6-9; Psalm 145.2-3, 8-9, 17-18; Philippians 1.20-24, 27

their work was worth. Those who came next, however, trusted the master to set "a fair wage" (v, 4, 7). They did not regret this decision. In the Kingdom of heaven, rewards are never a right. As Luke says, we are all undeserving and unprofitable servants. By the sovereign grace of God we will each receive what we need to live, entirely apart from our works. On the other hand, are not the workers who arrive at the eleventh hour the least favoured of all? Most of the day they have missed the chance and the joy of service for this good master. "Jesus is the good master" – so goes a song – let us serve him from our early years; with him we are never "too soon or too late."

In God's economy, the first workers who came to an agreement with the master represent Israel under the Old Testament; those who arrive at the eleventh hour are the 'Gentiles,' the objects of God's grace.



MEDITATIO

- Humanly speaking, how do you judge the decision made by the vineyard owner?
- Now, as a Christian, how do you understand his decision?
- Do you intend, in light of this decision, to take a step backwards in your faith? Don't forget that Jesus is supreme Lord and it is he who pronounces the true judgment on the last day. God loves us all the same.



ORATIO

Mediate on God's grace for mankind. He accepts us as we are. He alone is Lord of time and space.



CONTEMPLATIO

In light of the other texts, consider the magnificence of God and his righteousness which goes beyond all human righteousness.

Félix Anani Adouayom et Andrée Markoux



LECTIO

The preoccupation of the disciples with being first or last in the Kingdom of heaven, is explained by a new parable. We might be tempted to take the side of the discontented workers and find the master's actions unjust. But let's look at the story more carefully. The morning workers agreed to a certain wage (v. 2, 13) because they knew how much

CONVERSION NOT IN WORDS ALONE BUT IN ACTION

Matthew 21.28-32

²⁸ “Now, what do you think? There was once a man who had two sons. He went to the elder one and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ ²⁹ ‘I don’t want to,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰ Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. ‘Yes, sir,’ he answered, but he did not go. ³¹ Which one of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The elder one,” they answered.

So Jesus said to them, “I tell you: the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the Kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John the Baptist came to you showing you the right path to take, and you would not believe him; but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. Even when you saw this, you did not later change your minds and believe him.

Other Readings: Ezekiel 18.25-28; Psalm 25.4-9; Philippians 2.1-11

LECTIO

Again Jesus goes into the Temple where the Jewish leaders come to challenge his authority. The Lord, by asking a question, brings them to understand that, if they did not first recognize the authority of John the Baptist, they could not recognize his. Like the second son in the other parable (Luke 15.29), the leaders claimed to be doing the will of God but their actions denied it (Titus 1.16). Others, on the contrary, who had previously rebelled, infamous sinners, repented at the behest of John the Baptist and did God’s will. We risk, as children of Christian parents, to be preceded into heaven by people we perhaps now condemn or look down on (20.16). We have a responsibility!

MEDITATIO

- Is there a difference between saying and doing? Give an example from this passage.
- How would you describe each of the children in the passage?
- What is honesty to you? Where can it lead us?

ORATIO

Father, I do not want to be a person who only listens to your Word. I want especially to put it into practice so that it will reflect my entire life.

CONTEMPLATIO

God has shown the way. Meditate on this way by reading the following passage.

Ez 18.24-32: “But if a righteous person stops doing good and starts doing all the evil, disgusting things that evil people do, will he go on living? No! None of the good he did will be remembered. He will die because of his unfaithfulness and his sins. But you say, ‘What the Lord does isn’t right.’ Listen to me, you Israelites. Do you think my way of doing things isn’t right? It is your way that isn’t right. When a righteous person stops doing good and starts doing evil and then dies, he dies because of the evil he has done. When someone evil stops sinning and does what is right and good, he saves his life. He realizes what he is doing and stops sinning, so he will certainly not die, but go on living. And you Israelites say, ‘What the Lord does isn’t right.’ You think my way isn’t right, do you? It is your way that isn’t right. Now I, the Sovereign Lord, am telling you Israelites that I will judge each of you by what you have done. Turn away from all the evil you are doing, and don’t let your sin destroy you. Give up all the evil you have been doing, and get yourselves new minds and hearts. Why do you Israelites want to die? I do not want anyone to die,” says the Sovereign Lord. “Turn away from your sins and live.”

This passage says it all!

Félix Anani Adouayom et Andrée Markoux

GOD'S VINEYARD

Matthew 21.33-43

³³ "Listen to another parable," Jesus said. "There was once a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a hole for the winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he let out the vineyard to tenants and went on a journey. ³⁴ When the time came to gather the grapes, he sent his slaves to the tenants to receive his share of the harvest. ³⁵ The tenants seized his slaves, beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again the man sent other slaves, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷ Last of all he sent his son to them. 'Surely they will respect my son,' he said. ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the owner's son. Come on, let's kill him, and we will get his property!' ³⁹ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

⁴⁰ "Now, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" Jesus asked.

⁴¹ "He will certainly kill those evil men," they answered, "and let the vineyard out to other tenants, who will give him his share of the harvest at the right time."

⁴² Jesus said to them, "Haven't you ever read what the Scriptures say?"

"The stone which the builders rejected as worthless turned out to be the most important of all. This was done by the Lord; what a wonderful sight it is!"

⁴³ "And so I tell you," added Jesus, "the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce the proper fruits."

Other Readings: Isaiah 5.1-7; Psalm 80.8, 11-15, 18-19; Philippians 4.6-9



LECTIO

Jesus tells the priests and Pharisees a parable that is both anti-establishment and abrasive. The Pharisees were non-clerical Jews who wanted to practice their faith in a concrete way in their daily life. Jesus shows them a shocking reality: recipients of God's goodness can turn against the hand that feeds and blesses them. The vineyard owner's son is thrown out as though the owner was dead and had no say in the matter. This rejection was an insult to the honour of the owner and, according to customs of the time, called for retribution.

It wasn't Jesus who gave this terrible verdict, but his listeners themselves. Jesus responds with another verdict, a positive one. The sad fate of the rejected messenger will, by God's grace, turn into affirmation and inclusion. He will be the cornerstone of a grand building. The consequences of rejecting him will be serious indeed for Jesus' listeners. Access to the Kingdom of God will be given to people who will be much more productive.



MEDITATIO

- The song of the beloved to his vineyard (reading from Isaiah) contains emotion-filled poetry. He recounts the initiative and the disappointment of an eager farmer who is cruelly deceived. As such, we see a facet of God we might not expect: a lover appalled by failure in his attempts, however flawless. God does not hover above our lives with divine indifference. On the contrary, he gets passionate about the response of people to his offer of salvation. When that response is negative, there is tragedy in the air.
- The paradox of evil in the face of good is unacceptable, even to God. The gardener in the first reading expected good fruit but all he harvested was sour grapes. The Lord of the universe expected righteousness and justice from Israel, his vineyard, but there was only injustice. As for the investor in the Gospel, he was cheated by his employees. These scoundrels took themselves for someone they were not. They shed the blood of the rightful heir. God cannot stand by and do nothing. However, he depends on us to make clear his response to a world poisoned by evil.



ORATIO

I am thankful to God, because he chose us as allies, us, his beloved people. He wants us to be good vines. I know from experience that he is often disappointed by my weak response and my poor performance. I ask forgiveness, for God has planted us in soil which is not all that rocky but we still produce sour, bitter or worm-eaten fruit. I know from experience that God's response to my snubs is not destructive but constructive. He patiently waits for me to return and submit to him.

I pray for the future, both near and far, for our love relationship with God is not supposed to be lukewarm. I pray that God give me grace to honour his true messenger. I want to invest my faith legacy in promising enterprises that are in keeping with the message of Jesus and his resurrection.



CONTEMPLATIO

It doesn't give God pleasure to see what we have left undone. He often gets a busy signal when trying to access our hearts. Our poor Father! He has to deal with friends who are often distracted, burdened to the point of having no time to thank the source of their prosperity. When things are going well, we think it to be only the result of our talents and hard work. Yet, as soon as we find ourselves going through turbulence, we feel that life, good fortune and well-being are realities being given to us more generously than our basic needs! The time has come to recognize the role of the Son of God, the Father's messenger so that we can live and honour the one who sent his best messenger, Jesus.

Alain Faucher

TAKING GOD SERIOUSLY

Matthew 22.1-14

¹ Jesus again used parables in talking to the people. ² “The Kingdom of heaven is like this. Once there was a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son. ³ He sent his servants to tell the invited guests to come to the feast, but they did not want to come. ⁴ So he sent other servants with this message for the guests: ‘My feast is ready now; my bullocks and prize calves have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast!’ ⁵ But the invited guests paid no attention and went about their business: one went to his farm, another to his shop, ⁶ while others grabbed the servants, beat them, and killed them. ⁷ The king was very angry; so he sent his soldiers, who killed those murderers and burnt down their city. ⁸ Then he called his servants and said to them, ‘My wedding feast is ready, but the people I invited did not deserve it. ⁹ Now go to the main streets and invite to the feast as many people as you find.’ ¹⁰ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, good and bad alike; and the wedding hall was filled with people.

¹¹ “The king went in to look at the guests and saw a man who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹² ‘Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ the king asked him. But the man said nothing. ¹³ Then the king told the servants, ‘Tie him up hand and foot, and throw him outside in the dark. There he will cry and grind his teeth.’”

¹⁴ And Jesus concluded, “Many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Other Readings: Isaiah 25.6-10; Psalm 23; Philippians 4.12-14, 19-20

LECTIO

Jesus does not mince his words. He tells a harsh parable dealing with politics. He sets the scene with the wedding of a king's son, high society. We must take time to assess the issues. In fact, in Jesus' story, we find even dead people! Jesus brings intensity to the events to communicate very important details for the benefit of his listeners.

For us, a wedding invitation is something important. However, we have little idea of the power struggles that were in play in Jesus' day. When a person of rank gave an invitation to such an event, everyone took note of everyone else. If the most important guests said yes to the invitation, all the others felt obligated to do the same. Actually, they would gladly go, for the attendance of noteworthy people showed how important the event was. On the other hand, if the most reputable people declined the invitation, the empty hall dealt a serious blow to the honour of the host. Such is the case in the parable. According to the customs of the time, the king shuns the contemptuous guests and, to save face, fills the reception hall with strangers.

Given their anonymity and the fact that they were common people, these guests arrive in all manner of dress. Be careful here! The king's honour is at stake even if he has to provide proper clothing for the last-minute guests!

The king's shock is all the more understandable because he sees a guest who has refused the outfit provided for him by the palace staff. Such behaviour automatically excludes this guest as unworthy to enjoy the wedding banquet. He brings this upon himself through his disregard or his disdain for the king who had offered him a great opportunity. Hence Jesus' conclusion: many are invited, few are those who live up to the magnitude of the situation.

MEDITATIO

- Through this tale of feasts and fire and blood, Jesus describes the risk taken by God. Many people vehemently refuse to be part of his celebration. Others come without fully considering the consequences. Fortunately, God is much more patient than the king in the parable!
- God is affected by both enthusiastic response or contemptuous silence. What has God offered me? What does he offer me today? Am I receptive or do I neglect his goodness? What changes must I make in my life to accommodate his divine offer?

ORATIO

I ask for grace to hear God's call, despite the many other inviting voices and the confusions of today.

I pray for those who accept God's invitation and embark on a life's journey that pays heed to the Spirit.

I ask to find the right words to explain my decision to accept God's invitation.

I rejoice in acts of discernment which help me wear the wedding garment, each time I behave the way a follower of Christ is supposed to behave.

CONTEMPLATIO

I check that my daily choices are in keeping with my basic choice of life. Has God really a place in my decisions in the face of all the choices every day offers?

I give thanks with all my heart. I review the first reading for today.

Alain Faucher

JUSTICE AND FAIRNESS

Matthew 22.15-21

¹⁵ The Pharisees went off and made a plan to trap Jesus with questions. ¹⁶ Then they sent to him some of their disciples and some members of Herod's party. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you tell the truth. You teach the truth about God's will for people, without worrying about what others think, because you pay no attention to anyone's status. ¹⁷ Tell us, then, what do you think? Is it against our Law to pay taxes to the Roman Emperor, or not?"

¹⁸ Jesus, however, was aware of their evil plan, and so he said, "You hypocrites! Why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin for paying the tax!"

They brought him the coin, ²⁰ and he asked them, "Whose face and name are these?"

²¹ "The Emperor's," they answered.

So Jesus said to them, "Well, then, pay the Emperor what belongs to the Emperor, and pay God what belongs to God."

Other Readings: Isaiah 45.1, 4-6; Psalm 96.1, 3-5, 7-10; 1 Thessalonians 1.1-5

LECTIO

In this passage, people are trying to trap Jesus (Mt 22.15). Readers should be aware of this strategy which is used to challenge Jesus. It's important as well to take time to explain Jesus' response. Can he maintain his honour?

The group attacking the honour of Jesus is a curious mix of Pharisees – who believe in living out the Torah in their daily life – and those who sympathize with the pseudo-king who is a puppet of Rome. They try to corner Jesus between two extremes. He will get into trouble whichever side he takes!

To conceal the trap, they address Jesus with flowery words of praise, telling him that he is a teacher of the truth, and that he does not let himself be swayed by the opinion of others. In short, they address him as if his justice and fairness is worthy of God. Many biblical texts echo this aspect of God's character: Deuteronomy 1.17; Acts 10.34; Romans 2.11; Galatians 2.6; Ephesians 6.9; 1 Peter 1.17.

Having begun thus, the delegation asks Jesus to choose a position: is it permitted to pay taxes to the emperor? Jesus has already smelled a rat in their comedic language. He pretends to be playing into their hands, asking to see a coin, a currency of Rome, which bears a carving of Caesar. Jesus' answer, based on the image on the coin, prompts us to give to Caesar his due and to God his. In other words, there is no choice to make.

Saint Paul makes clear the importance of this decision in Romans 13.7: "Pay all that you owe, whether it is taxes and fees or respect and honor." (CEV) In other words, this discussion is not only a question of finances, but also one of respect and honour. In those days, there was no joking around these subjects!



MEDITATIO

- Jesus did not dodge the issue of what was due to a head of state. He did not give his personal opinion on the political system of the period, and recognizes its legitimate aspects; he mentions Caesar's rights as well as God's rights. Do I judge the current political systems with the same kind of approach, or at least with the same respect? Have I a clear idea of the rights of the religious based on the founding documents of my society? There are many subjects to meditate upon. From the early days of Church life, the Christian community has been able to recognize the necessary role entrusted to political authorities (1 Peter 2.14).



ORATIO

The Gospel for this Sunday opens several avenues for both individual and collective prayer.

Let us pray for those in power, so that they may understand the rightful limits of their authority.

Let us pray for administrators to whom the goods of the community have been entrusted.

Let us pray for judges who must be impartial and strict.

Let us pray for thinkers who imagine that God has nothing to contribute to society today.



CONTEMPLATIO

I pay attention to the debates about the secular nature of the State. I recall the position of Jesus: Caesar and God are both to be given their due honour. I understand that this is only possible if the spheres of influence of each are marked out clearly and with mutual respect.

I remember this characteristic of God: in fairness, he makes no distinction among persons. He judges all according to their merits. I am inspired to care and be fair in my relationships with others.

Alain Faucher

REAL PRIORITIES

Matthew 22.34-40

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they came together, ³⁵ and one of them, a teacher of the Law, tried to trap him with a question. ³⁶ "Teacher," he asked, "which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

³⁷ Jesus answered, " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the greatest and the most important commandment. ³⁹ The second most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.' ⁴⁰ The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments."

Other Readings: Exodus 22.20-26; Psalm 18.1-3, 46, 50; 1 Thessalonians 1.5-10

LECTIO

Jesus' answer to the Pharisee scholar likely caused a lot of uproar. In fact, the Pharisees, these Jews thoroughly involved in God's covenant with Israel, found great satisfaction in a word-for-word practice of all the tenets of the Torah, the Law. According to them, the world balanced on three things: First was the Torah, in other words, the divine teaching in the first books of the Bible. Next came respect for the feasts. Finally came reciprocal actions inspired by love¹. Asking Jesus which commandment takes precedence had a touch of sarcasm. Every one of the commandments was, for these good practitioners, an opportunity to show their love for the God of the Covenant.

Jesus sets a priority in the lengthy list of things to do. By quoting Deuteronomy and Leviticus, Jesus changes the equation. He sums things up in one single command, which re-establishes the balance of the world. Investing fully in loving God and at the same time investing fully in loving one's neighbour as one loves oneself, this summarizes the entire Law. Jesus doesn't simply set a course for heaven, fleeing the horizon of humanity. Nor does he press us into serving humankind, thus cutting us off from God. The two commands are so closely linked by Jesus that he sets up a new balance between our preoccupations here below and our desire to be with God. Scholars in the science of religion would say: the vertical and horizontal are in balance.

When Jesus speaks of *loving*, he speaks of a very demanding relationship. In fact, the word "love" must be put back into its biblical context. It describes the life of any group that takes the Covenant with God seriously. So love is not just chemistry or romantic adventures; love is a fundamental commitment on the part of believers to the divine offer of a covenant which governs all facets of human existence.

2 MEDITATIO

- Jesus does not cancel any of the commandments that distinguished his people from other nations. He hinges all the Bible's commands on this twofold command to love. And all that Jesus does from then on is based on this moment.
- I reflect on my reactions to the needs expressed by the world and by society. I am certainly aware of the specific needs which require a specific and thoughtful response. Nevertheless, do I retain in my field of vision, the point where all the commandments come together: love for God and love for others?

3 ORATIO

I think of the people I know who are capable of loving God and their neighbour. I ask in my prayer the grace to be like them.

When the commandment to love seems too heavy for me, I recall the desire of Jesus who wanted to concentrate his people's energies on what was really important. I rejoice in this lighter burden, this easy yoke.

In the second reading, Paul invites believers to live what they believe. I am thankful for people around me who offer me what is lacking in today's individualistic society: role models worthy of imitation.

4 CONTEMPLATIO

The Gospel establishes a solid link between the 'me who believes' and the 'me who loves.' According to Jesus, you cannot love God other than with everything you are. And others you cannot love less than yourself. In all probability, you do not go only halfway in loving yourself. So then, do the same for God and for those whom you meet. Logical, isn't it?

To make things even more concrete, take time to explore the practical advice and directives in our reading from the Book of Exodus which bring love for God and for others down to earth. Take time to commit to memory one or two directives that inspire you in creative ways.

Alain Faucher

¹ Mishna Abot I, 1-2, quoted in *La Torah orale des Pharisiens*, supplement to Cahier évangile 73, p. 9.

DO AS YOU SAY!

Matthew 23.1-12

¹ Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples. ² “The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees are the authorized interpreters of Moses’ Law. ³ So you must obey and follow everything they tell you to do; do not, however, imitate their actions, because they don’t practise what they preach. ⁴ They tie on to people’s backs loads that are heavy and hard to carry, yet they aren’t willing even to lift a finger to help them carry those loads. ⁵ They do everything so that people will see them. Look at the straps with scripture verses on them which they wear on their foreheads and arms, and notice how large they are! Notice also how long are the tassels on their cloaks! ⁶ They love the best places at feasts and the reserved seats in the synagogues; ⁷ they love to be greeted with respect in the market places and to be called ‘Teacher’. ⁸ You must not be called ‘Teacher’, because you are all members of one family and have only one Teacher. ⁹ And you must not call anyone here on earth ‘Father’, because you have only the one Father in heaven. ¹⁰ Nor should you be called ‘Leader’, because your one and only leader is the Messiah. ¹¹ The greatest one among you must be your servant. ¹² Whoever makes himself great will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be made great.

Other Readings: Malachi 1.14 – 2.2, 8-10; Psalm 131; 1 Thessalonians 2.7-9, 13

LECTIO

It was far from being a mundane façade, a parade outfit. In Mediterranean society, a person’s title was supposed to indicate to the letter his or her role in the group. Being or appearing to be equal to this title required constant effort. The visible role had to reflect who a person really was.

Jesus redirects all the attention of his listeners to his Father in heaven: “You must not call anyone here on earth ‘Father’” (Mt 23.9). Jesus disregards all the intermediaries and invites both the crowd and his disciples never to lose sight of the true source of all blessings.

Two thousand years later, we still find Jesus’ warning relevant. In his day, however, his listeners must have been shocked! For what Jesus is promoting is nothing less than a total social overhaul. One doesn’t suggest such social reorganization lightly in a setting where group survival is constantly threatened by the imperial power of Rome. Jesus, in fact, was killed because of such declarations! We should never forget the outcome of his words even today when we hear them echoed in such a shocking way.

MEDITATIO

- When the members of an association notice that some of their leaders take pleasure in the honours and the public display of their importance, the effect is distressing, especially if the honour of the leaders is a result of the hard work of the ordinary workers! The warnings of Jesus in the Gospel have lost none of their relevance. They, in fact, find their place among the most memorable passages in the Gospel. The picture of heavy burdens inflicted on people without their being offered any help (Mt 23.4) has remained etched in the memories of many as an indictment on the inconsistency between words and actions.
- By turning the words in the first reading (a passage from the prophet Malachi) from negative to positive, a series of appropriate behaviours can be gleaned. Whether one is in a leadership role or a simple worshipper, the words of the First Testament call for meditation in order to adapt our actions to our words. In this way, it is normal to focus on the Lord by placing his name in the forefront. It is also necessary to maintain the affirming and challenging component of the Law in that it teaches the plan of God. And lastly, the same fairness must be extended to all without exception.

ORATIO

The options to enrich our life of prayer are many. They hinge on the centrality of the Father and of Christ in our lives as believers. From the Gospel, we will doubtless recall the words “Don’t call anyone on earth your father. All of you have the same Father in heaven. None of you should be called the leader. The Messiah is your only leader.” (Mt 23.9-10). And in the first reading can be found strong assertions of God our Father’s identity, the only source of our being as a people and of our life (Malachi 2.10).

Once we manage to open our hearts to the centrality of the Father and of the Son, we can then widen the horizons of our prayers to include several situations where words and actions must absolutely go hand-in-hand. For example, our political and religious leaders need such kinds of prayer; the members of our community would certainly find them beneficial; and each of us must ask God for grace to be coherent in words and actions.

CONTEMPLATIO

By giving both Father and Son the place which is their due, I recognize the most powerful leadership that exists. I place myself in the right position for personal growth and the developing of the gift of God which I have received as my own. The Gospel affirms: “The greatest one among you must be your servant” (Mt 23.11). Here again, I can take inspiration from the extent to which Christ went to offer service. I am thus invited to marvel at the greatness which he attributes to my modest commitment in view of the all-encompassing nature of his own.

Alain Faucher

BE PREPARED!

Matthew 25.1-13

¹“At that time the Kingdom of heaven will be like this. Once there were ten young women who took their oil lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and the other five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any extra oil with them, ⁴ while the wise ones took containers full of oil for their lamps. ⁵ The bridegroom was late in coming, so the women began to nod and fall asleep.

⁶“It was already midnight when the cry rang out, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come and meet him!’ ⁷ The ten women woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ Then the foolish ones said to the wise ones, ‘Let us have some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ ‘No, indeed,’ the wise ones answered, ‘there is not enough for you and for us. Go to the shop and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ So the foolish women went off to buy some oil; and while they were gone, the bridegroom arrived. The five who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast, and the door was closed.

¹¹“Later the other women arrived. ‘Sir, sir! Let us in!’ they cried out. ¹² ‘Certainly not! I don’t know you,’ the bridegroom answered.”

¹³ And Jesus concluded, “Be on your guard, then, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Other Readings: Wisdom 6.12-16; Psalm 63.1-7; 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18



LECTIO

Today we need to read between the lines a bit to hear Jesus speaking the language of the heart. Jesus reminds his disciples that he is the beloved one for whose return they had to prepare: “Jesus was speaking to his disciples of his coming..”

In everyday life, grand and marvellous encounters with God are unexpected, for they come as suddenly as the return of Jesus at the end of time. It is possible not to notice that it is God or an angel who is going by. “The Lord just went b... oops! I missed him!” As Yvon Deschamps said: “Happiness: it comes, it goes!”

Let’s not be distracted by certain details in the parable that seem contrary to Christian values of sharing. For example, the five women who refuse to share: their refusal is necessary for the point the story is trying to make.

The delay of the bridegroom is another surprising detail in this noisy wedding scene. Out of politeness, perhaps he should have warned people that he would be late, we may say. But his delay is in keeping with the habits of the Mediterranean men of the time and the random comings and goings at weddings.



MEDITATIO

- The lack of charity we see in the five women in Jesus’ parable raises the question about our own attitude, our own responsibility in living as his companions. If we think carefully, there is no doubt the odd gap in our present commitment to live as alert disciples.
- The strange suggestion to go to the store in the middle of the night makes us think of our temptation to go and buy salvation from the first seller of happiness that comes our way. A refill of wisdom from Jesus is never too much!
- And our first reflex to link the parable’s application to our preparation (or lack thereof) for winter is not out of place. The parable definitely teaches us to be prepared. In northern climes, winter looks a bit like our God: it always arrives a little too soon!



ORATIO

God is like the bridegroom who makes people at his wedding reception wait. Or like happiness that comes and goes. Let’s take advantage of this short meeting time to beseech him to multiply the points of contact we have with him and with the members of our Christian community.

Let us pray for those who carefully rehearse the course of their life in prayer, in spirituality, or in education in their faith.

Let us pray for parishioners who invest in practical sharing with the poorest, the very sick, and the most needy.

Let us be alert enough to welcome the blessings of God’s provision for us so that we will in turn be an example of providence to others.



CONTEMPLATIO

Look around you. Take note of how baptized believers keep their lamp lit to enlighten their daily life. Let us rejoice with them in the presence of the bridegroom, our Lord, our ally.

Around us believers are keeping their lamps well lit. They do not simply give over their life to any popular whim. They take care to know more and more the one they have set as the focal point of their life. Since it is God who comes to meet us, it is just as well to learn in advance how to recognize him. It is just as well to share the experience of those who have met him in everyday life.

Around us believers keep their lamps well lit when they carefully weave the threads of their life so that their actions and love for their Lord are consistent. Waiting for the Lord’s return means believing that our future is, in fact, tied to him. This will impact our decisions today.

Alain Faucher

HOLY BOLDNESS

*Matthew 25.14-19, 24-30**

¹⁴ “At that time the Kingdom of heaven will be like this. Once there was a man who was about to go on a journey; he called his servants and put them in charge of his property. ¹⁵ He gave to each one according to his ability: to one he gave five thousand gold coins, to another he gave two thousand, and to another he gave one thousand. Then he left on his journey. ¹⁶ The servant who had received five thousand coins went at once and invested his money and earned another five thousand. ¹⁷ In the same way the servant who had received two thousand coins earned another two thousand. ¹⁸ But the servant who had received one thousand coins went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them.

²⁴ “Then the servant who had received one thousand coins came in and said, ‘Sir, I know you are a hard man; you reap harvests where you did not sow, and you gather crops where you did not scatter seed. ²⁵ I was afraid, so I went off and hid your money in the ground. Look! Here is what belongs to you.’

²⁶ “ ‘You bad and lazy servant!’ his master said. ‘You knew, did you, that I reap harvests where I did not sow, and gather crops where I did not scatter seed? ²⁷ Well, then, you should have deposited my money in the bank, and I would have received it all back with interest when I returned. ²⁸ Now, take the money away from him and give it to the one who has ten thousand coins. ²⁹ For to every person who has something, even more will be given, and he will have more than enough; but the person who has nothing, even the little that he has will be taken away from him. ³⁰ As for this useless servant – throw him outside in the darkness; there he will cry and grind his teeth.’

**For the full parable also read verses 20-23.*

Other Readings: Proverbs 31.10-13, 19-20, 30-31; Psalm 128.1-5; 1 Thessalonians 5.1-6

LECTIO

To illustrate his coming in the fullness of time, Jesus tells a story about a master who knows his workers and what he can expect of them. The third servant was right to fear his boss, when we see the fate he is dealt. Diplomacy could not really have made things right. In fact, the master takes nothing away from the incompetent servant. He does not say: “He who fails in his duty loses everything!” He says: “The person who has nothing, even the little that he has will be taken away from him.” So the servant is not deprived of very much... This servant foolishly confesses: “I was afraid.” The master replies that what mattered to him was for the servant to have moved forward. Bosses always appreciate employees who take their responsibilities seriously. So it is

the servant’s attitude that angers the master and not the amount earned or not earned. To understand the issue in financial terms, one talent equals thirty years of salary!

In the parable, the nervous energy involved in digging doesn’t help the situation. In fact, the “lazy” servant is the only one who does any physical work! He limited himself to the legal process proposed by the rabbis. According to some, hiding the goods entrusted to one meant taking care of them. The master does not share this view! He requires transformative action: “You should have deposited my money in the bank.” Is God like this uncompromising owner? Yes, in terms of forthrightness, God resembles this owner who tells the truth to those lacking initiative.

One sure indication of the importance of their attitude over their results is in the way the master praises the workers. He lauds just as much the servant who has gained five coins as he who has earned ten. Each one is congratulated by the master, regardless of the amount: “Well done, you good and faithful servant!” said his master. “You have been faithful in managing small amounts, so I will put you in charge of large amounts. Come on in and share my happiness!” The real reward for faithfulness is sharing in the master’s joy. The penalty for fear is being excluded.

2 MEDITATIO

- In emphasizing the gentleness and mercy of God, we have perhaps neglected to take God seriously. We have confused his mercy with an apparent disinterest, the so-called distance he seems to take from what we do in practice. We have perhaps lost sight of how important it is to him that we dare to do what is good, great, noble, and new.
- Through our close study of the Gospel passage, we can better understand what Jesus was driving at in his parable. Our God entrusts us with responsibilities, “to each according to his ability” (Mt 25.15). By accepting these responsibilities, we show our oneness with God. We are preparing now for our eternity with him. The fear of taking responsibility cuts us off from the life of the Lord.

3 ORATIO

I ask the risen Christ to give me the energy to take initiatives while I await his coming in glory. I give thanks for the members of my community who invest their abilities in service to believers. I ask, on behalf of the Church, that she never be deprived of leaders and members who breathe into her intense creativity as she awaits the Lord’s return.

4 CONTEMPLATIO

Are we bold enough to face the days preceding our risen Lord’s return? The first reading opens the way for responses that are both surprising and reassuring.

Alain Faucher

THE THOUGHTS OF A KING

Matthew 25.31-46

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes as King and all the angels with him, he will sit on his royal throne, ³² and the people of all the nations will be gathered before him. Then he will divide them into two groups, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the righteous people on his right and the others on his left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to the people on his right, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father! Come and possess the kingdom which has been prepared for you ever since the creation of the world. ³⁵ I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, ³⁶ naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me.’

³⁷ “The righteous will then answer him, ‘When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? ³⁸ When did we ever see you a stranger and welcome you in our homes, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?’ ⁴⁰ The King will reply, ‘I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these members of my family, you did it for me!’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Away from me, you that are under God’s curse! Away to the eternal fire which has been prepared for the Devil and his angels! ⁴² I was hungry but you would not feed me, thirsty but you would not give me a drink; ⁴³ I was a stranger but you would not welcome me in your homes, naked but you would not clothe me; I was sick and in prison but you would not take care of me.’

⁴⁴ “Then they will answer him, ‘When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and would not help you?’ ⁴⁵ The King will reply, ‘I tell you, whenever you refused to help one of these least important ones, you refused to help me.’ ⁴⁶ These, then, will be sent off to eternal punishment, but the righteous will go to eternal life.”

Other Readings: Ezekiel 34.11-12, 15-17; Psalm 23.1-3, 5-6; 1 Corinthians 15.20-26, 28

LECTIO

God can sometimes be quite disappointed. Some of our actions measure up to his holiness; others fail the test. God’s ability to judge is affirmed in the first reading and played out in the Gospel.

The prophet Ezekiel denounces those in leadership among God’s people who have not maintained unity, and left the sheep alone and watched them be scattered (Ez 34.12). In such an extreme case, only one solution is possible: God will take things in hand. “I myself will look for my sheep and take care of them” (Ez 34.11). The wandering, wounded and weak sheep will gently be ministered to as necessary. The stronger ones will be treated justly. On the horizon an action worthy of a king is in preparation: “I will judge each of you and separate the good from the bad, the sheep from the goats” (Ez 34.17). The Gospel allows us to be present in advance at this judgment. Divine powers are conferred on the Son of Man. The nations assemble before him.. Paradoxically,

this strong judgment will result in a new creation. The boundaries will be as clear as day and night. Actions carried out for the King on one side, negligence on the other (Mt 25.40-45). Discernment is required. Those who find grace under his royal gaze are not always aware that they are acting for him. These people who are honoured by the judge have worked quietly helping their fellow humans to handle life’s problems. They have shared clothing, food, or water with those in need. They have disregarded life’s social boundaries so as to leave no one in loneliness. At the close of their journey, they enjoy a final surprise: meeting the Son of God who was at the receiving end of their kind actions.

MEDITATIO

- Often times, we are motivated to do certain things, but tire easily. In wanting to fill our tank only with our own good intentions, we are moving quickly toward a spiritual burnout. To be generous with staying power, we will sooner or later have to confess that we need role models to give us lasting momentum. Whether we choose to call them role models or mentors or coaches is of no matter. One basic human reality is the ease with which we can act if we open our minds to something besides ourselves.
- Christian expertise finds no shame in taking its cues from a powerful source of inspiration. This source, Jesus, exists outside of the boundaries of the people who make up the Church. The spirit of service and renewal is nourished by the words of the best messenger God could have sent: his equal, his Son who is totally established in our human existence.

ORATIO


I take practical steps to help and share every time I have the chance. These acts honour Christ our king. I persist in asking for grace to meet on my journey, role models who will encourage me to keep on, even increase my involvement as a caring believer. I allow the sunlight of practical achievements to penetrate my life by the members of our community who are involved in serving the poor.

CONTEMPLATIO

If we take the joy that our kind acts can generate in his divine heart seriously, acts of goodness will help us meet the eternal God on our daily path. In these, Christ our king is a role model to copy. A king who is so transparent in revealing the deep source of his action deserves our respect and our commitment.

Alain Faucher





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

Psalm 119.105
Good News Bible

