

LITURGY NOTES

fall 2021

In This Issue

Liturgy Notes is a new quarterly resource from the Liturgy Office of the Diocese of London. In every issue, there will be reflections on the readings and music suggestions for every Sunday, notes about special liturgical celebrations that may occur during the quarter, and information about liturgical practice and seasons in the liturgical year. In future issues, there will be a Q & A section addressing questions that come to the Liturgy Office.

In this inaugural issue, in addition to the reflections on the readings and music suggestions, there are notes about about the celebration of Thanksgiving, the main features of the end of Ordinary Time, and the significance of the altar.

Approaching the End of the Year

In Ordinary Time, readings are not chosen to “fit” with any particular seasonal emphasis. We read the gospel in a semi-continuous way, proceeding in order from one passage to another, while skipping some passages. In the second reading on Sundays, we proceed the same way through the epistles. This “course reading” might seem random from one Sunday to the next, but still, there are certain emphases that appear regularly as Ordinary Time, and the liturgical year itself, approaches the end.

The end of any gospel is the Passion narrative, the empty tomb, and the post-Resurrection appearances, but of course, those are read in Holy Week, the Triduum, and the Easter season. The end of Ordinary Time gives us last things a synoptic gospel mentions before moving on toward Jerusalem and Jesus’ death. We get many of Jesus’ miracles and sayings, and as the season comes to its end, talk of the Second Coming. While there are profound ethical considerations in many of these narratives, there is also a strong eschatological sense: Jesus is proclaiming the Reign of God, which is inaugurated in himself, and the fulfillment of which we await at the end of time. By the end of the season, this focus moves us smoothly from the end of Ordinary Time and into Advent, the eschatological season *par excellence*.

So, since Vatican II, Ordinary Time concludes with the Solemnity of Christ the King (or now, in our newer translation, “Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe”). Far from simply triumphalistic jingoism, this feast calls us to look at our world, especially the most powerful, in contrast to the kind of Kingdom Christ proclaims: a reign marked by the power of humility, peace, and hope for the hopeless. Christ’s proclamation of the Reign of God inverts and subverts the idolatry of power, and calls upon his disciples to do the same.

September 5, 2021 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, B Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Isaiah 35:4-7

Isaiah of Jerusalem was active in Jerusalem from around 740 to 700 BC, and he moved in elite circles as an advisor to the King of Judah. The book named for him is the longest of the prophetic books, and it likely evolved over several centuries through contributions from disciples and followers of Isaiah of Jerusalem himself. Chapters 34 and 35 are a vision of a restored Zion (Jerusalem), and these chapters might date from a time in Judah's history closer to or during the Babylonian Exile (587-538 BC). In the verses for this Sunday, the prophet attempts to bolster waning spirits by emphasizing the saving presence of God. In response to God's nearness humanity, and all of creation itself, will be rejuvenated. The blind, deaf, lame, and mute will be healed of their infirmities, and life-giving water will revitalize the parched earth. Importantly, the types of healings listed would mean those who had been healed could perceive and react to hearing the word of God.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 146

Isaiah 35:6 promises "the tongue of the speechless shall sing for joy" (NRSV), and in the psalm the joyful proclamation comes to life. Psalm 146 belongs to a subcollection of psalms known as the "*Hallel*" (praise) psalms, since each begins with the instruction "Praise the Lord!" In Psalm 146, the psalmist praises God as the one who accompanies, saves, and restores those who are suffering. This is remarkable because ancient conceptions of suffering (both physical and social) often saw these conditions to be the result of sin, and therefore separation from God. By asserting, instead, God's presence in the midst of human suffering, the psalmist witnesses to God's life-giving power.

Second Reading: James 2:1-5

This section from the Letter of James is straightforward and timeless. James insists that the Christian way of life is incomplete if believers do not accompany their faith in Jesus with authentic living manifested through care for the marginalized in society. The letter reminds believers that God has a special care for the poor and downtrodden; thus, these are the people whose company believers should seek.

Gospel: Mark 7:31-37

As Jesus returns to the region of Galilee, some unnamed people bring to him a man who is deaf and who has a speech impediment. In the ancient world (as in some less developed countries even today), deafness and the inability to speak properly would be a death sentence, since a person could not keep up in society. However, this man's infirmities are not only socially challenging, they are also covenantally symbolic. The great instruction of the *Shema* relies on hearing and speaking in order to be followed: "Hear, O Israel, The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down, and when you rise" (Deut 6:4-7). Deafness and speechlessness would indicate a person who cannot participate fully in covenantal life. By healing this man, Jesus restores him, body and soul, and this healing represents at the individual level the type of healing God desires for all people.

Reflection

Today's readings draw deeply from Old Testament traditions in which physical infirmities such as blindness and deafness would be associated with a "missing the mark" (or sin) in covenantal understanding (e.g., Deuteronomy 28). Healing these disabilities would be a sign of God's power and the restoration of the covenantal relationship. The

association of disability with wrongdoing is something we encounter even today, for example, when people say, “What did I do to deserve this?” or “What did I do wrong that my child was born with this condition?” It is important for preachers to be aware of the differences between the understanding of disability in the ancient world and how we would approach it today with much more understanding and acceptance of people’s unique differences. One way to do this might be to emphasize that Jesus himself will continue to bear his wounds even after his resurrection, as they are now part of his identity, even in his risen glory. Essentially, the healing miracles in Mark’s Gospel point to the desire God has for oneness with creation, something that can only happen when we are fully open to God’s presence in our lives.

Reflecting the Word in Song

Amazing Grace (NEW BRITAIN)	CBW 480
Bless the Lord (D. Brennan et al)	SS 205
Come to Jesus (J. Blackesley & S. Hart)	SS 208
God, Whose Glory Reigns Eternal (BEACH SPRING)	CBW 475
Healer of Our Every Ill (M. Haugen)	CBW 363 / G 642
O Christ, You Speak the Names of God (MORNING SONG)	CIS 6.35
O God Our Help in Ages Past (ST. ANNE)	CBW 644
Only in God (J. Foley)	G 424 / GP 154
There is a Longing (A. Quigley)	CIS 6.15 / SS 366
Though the Mountains May Fall (D. Schutte)	G 426 / GP 214

The Voice of God (FLENTGE OR WOODLANDS)
CBW 433

We Cannot Measure How You Heal (J. Bell)
G 401

September 12, 2021 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, B

Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Isaiah 50:5-9

In this first-person oracle the prophet reflects on his call to serve the Lord God despite encountering severe social opposition. This is one of the four Servant Songs in Isaiah, which describe the total devotion of an unnamed “servant” (see 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). What is notable about the servant is that he remains committed to following in God’s way, even if it entails personal suffering. Early followers of Jesus, struggling with the reality of Jesus’ torturous death, likely recalled these Servant Songs, finding in them theological support for the surprising nature of Jesus’ suffering messiahship. Since we read the fourth Servant Song (Isa 52:13-53:12) during the Good Friday liturgy, these songs are intimately connected with understanding Jesus’ identity. The portion of the Servant Song read today asserts God’s abiding presence with the one who serves him.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 116

In another connection to the Triduum, the psalm we sing today is also used on Holy Thursday. The Psalmist recounts an event in which he is ensnared by death. According to Ancient Israelite understanding, Sheol (the realm of the dead), was a place of separation from God, and so to be “encompassed” by death would be a situation of great terror and imminent loss. Here the Psalmist praises God for delivering his soul from death (Ps 116:8), and he vows to devote his life to God’s service by walking “before the Lord in the land of the living” (Ps 116:9).

Second Reading: James 2:14-18

Like the Old Testament prophets before him, James directly asserts that a living and true faith is one that is accompanied by concrete actions to care for the poor. James' letter is both practical and deeply theological because it insists on a thorough-going congruency between what one professes to believe and how one lives. That is, it is inauthentic to profess belief in a God of salvation whose incarnate Son healed and encountered the poor and marginalized, without imitating these actions in one's own life.

Gospel: Mark 8:27-35

Roughly half-way through the Gospel of Mark, Jesus has a remarkable conversation with his disciples. Up until this point, Jesus has taught with authority (Mark 1:22), healed the sick, exorcised demons, fed multitudes, and calmed a turbulent sea. People are amazed by him, but some are skeptical (6:1-6), and even his disciples struggle to understand that his deeds of power (as Mark calls them) are not for sensationalist purposes, but to manifest the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God (Mark 8:14-21). With such misunderstanding abounding, it is remarkable that Jesus asks the disciples now, "Who do people say that I am?", rather than waiting until after the Transfiguration in the very next chapter. The disciples' responses are telling: "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets" (Mark 8:28). In each case, the people perceive that Jesus is certainly "of God", assuming him to be the re-manifestation of a great witness from the past (John the Baptist is killed in Mark 6).

Jesus then turns the questions to the disciples directly, "Who do YOU say that I am?" Peter responds with his important Messianic confession, "You are the Messiah" (Mark 8:29), a title that resonates with centuries of expectation for God's salvation of Israel. When Jesus responds, he surprises the disciples in two ways: first by referring to himself as the "Son of Man", a title found in Daniel 7:13 to refer to the one designated to receive glory and kingship. Second, by describing the suffering he must endure before his death and

resurrection. What a jarring contrast! It is no wonder Peter "took him aside and began to rebuke him" (Mark 8:32). How confusing it must have been for Peter to then be rebuked in turn. What can Jesus mean when he says, "you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things" (Mark 8:33)?

Reflection

It must have been enormously difficult for the disciples to hear Jesus' prediction of his passion and then to witness the events themselves. The messianic expectations handed down over centuries envisioned a mighty and glorious reassertion of Israel's golden age. The Messiah would be the one to liberate Israel from foreign oppression, and to summon all nations to witness to the one God. The idea that God's messiah would be brutally killed by crucifixion was more than preposterous, would have been considered by some to be blasphemous (see Deut 21:22-23). When Jesus tells Peter that he is "setting his mind ... on human things", he reacts to Peter's tacit acceptance of human expressions of power. Essentially, Peter wonders: How could someone rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes be the Messiah? How could someone killed as a criminal be the Messiah? Jesus tells them that the Son of Man would rise again, clearly teaching that violence and death do not have the last word, and that God is not confined by human systems of honour and power.

Reflecting the Word in Song

As We Gather At Your Table (NETTLETON)	CBW 583
Be Not Afraid (B. Dufford)	CBW 481 / G 430 / GP 24 / SS 271
Christ, Be Our Light (B. Farrell)	CIS 6.31
I Will Choose Christ (T. Booth)	SS 220
Lift High the Cross (CRUCIFER)	CBW 435
Lord Jesus, We Must Know You (ST. THEODULPH)	CBW 517

Prayer of St. Francis (S. Temple)	G 524 / SS 339
A Rightful Place (S. Angrisano)	SS 202
The Servant Song (R. Gillard)	G 476
Take Up Our Cross (S. Hart & M. Byrd)	SS 354
take up your cross (ERHALT UNS, HERR)	CBW 353
You Have Anointed Me (M. Balhoff et al)	G 483 / GP 81

September 19, 2021 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, B

Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Wisdom 2:12, 17-20

The Book of Wisdom (or Wisdom of Solomon) is one of the Deuterocanonical books of the Bible. It was written in Greek, likely in Alexandria, Egypt, between 30 BC and 40 AD, when the Roman Empire controlled Egypt. It was common for ancient writings to assume the name of great figure of the past (e.g. Solomon or Moses), as this was a way of asserting the congruity of a work with the larger tradition. This context is important when considering the book's contents, as it is intended to bolster the faith of Jewish youth by encouraging them to attend to their traditions, love of the Torah, and commitment to God in the face of persecution. Today's passage is part of a longer section that compares the way of righteousness to the way of the ungodly (Wisdom 1:1-3:19). As in other biblical wisdom literature, the way of the ungodly is presented as a way of foolishness and death. Today's passage is spoken from the point of view of the ungodly, as they make plans to torment a righteous person. In the theological arrangement of the lectionary, we are invited to link Jesus to this unnamed righteous person, though we should remember that it is intended to be a more general contrast between those who follow in God's way and those who

persecute the faithful. The intention of the text is to motivate the believer to a pure faith.

Psalm: Psalm 54

The superscription of this psalm ties it closely to an event in David's life, when the "Ziphites went and told Saul, 'David is in hiding among us.'" (1 Sam 23:15-29). The superscription itself provides an interpretation of the psalm that expresses trust and fidelity in God in the face of danger and betrayal.

Second Reading: James 3:16-4:3

In this brief reading James encourages internal harmony within the community. Although James is often contrasted with Paul, here we can see a great deal of continuity between the two apostolic writers. James' insight is that living in peace in Christ must begin with those closest to a person. James says, "You want something and you do not have it; so you commit murder," (James 4:2), powerfully evoking the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4). The implication is that internal divisions do nothing but unravel the fabric of a community, and believers should strive for, and petition for, peace.

Gospel: Mark 9:30-37

Today's section of the Gospel of Mark takes place after the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-9). It is part of a larger chapter on messianic expectations, divine versus earthly power, and the importance of faith and prayer. The reading starts with Jesus' second passion prediction in the Gospel of Mark, and the disciples "did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him" (Mark 9:32). This is curious! Earlier they asked him why the "scribes say Elijah must come first" (Mark 9:11), so they are certainly not averse to asking him questions. Likewise, their fear is questionable, for he tells them directly that "he will rise again" (9:31). We gain some insight when we see what happens next. After arriving at Capernaum, Jesus asks them what they had been arguing about along the way, and it turns out they were arguing about "who was the greatest" (Mark 9:34). This helps us to understand their misunderstanding and fear because it reveals

that they have mistakenly assumed that following Jesus will result in some kind of earthly gain for themselves. It would be confusing and frightening to discover that the man they were following was going to be persecuted and killed as a criminal. Being aligned with a person like that would mean their own honour and very lives would be in danger. Jesus patiently explains that the key to greatness is in service. And, lest they think that they will achieve greatness by serving someone powerful and important, Jesus specifies that the type of service required is to serve without the expectation of personal gain. Using the example of a child, who has no honour of his or her own to bestow, Jesus says, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me” (Mark 9:37).

Reflection

The readings today comment on the tensions between earthly systems of recognition, honour, and power, and the wisdom it requires to avoid obsessing about competitive relationships, careerism, and the dehumanizing of others by seeing them as tools for one’s own gain. These readings invite a deep look inside our motivation for following Christ: do we follow him to be important in the community? To feel “better than” other people? To justify judging other people? Even if we answer “no” to these questions, are we ready to serve others as completely as Jesus calls us to do, with no expectation of personal gain? Let us give ourselves the space to explore these questions honestly, to identify with the different voices and characters in these readings, and to move forward in hope and faith, knowing that God gives us the grace to learn, grow, and change.

Reflecting the Word in Song

As We Gather At Your Table (NETTLETON)
CBW 583

Blest are the Pure in Heart (FRANCONIA)
CBW 471

Bread for the World (B. Farrell)
CIS 6.1 / SS 240

The Cry of the Poor (J. Foley)
G46 / GP 59 / SS 340

Holy is His Name (J.M. Talbot)
SS 110

Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service (IN
BABILONE OR BEACH SPRING)
CBW 444

O God Beyond All Praising (THAXTED)
CBW 561

Open My Eyes (J. Manibusan)
SS 337

The Servant Song (R. Gillard)
G 476

Sing to the Mountains (B. Dufford)
G 313 / GP 196

10,000 Reasons / Bless the Lord (J. Myrin & M.
Redman)
SS 270

Ubi Caritas (J. Berthier)
CBW 67 / G 301

Ubi Caritas (B. Hurd)
SS 259

September 26, 2021 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, B

Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Numbers 11:25-29

This passage in Numbers comes from a section of the book that strives to articulate Moses’ pre-eminence as the one upon whom God’s spirit rests, while also demonstrating how Moses’ leadership can be delegated to another without any diminishment of his own. The context of today’s passage describes the Israelites journeying through the desert wilderness while suffering from hunger and responding with dissatisfaction. Moses is frazzled: how can he lead the people all on his own? In Num 11:10-15 Moses expresses his frustration to God, and the beautiful thing is that God responds with aid. He tells Moses to choose seventy elders of Israel and God takes

“some of the spirit that was on him [that is on Moses] and put it on the elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied” (Num 11:25). This seems to be a temporary gift, but two men, Eldad and Medad, retain the ability for a little longer than the others, much to the consternation of Joshua son of Nun (who will ultimately be Moses’ successor). Moses reassures Joshua that this is not inappropriate—if the spirit of God rests on a person, one must prophesy. Moses’ reaction is incredibly important, for in one simple teaching he acknowledges both the power of God’s spirit and that it is a gift.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 19

The verses of the psalm sung today emphasize the gift of the “law” (lit. *Torah*, instruction, teaching) of God. The essential message is that following the way of the Lord will give life, righteousness, and happiness.

Second Reading: James 5:1-6

James’ directness continues in this week’s reading, in his description of how the wealthy prosper at the expense of the poor. This is a strong social justice message that continues to be relevant today. Although it can be difficult to comment on all the readings in a homily, it could be worth encouraging parishioners to dwell on this reading over the week as an examen. For example: In what ways do I identify with the “rich”? When am I more like “the poor”? Where is conversion needed?

Gospel: Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

The Gospel reading closely mirrors the First Reading in events and in the message. However, it is necessary to consider the broader context of chapter 9, which contains a cluster of events that centre on Jesus’ divine power and authority, and how that power and authority differs from human systems of honour and prestige.

Mark 9 opens with the Transfiguration, during which Peter, James, and John witness Jesus’ glory in the company of Moses and Elijah. Even if Jesus had not been performing miracles and exorcisms, this event alone would have clearly

indicated his importance. Later in the chapter, the disciples argue about “who was the greatest” among them (Mark 9:34), a woeful misunderstanding of what following Jesus means. Even though Jesus clearly tells them that they must seek to serve, rather than accumulate human glory (Mark 9:35), his message does not sink in. In today’s lection, the disciples are anxious because someone, not of their group, is performing exorcisms in Jesus’ name. Jesus, like Moses, reassures the disciples that someone performing deeds of power in his name will awaken to the truth of that power. Importantly, Jesus refers to himself as “Christ” (Mark 9:40), the messianic title that would have carried weight in both Jewish and Imperial Roman circles. However, as so often in Mark’s gospel, Jesus’ status as the Christ of God entails a radically different type of glory than that conferred by humans. It is power demonstrated through service rather than control over others. For his disciples, it is power demonstrated by bringing people to Jesus and helping them flourish in his name, rather than installing “stumbling blocks” that prevent them from witnessing to Jesus in their own lives.

To drive the point home, Jesus uses vivid (and hyperbolic) imagery of physical injury that requires an understanding of both early Jewish sacrificial practices and the connection between physical infirmities and sin. In the sacrificial rites described in the Pentateuch, both the animals for sacrifice and those offering the animals had to be whole and unmaimed. In addition, physical infirmity was typically associated with sin (see Deuteronomy 28). There was strong a connection between *wholeness* and *holiness*. Thus, Jesus’ teaching seems paradoxical: how could it be *better* to have only one hand? How could this ensure a person would “enter life” (Mark 9:43)? The message, while sharp, is that at all times believers should help others come to God through Jesus, rather than spending energy on keeping them away. Furthermore, those who are already authentically acting in Jesus’ name should be nurtured, not reprimanded.

Reflection

The disciples' impulse to limit and protect who is authorized to act in Jesus' name is an instinctive and understandable response. After all, they are the ones who had given up everything to follow him! Thus, it is only natural that they might feel protective about who gets to act in Jesus' name. Jesus' response challenges them to be more inclusive in their thinking, and to consider how their own commitment to exclusivity might hinder others from finding a deeper relationship with God. These readings invite us to consider the ways in which our own ministries invite or dissuade people from discovering Christ. If the latter, how can we change?

Reflecting the Word in Song

Christ the Made the Sure Foundation (WESTMINSTER ABBEY)	CBW 430
The Eyes and Hands of Christ (T. Kenzia)	SS 234
Gather Your People (B. Hurd)	CIS 6.12
Go Make a Difference (S. Angrisano & T. Tomaszek)	SS 213
Go to the World (ENGELBERG)	CBW 508
Here I Am, Lord (D. Schutte)	CBW 520 / SS 250
Lord Jesus, We Must Know You (ST. THEODULPH)	CBW 517
Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service (IN BABILONE OR BEACH SPRING)	CBW 444
Only This I Want (D. Schutte)	CBW 516 / G 499 / GP 155
The Summons (J. Bell)	CIS 6.39 / SS 230
Table of the World (NETTLETON)	CIS 6.30
We Are the Light of the World (J. Greif)	G 353 / SS 237

October 3, 2021 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, B Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Genesis 2:7ab, 15, 18-24

This passage from Genesis forms the basis for Jesus' teaching regarding divorce in the Gospel for today. The pairing with the Gospel focuses our attention on the last line, "and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24), but it is important to be equally attentive to all the details leading up to that point. First, the Man is formed from the "dust of the ground" and the Lord God breathes the breath of life into his nostrils and then places him in the garden of Eden. The animals that follow are likewise made from the ground, though it is not clear whether they are made outside of Eden (as was the Man), or inside Eden before being brought to the Man. Whatever the case, they too are made from the ground, just like the Man, yet none is suitable to be "a helper as his partner." The Lord God causes a "deep sleep" to overcome the Man and he takes a rib from the Man to fashion the Woman. It is vital to understand that this means that the Woman has been made directly out of matter that has already been animated by the breath of life. That is, she is not made from the "dust of the ground", but rather from the being that the Man is, *after* being enlivened with the breath of life. For this reason she is a suitable "helper as his partner." The Hebrew is *'ezer kenegdo*, which means "a helper on par with" or "a helper corresponding to." The second word, *kenegdo* also has the sense of "strength and power." So, the Woman is a strong, equal counterpart with the Man, and together they represent the wholeness of humanity.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 128

Psalm 128 is a psalm of reassurance of the blessings that come to a person who follows in God's way. The blessings are threefold: a rich harvest, children and a healthy family, and a long life. In developed countries we may not feel the weight of these blessings as acutely today, but if we pause to contemplate them,

they are just as significant today as in the ancient world.

Second Reading: Hebrews 2:9-11

As we begin October, we also begin to transition into the more eschatological season leading up to the Feast of Christ the King on November 21. Beginning with this week the second reading will be drawn from the Letter to the Hebrews. Although this letter came to be attributed to Paul, its author is likely an anonymous, Greek-speaking Christian who is familiar both with Old Testament sacrificial traditions and Greek philosophy. The inclusion of Hebrews in the canon was initially debated; some early Church fathers were not convinced that Paul wrote it, and it resembles a treatise or sermon more than the typical Greco-Roman letter. Nevertheless, Hebrews found a place in the canon and it provides one of the most profound theological insights regarding Jesus' identity, depicting Jesus as the Great and Final High Priest who is both the offerer and the offering of sacrifice.

In the section read today, the author muses on the fact of Jesus' suffering in death, since normally crucifixion would be regarded as a disgraceful way to die. Hebrews teaches that God made Jesus, the "perfect through sufferings" (Heb 2:10). Why would God make Jesus perfect through sufferings? Does this not seem quite cruel? It is helpful to note that the word translated as "perfect" is the Greek word *teleioó*, which has the sense of "to complete, to achieve a goal, to accomplish, to finish." One way to understand Jesus as made "perfect through sufferings," is to recognize that Jesus aligned his will with the Father's at every moment of his life, and recognized God the Father as the sole and perfect authority, even when his devotion put his life at risk. To have wavered from this commitment in the face of imminent danger would have tacitly accorded the Emperor more power. Thus, Jesus' thoroughgoing desire to be at one with God the Father brought him to and through suffering.

Gospel: Mark 10:2-16

Jesus transitions from the region of Galilee to Judea and encounters "some Pharisees" who want to "test" him. The Pharisees were laymen who were experts in both the Torah and the Oral Torah, a tradition of sayings and commentary on the Torah intended to aid believers in holding fast to the 613 commandments of the Law of Moses. The Pharisees had a reputation for being exacting in their recall and interpretation of passages of scripture, thus, their "test" of Jesus is to see if he can hold his own in this regard. The question they pose to him is regarding divorce: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" Jesus responds from within the tradition (rather than reaching for a non-Jewish rationale), but returning the question with a question: "What did Moses command you?" Drawing from Deuteronomy 24:1-4, the Pharisees acknowledge that it is permitted in certain circumstances, namely if the husband "finds something objectionable about her" (Deut 24:1). Biblical scholars suggest that the "objectionable" thing might be some sort of disloyalty or betrayal.

Jesus then provides an interpretation of his own that grounds an understanding of marriage in the perfection of creation before "the fall." He explains that Moses' instruction was necessary because of human frailty, but that the ideal of marriage is that a married man and a woman together represent a wholeness and a oneness intended by God. In saying this, Jesus demonstrates that he, like the Pharisees, "knows his scripture", and that it will be difficult for them to snag him in a misinterpretation.

Reflection

Jesus' teaching about marriage in the Gospel of Mark is, in fact, stricter than the teaching that is presented in Matthew 5:32 or 1 Cor 7:10-16. As one of the seven sacraments of the church, marriage has an important place in Catholic tradition, when a man and a woman witness to the fulness of the Kingdom of God in their love for each other. However, we also know that many marriages are very imperfect and, in

some cases, unsafe. Many people in our congregations will have experienced divorce and remarriage in some way, and so it will be important for homilists and presiders to be compassionate in their preaching.

Reflecting the Word in Song

A Living Faith (ST. CATHERINE)	CBW 447
Blest Are Those Who Love You (M. Haugen)	CBW 628 / G 111
For the Beauty of the Earth (DIX)	CBW 531
God Our Author and Creator (BEACH SPRING)	CIS 6.32
God's Love is Everlasting (T. Tomaszek)	SS 300
Lord, Make Us Servants of Your Peace (O WALY WALY)	CBW 630
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (HYFRYDOL)	CBW 625
The Love of the Lord (J.M. Joncas)	G 504
Sent Forth By God's Blessing (ASH GROVE)	CBW 533
Though the Mountains May Fall (D. Schutte)	G 426 / GP 214
Ubi Caritas (J. Berthier)	CBW 67 / G 301
Ubi Caritas (B. Hurd)	SS 259

October 10, 2021 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, B

Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Wisdom 7:7-11

The Book of Wisdom (or Wisdom of Solomon) was written in Greek between 30 BC and 40 AD. This reading is part of a poem in which the author reflects on the goodness and beauty of wisdom. It is written in the voice of King Solomon, who once asked God for wisdom, rather than for power or personal gain (1 Kings

3:5-15). In Second Temple Period wisdom texts such as this one, it was common for the concept of wisdom to be personified as a woman: *Sophia* (in Greek) or *Hokmah* (in Hebrew). Here, the author expresses how his devotion to *Sophia* is more precious than any earthly thing. He recognizes that living a life of wisdom (which would involve prudence, faithfulness, and discernment), will bring him every blessing. And what is a life of wisdom? Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the prophets and sages describe wisdom as having “fear” (or awe and reverence) for God and “walking” in God’s instruction (see Psalm 1, for example). The instructions of the covenant can be whittled down to two essential and intertwined premises: exclusive devotion to God alone and care for one another. Thus, the wise person will strive to live a life of orthopraxy (correct worship) and social justice.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 90

This is a powerful communal petition for God to be attentive to the community. The psalmist expresses the frailty of humanity vis-à-vis the power of God.

Second Reading: Hebrews 4:12-13

This familiar reading is part of a longer reflection on obedience and trust in God. The author of Hebrews contextualizes the need for trust by recalling the incident in Num 14:1-35 when the people struggled to envision the bounty of the promised land as they journeyed towards it (Hebrews 3:1-4:13). The Israelites’ desire to return to Egypt was interpreted as a lack of faith and trust in God due to an inability to “hear” God’s words through the leadership of Moses. Today’s reading from Hebrews briefly summarizes the power of God’s word (*logos*). In these two verses, God and the word of God are used interchangeably. God’s dynamic word permeates the body and mind, and it knows the intentions of each person’s heart. The implication is that one’s faith must be trusting and authentic, and not merely self-interested lip-service wherein a person does not truly stand in awe of God.

Gospel: Mark 10:17-30

In today's Gospel a nameless man approaches Jesus, asking, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" His question indicates a belief in the afterlife that must be earned, thus we can sympathize with this man as a person who genuinely cares about doing right. We can assume that this man is Jewish, for Jesus asserts that the man is familiar with the commandments, and so yet one more thing is left to do. Notice how Jesus says "you lack one thing", and then explains that the man must divest himself of his property and give the money to the poor. We might have expected Jesus' phrasing to be instead, "you have too much." By telling the man that he lacks something, Jesus expresses the insights articulated in the first reading from Wisdom, namely that true satisfaction does not come through accumulated wealth, but through devotion to God and care for all people.

The man struggles with this message, and it is not because he is selfish or short-sighted. Rather, the gospel passage gives us a picture of a successful man who has kept the commandments since his youth. In the eyes of society, he would be the epitome of someone who had been richly blessed precisely because of his attentiveness to the Torah. His shock is genuine, for he likely understood his possessions as signs that he was on the right track already, and he approaches Jesus as much for affirmation as for guidance. It is not difficult to imagine his shock when he receives this startling, counter-cultural message. After he leaves "grieving", Jesus explains to his equally surprised disciples that wealth in this life is not an indicator of one's existential merit. If that were the case, it would be worldly wealth that saves a person. Jesus

firmly corrects this thinking: only God can save because "for God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27).

Reflection

The message of today's readings is both simple to understand in principle and fiendishly difficult to live out in reality. Jesus

unambiguously teaches that accumulated wealth—even by a good person who is attentive to God and society—is a hindrance to, not the indicator of, a person's entry into the Kingdom of God. Jesus' words, of course, insist that we examine our own lives, both as individuals and as communities. We certainly need some possessions for survival, but we must not mistakenly think that these possessions are what ensure salvation. Instead, Jesus' words invite us to consider how we can share our resources more equitably, live more simply, and find happiness and spiritual nourishment in the abundance of life in God.

Reflecting the Word in Song

All That We Have (G. Ault)	G 425
Anthem (T. Conry)	G 494 / GP 13
Be Not Afraid (B. Dufford)	CBW 481 / G 430 / GP 24 / SS 271
Forth in the Peace of Christ We Go (LLEDROD)	CBW 514
I Say "Yes," Lord (D. Pena)	G 421
I Send You Out (J. Angotti)	SS 214
I Will Choose Christ (T. Booth)	SS 220
In Christ There Is No East or West (MCKEE or LAND OF REST)	CBW 529
Lord Jesus, We Must Know You (ST. THEODULPH)	CBW 517
The Summons (J. Bell)	CIS 6.39 / SS 230
Table of the World (NETTLETON)	CIS 6.30
Take, Lord, Receive (J. Foley)	GP 210
We Will Follow (D. Brennan et al)	SS 239

Note on Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving has been officially celebrated as an annual holiday in Canada since November 6, 1879. While the date varied by year and was not fixed, it was commonly the second Monday in October. On January 31, 1957, the Governor General Vincent Massey issued a proclamation stating: “A Day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed—to be observed on the second Monday in October.”

In 2021, Canadians observe Thanksgiving Day on 10 October.

The Canadian edition of the Roman Missal provides collects for celebration on page 952 but they are not to supplant the propers of the Sunday. It is interesting to note that the Prayer Over the Offerings is essentially Eucharistic in its tone, reminding us that as Catholics our true thanksgiving takes place every time we gather to celebrate the Eucharist and Christ’s victory over sin and death.

Recognizing this, it is important that we keep the focus of our preaching on the readings of the day and that any decorations placed in the church do not detract from the primary symbols of the worship space, namely, the assembly, the ambo, the altar, the font and the presider’s chair.

Rather than covering the front of the altar with bales of straw, pumpkins, gourds, corn stalks and wheat sheaves, consider using the foyer/narthex for these displays or consider decorating the front doors of the church so that all in the community might enjoy this display. There is no rule stating that decorations are limited to the inside of the worship space. There are many directives stating that the liturgical furnishings should stand alone.

Allow the altar-table to be prominent and adorned with a cloth, candles and possibly a simple arrangement of flowers.

October 17, 2021 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, B Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Isaiah 53:10-11

These verses come from the final section of the fourth Servant Song (Isa 52:13 - 53:13). We read the entirety of this song during the Good Friday liturgy; thus the portion we hear today reminds us how Jesus’ suffering was understood in light of prophetic material. This is a difficult reading, especially the opening line: “It was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain” (Isa 53:10), which is certainly a troubling notion. One recurring theme in the Book of Isaiah is that a period of suffering due to sin will proceed God’s intervention and salvation. In the early sections of the book, the suffering is endured by the entire nation (Isa 6:10-13), whereas in the later portions of the book, the suffering of the nation is borne by an individual on behalf of the people. Today’s first reading expresses the notion that a single person, the righteous Servant, bear the effects of sin for the sake of everyone else. Although we do not read it today, the next verse says, “Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (53:12).

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 33

In Psalm 33 the psalmist sings of the “steadfast love of the Lord”, which ensures that one’s hope in the Lord is not in vain. This psalm emphasizes God’s righteousness, faithfulness, justice, love, and protection.

Second Reading: Hebrews 4:14-16

These verses follow immediately on those read last week. They express the central insight of Hebrews, that Jesus is not a passive victim, but rather the “great high priest” (Heb 4:14). It is important to remember that the priestly theology of Hebrews is drawn from the sacrificial system as it is described in Leviticus,

wherein animal sacrifices were offered to atone for the sins of the people and the priests as well (see Leviticus 1-4 and Leviticus 16). The author of Hebrews explains that Jesus' self-sacrifice on the cross means that he functions both as the priest and the offering, and that no further sacrifices are necessary. All that is now required is belief in the effectiveness of Jesus' self-gift. For this reason, believers are enjoined to "hold fast to our confession" (Heb 4:14).

Gospel: Mark 10:35-45

The conversation between Jesus and James and John of Zebedee takes place as they are journeying up to Jerusalem. It is the final scene before the entry into Jerusalem and the passion narrative begins. In the three verses preceding today's lection, Jesus delivers his third passion prediction (Mark 10:32-34), and so James' and John's question indicates their lack of understanding of what being a disciple truly entails. As we can see from their question, they anticipate that Jesus will be "in glory", and they wish to be positioned in places of honour near him. Jesus knows that his total commitment to the will of God whom he calls "Abba" will mean that he cannot capitulate to the representatives of human authority. To do so would be to acknowledge that they are more powerful than God. Thus, he speaks frankly to James and John, telling them that they do not understand what they are asking of him, because they are seeking honour that reflects a worldly view of greatness. To reinforce his response, he tells the disciples that "whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:44-45). With this statement, Jesus essentially establishes that being one of his followers (in later tradition, a Christian), means that one does not seek personal glory, but seeks instead to serve others in love and charity.

Reflection

As we move closer to the feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, the lectionary selections consistently remind us that Jesus' glory comes through his enduring commitment to the will of the Father and his words and deeds that consistently pointed to the inbreaking of the Reign of God. Today's readings explore the nature of servanthood, emphasizing that service to others and to God is the most pure when it does not seek personal gain. These readings offer us a chance as individuals and as communities to consider the ways in which we serve others and the motivations with which we serve others. Can we do more? Can we purify our intentions? Let us be reassured by the words of Psalm 33, that God's grace will aid us in becoming good servants, for God "is our help and our shield" (Psalm 33:20).

Reflecting the Word in Song

- Come and Journey with a Savior (BEACH SPRING)
CBW 476
- God Our Author and Creator (BEACH SPRING)
CIS 6.32
- I Send You Out (J. Angotti)
SS 214
- Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service (IN
BABILONE OR BEACH SPRING)
CBW 444
- My Soul Gives Glory to the Lord (J.M. Joncas)
CBW 678 / G 14
- Now Let Us From This Table Rise (DEUS TUORUM
MILITUM)
CBW 521
- Only This I Want (D. Schutte)
CBW 516 / G 499 / GP 155
- Peace Prayer (J. Foley)
GP 163
- The Servant Song (R. Gillard)
G 476
- Song of the Chosen (R. Cooney)
G 584
- Take Up Our Cross (S. Hart & M. Byrd)
SS 354

October 24, 2021 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, B

Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Jeremiah 31:7-9

The prophet Jeremiah lived and worked in Jerusalem from approximately 640 BC until he was sometime after 586 BC. This timeframe corresponds with the tumultuous period of the Babylonian invasion in Judah and the subsequent Exile of most of the Judean population to Babylon. Jeremiah's own exile to Egypt came as the result of being taken captive by Judeans and others who were fleeing the Babylonian regime. Jeremiah's is known for the deep suffering he endured whilst speaking on God's behalf (Jer 20:7-18). His messages were often pessimistic and not well received. For example, he insisted that any reforms of the people were too little, too late, and that the Babylonian invasion was an inevitability. Nevertheless, the Book of Jeremiah has moments of joy and optimism, and it is such that we hear today. In these verses, God promises to bring all the people out of their exile, on a straight path and with consolation. Notably, the Lord specifies that the ones rescued will include "those who are blind and those who are lame, those with child and those in labour" (Jer 31:8). In other words, the full spectrum of Israel, from the very elderly to the very youngest will be brought home in hope and joy. God claims Ephraim (the poetic name for Israel) as his "firstborn", which is a distinct echo of Exodus 4:22. Thus, God's rescue of the exiles is the same salvific action as the exodus out of slavery in Egypt.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 126

Many scholars suggest that Psalm 126 stems from the end of the Babylonian Exile. It is a "Song of Ascents" that was meant to be sung as one made a pilgrimage "up" to Jerusalem. The psalm is a song of joy, in which the psalmist can hardly contain him or herself because their mouth is "filled with laughter,

and our tongue with shouts of joy" (Psalm 126:2). It is the opposite emotional range to Psalm 137 (By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and there we wept...). Instead, the water that is mentioned restores the desert, and the tears have become shouts of joy.

Second Reading: Hebrews 5:1-6

This section from Hebrews demonstrates the author's deep familiarity with the Old Testament and the gospel traditions of Jesus that were already being circulated. The first part of the reading is a reflection on the role of the Aaronic priesthood that is described in Exodus and Leviticus. Aaron and his successors, as humans, were called to holiness but also subject to weakness, just like the others, "and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people" (Heb 5:3). Hebrews explains that Jesus is of a different order of priests than Aaron, for Jesus comes from "the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:6). How does the author arrive at this insight? The answer is found by contemplating an essential quality of both types of priesthood, namely that "one does not presume to take this honour, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was" (Heb 5:4). Was Jesus called by God to be a priest? The author reminds us that God said, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you" (Heb 5:5). Although this sounds very close to the words of God at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration (see Mark 1:11; 9:7), these in turn more directly reflect Psalm 2 "He said to me, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you'" (Psalm 2:7). The other psalm that sings of God addressing his co-regnant is Psalm 110 (see Psalm 110:1), and it is in Ps 110:4 that God says, "You are a priest forever according to the line of Melchizedek."

The author of Hebrews masterfully stitches these passages together to establish that Jesus is indeed a priest, one who mediates on behalf of humanity, and that Jesus is called to this unique priesthood directly by God.

Gospel: Mark 10:46-52

On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus encounters Bartimaeus son of Timaeus who is blind. In Greek, “Timaeus” means “honour”, and so one meaning of his name is “Son of Honour Son of Honour.” However, if understood as an Aramaic name, it could sound like “Son of Impurity Son of Impurity.” So, which is it? Honour or Impurity? Bartimaeus’ blindness suggests that he is on the margins of society, and given the social norms of his day, people would have assumed that his blindness was due to some kind of sin or wrongdoing, either of his own or his parents (see John 9:1-2). Regardless of Bartimaeus’ social status, he knows *exactly* who Jesus is, and calls out “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” It is worth noting that the others who recognize Jesus in the Gospel of Mark are likewise people who are suffering at the margins (e.g. Mark 5:7). Notice that Bartimaeus identifies Jesus as the “Son of David”—an essential identifier of the long-awaited Messiah. His request for Jesus to have mercy on him expresses belief in Jesus as the one who can heal his blindness. Though Bartimaeus lacks the sense of physical sight, he has profound spiritual vision.

Another beautiful feature of this reading are Bartimaeus’ and Jesus’ postures. At first, Bartimaeus is sitting; he then calls to Jesus who “stood still” and tells his disciples to “Call him here.” When Bartimaeus is called “he sprang up and came to Jesus.” After he is healed, he “followed him on the way.” In Greek, the word for “resurrection” is *anastasis*, which literally means “a standing up again.” Thus, Jesus “stood”, called the sitting man to him who “sprang up” and then followed Jesus. It suggests that Jesus is the Messiah who waits and invites us to share in his resurrection and new life.

Reflection

There is a distinctive joyful tone that resonates through the readings today. These lections offer reassurance that God is present to us even in times of deep suffering and disorientation. They also remind us that everyone, especially the socially marginalized, can call upon the

mercy of the triune God and be heard and consoled.

Reflecting the Word in Song

Amazing Grace (NEW BRITAIN)	CBW 480
Christ, Be Our Light (B. Farrell)	CIS 6.31
Church of God (M. Daly)	CBW 581 / G 472
God, Whose Almighty Word (MOSCOW)	CBW 513
Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise (ST. DENIO)	CBW 472
Lead Me, Lord (J. Becker)	SS 221
Lift Up Your Hearts (R. O’Connor)	G 387 / GP 120
Now in This Banquet (M. Haugen)	CBW 608 / G 600
Open My Eyes (J. Manibusan)	SS 337
Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness (NETTLETON)	CBW 582
There is a Longing (A. Quigley)	CIS 6.15 / SS 366
Though the Mountains May Fall (D. Schutte)	G 426 / GP 214

October 31, 2021 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, B

Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Deuteronomy 6:2-6

This is the famous passage known in Jewish tradition as the *Shema* (Hear!). In Deuteronomy, Moses reiterates the instructions of the Lord for the people, commanding them to not only hear the words, but to internalize them by keeping them in their hearts. Moses names specific blessings that are promised if one keeps the statutes of the Lord—longevity, land, and offspring. In the ancient world these were the essential

ingredients for leaving a legacy of some kind, thus the blessings suggest that the person who keeps the statutes of the Lord will be remembered for their faithfulness.

Another important aspect of this passage is the affirmation “The Lord is our God, the Lord alone” (Deut 6:4). The Ancient Israelites were unique among the surrounding peoples for their exclusive loyalty to the Lord (YHWH). Eventually, their exclusive worship of the Lord would yield to the insight of monotheism: that God is the *only* god, not simply one to be worshipped among many. The instructions to “Hear!” and “keep these words ... in your heart” demand that the people place all of their trust in God alone for every aspect of their lives. By keeping God’s words in their hearts, God will always be “very near” (Deut 30:14), even when external circumstances might suggest otherwise.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 18

This psalm expresses praise and thanksgiving for God’s unfailing assistance in times of trouble. The psalmist praises God for his steadfast love (Heb: *hesed*), which is God’s essential covenantal attribute: God does not abandon the people.

Second Reading: Hebrews 7:23-28

The author of Hebrews contrasts Jesus’ eternal priesthood with the time-limited priesthood of those who serve in the Temple. Jesus’ total commitment to oneness with the Father led him to be willing to endure death, even though he was blameless. The author of Hebrews understands Jesus’ death as a priestly offering of himself as the sacrifice. Jesus’ resurrection is the sign that his offering of self is completely sufficient, and most importantly, eternal. Thus, in contrast to the earthly priests of the Temple who must offer daily sacrifices for their own sins and for those of the people, and who are limited by their own mortality, Jesus’ priesthood is permanent and his offering of self is eternal “because he continues forever” (Heb 7:24)

Gospel: Mark 12:28-34

The scene with the scribes follows on dialogues with the Pharisees and Herodians (Mark 12:13-17), and the Sadducees (Mark 12:18-27). These four groups, the Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, and Scribes, together make up the religious and political leadership of Judea, and their dialogues with Jesus are meant to test him regarding his knowledge of the Torah and imperial law. The scribes ask Jesus “Which commandment is the first of all?” (Mark 12:28), and in fact there are different ways Jesus could have answered this question, since, read in canonical order, God gives instructions as early as Genesis 1:28, “Be fruitful and multiply....” Rather than answering in terms of sequential arrangement, Jesus answers in terms of theological importance, stating that the first commandment of all is the *Shema*, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:29-30; cf. Deut 6:4-5). By Jesus’ day, this commandment was understood in a thoroughly monotheistic manner: God is not just the God for the people of Israel, but God is the only God for all eternity.

Then, without prompting, Jesus adds that the second commandment is “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Mark 12:31). This is drawn from Leviticus 19:18, though it also functions as a summary for huge portions of the prophetic material. The overarching understanding of living out the Torah authentically necessitated care for “the other” as a component of devotion to God. Jesus indicates the essential oneness of these commandments when he says of them both, “There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:31). The scribe, well-versed in scripture, can only agree with Jesus, for Jesus’ words succinctly capture the entire Torah tradition.

Reflection

Jesus’ response to the scribes serves as an important reminder for all of us today. The intertwined nature of devotion to God and care

for others prompts us to self-examination: are we being attentive to one over the other? More profoundly, do we understand care for others as an aspect of devotion to God, rather than in addition to devotion to God? That is, Jesus reminds us that our love for God is incomplete if we do not also show compassion and love to our neighbour.

Reflecting the Word in Song

Bread for the World (B. Farrell)	CIS 6.1 / SS 240
Christians, Let Us Love One Another (PICARDY)	CBW 595
Gather Your People (B. Hurd)	CIS 6.12
God Our Author and Creator (BEACH SPRING)	CIS 6.32
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (HYFRYDOL)	CBW 625
Love Never Fails (K. Canedo & J. Manibusan)	SS 132
No Greater Love (J.M. Joncas)	CBW 599 / G 444
Ubi Caritas (J. Berthier)	CBW 67 / G 301
Ubi Caritas (B. Hurd)	SS 259
Vine and Branches (T. Thomson)	SS 261
We Are the Light of the World (J. Greif)	G 353 / SS 237
Whatsoever You Do (W. Jabusch)	G 477
With One Voice (R. Manalo)	SS 232

November 7, 2021 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, B

Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: 1 Kings 17:10-16

Elijah's makes his journey to Zarephath at the Lord's command, and it is a curious instruction for God to have given him! Zarephath is in Sidon, which is north of Israel, thus Elijah is now a foreigner in a foreign land. When he comes to Zarephath, he encounters a widow at the gate of the town. All of these details are pertinent to their encounter. Widows were at the very margins of society, and the gate of the town was the most liminal place in a community. She is at the very edge of belonging. Elijah, whose name means, "My God [is] YHWH", sees her gathering sticks and asks her for a drink of water. Despite her low station, she immediately turns to bring him this small gesture of hospitality when Elijah also asks for some food. Although we do not learn her name, it is important to listen closely to her words. She expresses knowledge of God, and also reveals the purpose for gathering the sticks: the famine has made things so desperate that she is about to prepare a final meal for herself and her son before they die. Elijah's response demands an enormous amount of trust from the Widow. He tells her to first make him a cake, then prepare something for herself and her son, and finally reassures her that the "Lord the God of Israel" has decreed that her food stores will not run out (1 Kings 17:14). Amazingly, after doing as Elijah instructed, the Widow's jar of meal and jug of oil are not emptied. The fact that this miracle takes place outside of Israel indicates that God's power is not geographically limited. The fact that this foreign widow acknowledges "the Lord your God" (1 Kings 17:12) indicates that knowledge of God is open to all people.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 146

Psalm 146 is found near the end of the Psalter and it is the first of the final five songs of praise. These verses offer praise for God's care

for the most marginal society: the oppressed, the hungry, the prisoners, the blind, the disabled, the strangers, and widows and orphans. In the ancient world, these groups would have been largely rejected by society, thus the psalm is a radical claim that the God of Israel is the liberator and steadfast lover of the poorest of the poor.

Second Reading: Hebrews 9:24-28

The author of Hebrews reinforces Jesus' supreme self-offering by asserting that Jesus is now in heaven itself in the very presence of God (Heb 9:24). The Glory of God, believed to reside in the Temple in Jerusalem, was understood to be the presence of God, while at the same time not containing God (which would be impossible) (see 1 Kings 8:27). In today's reading the author teaches that Jesus' self-offering is so perfect that "he entered into heaven itself" (Heb 9:24), rather than the earthly sanctuary which was thought to mirror the heavenly realm. In this intimate proximity to God the Father, Jesus acts as the ultimate intercessor on our behalf.

Gospel: Mark 12:38-44

In Jesus' day, the Temple precinct in Jerusalem was a large area that had different public areas for various purposes. Although only the priests could enter the area where sacrifices were offered, the outer areas of the Temple were accessible to people of various states in life. One feature were the trumpet-shaped treasury boxes that collected coin donations which were used for various purposes. Some money was used for the running of the Temple, while other funds might be in turn given to charitable causes. Since all the money collected was coinage, it would have been very obvious when a wealthy person made a substantial donation, while a small donation would look, and sound, inconsequential. Jesus, however, has sharp words for people who seek attention and preen (Mark 12:38-40). Instead, he draws his disciples' attention to "a poor widow" who puts in two small copper coins. These copper coins (*lepta*) are equal to one *quadrans* (translated as penny), which was the smallest denomination. In other words, even though she

had next to nothing, she still set aside something to give. As a widow, her social status was precarious, and she would not have any other form of income to rely upon. Far from bolstering her social status, the widow's donation would have driven her further into destitution and social marginalization.

The widow's donation is an enacted parable, and Jesus seizes upon it to teach his disciples an important lesson about the nature of true service. In contrast to the rich, whose donations "out of their abundance" would have no impact on their lives, the widow's contribution has a definite effect on her livelihood. It is given in trusting devotion, and it costs her something tangible ("all she had to live on") and intangible (her social standing). By affirming the magnitude of her gift, Jesus asserts that true discipleship is expressed through selfless service to others (see Mark 10:45).

Reflection

Today's readings present the powerful witness of faith of two women, both widows. Although their names have not come down to us, they act as models of generosity, service, and trust for all believers, men and women alike. Jesus' praise of the widow's donation affirms that gentle service is possible for all people. The challenge is to give with a pure heart and not for glory and recognition from others. Christina Rossetti's beautiful poem *In the Bleak Midwinter*, expresses this well, "What can I give him / Poor as I am? / If I were a shepherd / I would give a lamb / If I were a wise man / I would do my part / But what I can I give him / Give him my heart / Give him my heart." These readings encourage us to "heart service": giving of our time, resources, and love from the heart.

Reflecting the Word in Song

All That We Have (G. Ault)

G 425

Anthem (T. Conry)

G 494 / GP 13

Awake, Awake: Fling Off the Night (DEUS TUORUM MILITUM)	CBW 304
Christ, Be Our Light (B. Farrell)	CIS 6.31
Come to the Water (J. Foley)	G 340 / GP 52 / SS 281
Glorious in Majesty (SHIBBOLET BASADEH)	G 478
Here I Am, Lord (D. Schutte)	CBW 520 / SS 250
Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise (ST. DENIO)	CBW 472
The Love of the Lord (J.M. Joncas)	G 504
Our God is Here (C. Muglia)	SS 226
Take, Lord, Receive (J. Foley)	GP 210
Whatever You Do (W. Jabusch)	G 477
You Are All We Have (F.P. O'Brien)	G 346

November 14, 2021 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, B

Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Daniel 12:1-3

The Book of Daniel was written around 164 BC, during the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the brutal Hellenistic ruler in Judea. The book is set further in the past, during the Babylonian period (597 BC–539 BC), and depicts Daniel as a sage and seer in the court of the Babylonian king. Daniel receives special visions that are intended to bolster the spirits of the people enduring foreign occupation. Today's first reading comes from the final chapter of the book, and it describes how Michael the Archangel will herald the end times. This passage is significant because it is the earliest canonical reference to the concept of resurrection, and we can see that resurrection includes judgment between the wise and the wicked. The wise ones, those who have been

faithful to God and followed in God's way, will awake to "everlasting life", while others will rise to "shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan 12:2). The intention of this passage is to encourage believers to maintain their faithfulness, hope, and upright living even in the face of persecution. It reassures believers that God has not abandoned them.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 16

This psalm is a song of petition and praise. The psalmist calls upon God to protect him or her, expressing confidence in God's willingness to do so. The psalm clearly states that with God there is life and joy.

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:11-14, 18

In Jerusalem in Jesus' day (and long afterward in some cultures), atonement for sin involved offering an animal sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem. Leviticus describes different situations in which an animal would be offered (Leviticus 1-4; 16), and a common feature of these offerings is that some of the blood of the animal would be daubed on various elements of the sanctuary (e.g. the curtain of the sanctuary (Lev 4:6), the horns of the altar and base of the altar (Lev 4:30), and the mercy seat (Lev 16:14)). The blood had a purifying effect, that would cleanse these holy items from the effects of peoples' sins. Since all people sinned (in Hebrew, the word for sin is best understood as "missing the mark"), both inadvertently and intentionally, the sacrificial process would have to be repeated frequently. Likewise, since even the priests performing the sacrifices sinned, they first had to atone for their own sins before attending to the peoples'. The author of Hebrews asserts that Jesus' self-sacrifice ends the cyclic nature of animal sacrifices. By living in full conformity to God's will (and thus being sinless), Jesus' self-sacrifice is not necessary for his own sake, but rather is offered "for all time [as] a single sacrifice for sins" (Heb 10:14). The author exhorts believers to trust in the effectiveness of Jesus' offering through belief in his resurrection from the dead.

Gospel: Mark 13:24-32

This is final lection from the Gospel of Mark for Year B. These verses are part of a longer passage known as the Markan Apocalypse (Mark 13:3-37) in which Jesus offers insights into the signs that will herald the end times (*eschaton*). He warns his disciples that some people will come in his name to “lead many astray” (Mark 13:5) and that they should anticipate a period of persecution (Mark 13:9-13). Drawing from earlier prophetic texts, Jesus describes a cataclysmic event when the lights of heaven will darken (Mark 13:24-25). These terrifying images remind us of pre-creation, when all was in darkness (Gen 1:1-2). This apocalyptic darkness will yield to “the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory” (Mark 13:26), signaling a new era of creation. To emphasize that this moment will be one of new life rather than of continued terror and oppression, Jesus uses a fig tree as an example: when the branches become supple and put forth leaves, you know that summer is near (Mark 13:28). The fig tree is a frequent image for abundance and blessings (see Deut 8:8), and the lesson it holds is that its new life emerges in harmony with the seasons of creation. Believers must hold fast, “be alert” (Mark 13:23), and trust in God.

Reflection

As we near the end of this liturgical year the readings remind us that we are in the “in between times”, both living within the reign of God as it continues to unfurl *and* waiting for Jesus to return in glory to assist us to the end. What does our waiting look like? Jesus’ words encourage mindful waiting in which we remain alert to the signs of the times, work to foster communion and peace, and prepare our hearts in the confidence of God’s nearness.

Reflecting the Word in Song

Eye Has Not Seen (M. Haugen)
CBW 482 / G 450

Find Us Ready (T. Booth)
SS 209

God, Whose Almighty Word (MOSCOW)
CBW 513

I Sing the Mighty Power of God (MOZART)
CBW 541

The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns
(MORNING SONG)
G 248

The King Shall Come (T. Thompson)
SS 143

Praise to You, O Christ Our Savior (B. Farrell)
CBW 442 / G 360

Sing a New Song (D. Schutte)
CBW 563 / G 384 / GP 193

Soon and Very Soon (A. Crouch)
G 758

There is a Longing (A. Quigley)
CIS 6.15 / SS 366

Though the Mountains May Fall (D. Schutte)
G 426 / GP 214

Wait for the Lord (J. Berthier)
CBW 319 / G 256

Word of God, Come Down on Earth (LIEBSTER
JESU)
CBW 429

November 21, 2021 Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, B

Breaking Open the Word

First Reading: Daniel 7:13-14

In this apocalyptic vision, Daniel sees four terrifying beasts rise out of the sea, after which thrones are set in place and “an Ancient One took his throne” and a heavenly court room assembles itself for judgment. After the fourth and most terrifying beast is condemned to death and destroyed, a new figure described as “one like a son of man” appears on the clouds. The one like a son of man presents himself to the Ancient One, and receives “dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples and nations should serve him” eternally (Dan 7:14).

Daniel’s vision is part of the “apocalyptic” genre of literature in the Bible. The word

“apocalyptic” means “unveiling” or “revelation”, and this type of literature frequently involves fantastic visions granted to a seer who is granted the ability to understand the symbols that are presented. Daniel himself requires an explanation, and when the vision ends, he asks one of the heavenly attendants to interpret what he has seen (Dan 7:15-16). Apocalyptic literature developed in the wake of prophetic literature as a means of encouraging people in their faith in the face of persecution. In this vision, the beasts signify the four major oppressors of Israel: Babylon, Persia, Media, and Greece. The Ancient One (or Ancient of Days) who sits on a throne of burning fire is God, and the thousands who serve him are the angelic host. The nameless “one like a son of man” (literally, “mortal”) had various explanations: it was sometimes understood as a reference to the archangel Michael, and sometimes as a reference to Israel as a whole. However, according to the gospels, Jesus uses the title “Son of Man” to refer to himself (e.g. Mark 9:31), and Christian interpretation subsequently understands Daniel’s vision of the Son of Man receiving his mandate from the Ancient of Days as a Christological prophecy. Read in this light, important features of Jesus’ divine kingship emerge from this vision: unlike earthly rulers whose domains are bound by both geography and time, Jesus’ “dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away” (Dan 7:14). Jesus’ kingship is eternal and universal.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 93

Psalm 93 is one of several psalms that extoll the Lord (YHWH) as King of the universe (see also Psalms 95-99). The portions of Psalm 93 sung today emphasize God’s strength as creator and the source of divine instructions.

Second Reading: Revelation 1:5-8

The New Testament Book of Revelation (*Apocalypsis*) lends its name to the whole genre of literature known as apocalyptic. As exemplary of this genre, The Book of Revelation features a seer, John of Patmos, who receives visions concerning the early Christian churches in Asia Minor near the end

of the first century. His visions are fantastical and otherworldly, placing a great deal of emphasis on maintaining belief in Christ despite persecutions. The Book of Revelation draws expansively from Old Testament traditions to convey Jesus as the triumphant deliverer and savior of the people, who vanquished death and sin through his own blood. Today’s verses express the eternal nature of Jesus’ victory, equating him with the vision of the Son of Man in Daniel who comes “with the clouds” (Dan 7:14; Rev 1:7). The expression “alpha and omega” refers to the first and last Greek letters, rather like saying “I am the A to Z.” It is meant to indicate totality and eternity. It is an expression used both by the Lord God (Rev 1:8) and the Son of Man (1:17) and so expresses the essential oneness of Jesus and the Father.

Gospel: John 18:33b-37

On this important feast the Gospel lection comes from the interrogation scene in John’s gospel. Pilate, the delegate of the Roman Emperor, demands of Jesus “Are you the King of the Jews?” (John 18:33). This is a dangerous question: If Jesus answers “yes” he will put himself in direct opposition to the Roman Emperor, which potentially would endanger Pilate himself for not being aware of an insurrectionist earlier. Instead, Jesus responds with his own question: “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” (John 18:34). In the Gospel of John, several figures engage in a questioning dialogue with Jesus to determine his identity—will Pilate become a believer, or remain outside the realm of understanding? Pilate in turn asks “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” (John 18:35). Pilate seems to choose to remain outside of the conflict, but Jesus’ subsequent answer will befuddle him. Jesus states that his “kingdom is not from this world” (John 18:36), and what Pilate cannot fathom is that Jesus means that his kingdom is not part of the sphere of human existence and power, the sphere of totalitarian regimes and suffering. Rather, his kingdom is what is manifest when through him his followers know

and believe that God is the highest and only moral authority. When Jesus says that he testifies “to the truth”, he is telling Pilate that his whole life is a witness to the one and only God (John 18:37). It is such a pure witness that it can only be possible if the Father and Son share an essential oneness. As Jesus says earlier in the gospel, “whoever sees me sees him who sent me,” (John 12:45) and, “The Father and I are one” (John 10:30).

This assertion is far beyond Pilate’s understanding. Although we do not hear his final statement in today’s reading, Pilate closes the conversation by saying “What is truth?” (John 18:38). In Pilate’s world, “truth” was an ever-shifting mirage based on the desires of whoever was in charge—the Emperor. The notion that there could be an absolute fullness of pure truth is something that Pilate cannot fathom.

The scene is replete with dramatic irony. The reader already knows that Jesus himself is the truth (John 14:6), and the dialogue with Pilate is carefully presented to demonstrate that the most powerful leaders in the human sphere forget—or never know—their own fallibility and misunderstanding.

Reflection

The readings today are quite grand and readily contribute to the title of today’s feast, “Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.” However, it is imperative that we do not lose sight of the important lessons about Jesus’ identity, and our own as believers, that we have heard in the weeks leading up to this Sunday. Jesus’ Christological identity is not based on earthly systems of power and honour. Rather, as the incarnate son, the perfect expression of God to humanity, Jesus’ whole earthly life witnessed to the one God as the ultimate source of power and love. Jesus’ consistent

teaching was that devotion to God is imperfect if it is not accompanied by gestures of service to others. Jesus’ kingship is one of giving, of love, and of steadfast devotion.

Reflecting the Word in Song

- All the Ends of the Earth (B. Dufford)
G 378 / GP 7
- Alleluia! Sing to Jesus (HYFRYDOL)
CBW 426
- At the Lamb’s High Feast We Sing (SALZBURG)
CBW 375
- Christ is the King (GELOBT SEI GOTT)
CBW 387
- Christ the Lord (S. Hart & R. Feduccia)
SS 194
- Christ, Our King Before Creation (S. Chavez-Melo)
CBW 499
- Crown Him With Many Crowns (DIADEMATA)
CBW 437
- Forth in the Peace of Christ We Go (LLEDROD)
CBW 514
- Glorious in Majesty (SHIBBOLET BASADEH)
G 478
- God, Whose Glory Reigns Eternal (BEACH SPRING)
CBW 475
- Jesus, the Lord (R. O’Connor)
CBW 432 / G 304 / GP 111
- Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven (LAUDA ANIMA)
CBW 565
- To Jesus Christ, Our Sovereign King (ICH GLAUB AN GOTT)
CBW 438
- You Are the Way (NICOLAUS)
CBW 441

The Altar

The altar is a fixed, freestanding table, the central focus for the celebration of the Eucharist. It is both altar and table. As altar, it is the place of sacrifice, where Christ, who was sacrificed on the Cross for us, becomes present again under the sacramental form of bread and wine. As table, it gathers the people of God to share the Body and Blood of Christ, their holiest meal, which recalls the Passover and grants a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

The altar is traditionally made of stone, but it may be constructed of another solid, well-crafted material such as wood or metal, which establishes its beauty and dignity. Its rectangular shape suited the liturgy before the Second Vatican Council, when the Scriptures were read from the sides of the altar. Today's altar is often more square to accommodate the priest, the bread, and the wine. But it should always be clear among church furnishings that the altar is the center of focus.

When the altar of a church is consecrated, the bishop anoints its top with Chrism. Chrism is the perfumed oil we reserve for the sacraments that are celebrated only once in one's lifetime: Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders. The consecration of an altar sets it apart permanently for its sacred purpose. In conjunction with this anointing, the altar also represents Jesus, whose title "Christ" means, "anointed." The proper reverence upon entering a church is to bow to the altar, unless the tabernacle is centrally located, in which case one genuflects to the tabernacle.

In the past, the altar was located against the rear wall, and the priest celebrated Mass with his back to the people. Additional altars were often located in chapels around the church, permitting other priests to celebrate separate Masses at the same time. Today a church should have one altar, freestanding so the priest may walk completely around it. It should be permanently fixed to reflect the stability of our faith (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 299).

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