

# Sunday Gospel Readings with *Lectio Divina*

Year B: Year of Mark

“The Roman Catholic Bishops of Scotland wish to encourage the use of this *lectio divina* resource. This ancient way of prayer, which has the word of God at its heart, is presented in an attractive and up to date way in this resource: bringing from the storeroom of the tradition of Christian prayer things both old and new.”

*Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Scotland*

“I am delighted to welcome this publication of *Sunday Gospel Readings with lectio divina*. It will be welcomed by many, especially those preparing for Sunday Mass.”

*Most Reverend Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Birmingham*



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

**2 Timothy 3:16-17**  
*Good News Bible*

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*Sunday Gospel Readings with Lectio Divina Year B: Mark*



## Sunday Gospel Readings with *Lectio Divina*

Year B: Year of Mark

*Advent 2008 – Christ the King 2009*

### INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## AN INTRODUCTION TO 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.



## LECTIO – READING

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

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

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

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



## MEDITATIO – MEDITATION

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

*Here are some suggested approaches you may find helpful.*

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

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

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



## ORATIO – PRAYER

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

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

## CONTEMPLATIO – CONTEMPLATION:

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

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

### *Review*

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

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## USING THESE OUTLINES IN GROUPS

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

## LECTIO:

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

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

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

Two readers. Two people read the text aloud alternately.

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

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

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

## MEDITATIO:

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

## 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.

## 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'.

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*\*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.*

## THE GREAT COMMISSION

### *Matthew 28:16-20*

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

<sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshipped him, even though some of them doubted. <sup>18</sup>Jesus drew near and said to them, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>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: Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40; Psalm 33:4-6, 9, 18-20, 22; Romans 8:14-17*



### **L**ECTIO:

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

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

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

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

### **M**EDITATIO:

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

### **O**RATIO:

Psalm 33 speaks of creation, God's everlasting promises and his protection.

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

### **C**ONTEMPLATIO:

There is an on-going theme today: everlasting care and protection. In Deuteronomy 4 Moses reminds the Israelites of God's love and provision throughout their history, just before he reveals the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5).

In Romans 8:14-17 Paul emphasises that those whom God guides by his Spirit are God's children.

## GOD'S KINGDOM IN US

### Mark 4:26-34

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

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

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

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



### LECTIO:

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

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

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

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



### MEDITATIO:

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



### ORATIO:

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

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



### CONTEMPLATIO:

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

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

## MIRACLE ON THE LAKE

### Mark 4:35-41

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

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

<sup>41</sup> But they were terribly afraid and said to one another, "Who is this man? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

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

## LECTIO:

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

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

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

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

## MEDITATIO:

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

## ORATIO:

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

## CONTEMPLATIO:

God is always with us and is more than able to keep the circumstances around us under control. Poor old Job had a good moan at God. After all he had suffered it wasn't really surprising. But in Job 38:8-11 God rebukes him and asks whether Job had been around when God was setting the world up. Of course he wasn't, but God's words remind us how mighty his power is.

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

## FAITH REWARDED

### Mark 5:21-43

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

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

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

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

<sup>31</sup> His disciples answered, “You see how the people are crowding you; why do you ask who touched you?”

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

<sup>35</sup> While Jesus was saying this, some messengers came from Jairus’ house and told him, “Your daughter has died. Why bother the Teacher any longer?”

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

<sup>40</sup> They laughed at him, so he put them all out, took the child’s father and mother and his three disciples, and went into the room where the child was lying. <sup>41</sup> He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha, koum,” which means, “Little girl, I tell you to get up!”

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

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

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## LECTIO:

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

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

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

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

## MEDITATIO:

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

## ORATIO:

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

## CONTEMPLATIO:

In the Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15, 2:23-24 we read that God made us in his image and is concerned about our health.

In 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15 Paul reflects upon the loving acts of Jesus. He urges Christians to be as generous as Jesus in sharing what they have with others.

## GOOD QUESTION, WRONG ANSWER

### Mark 6:1-6

<sup>1</sup> Jesus left that place and went back to his home town, followed by his disciples.  
<sup>2</sup> On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue. Many people were there; and when they heard him, they were all amazed. “Where did he get all this?” they asked. “What wisdom is this that has been given him? How does he perform miracles?”  
<sup>3</sup> Isn’t he the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon? Aren’t his sisters living here?” And so they rejected him.  
<sup>4</sup> Jesus said to them, “Prophets are respected everywhere except in their own home town and by their relatives and their family.”  
<sup>5</sup> He was not able to perform any miracles there, except that he placed his hands on a few sick people and healed them. <sup>6</sup> He was greatly surprised, because the people did not have faith. Then Jesus went to the villages round there, teaching the people.

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

## LECTIO:

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

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

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

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

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

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## MEDITATIO:

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

## ORATIO:

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

## CONTEMPLATIO:

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

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

## INTO ACTION

### Mark 6:7-13

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

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

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



## LECTIO:

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

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

## MEDITATIO:

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

## ORATIO:

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

## CONTEMPLATIO:

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

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

## MOVED BY PITY

### Mark 6:30-34

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

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

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



## LECTIO:

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

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

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

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

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

## MEDITATIO:

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

## ORATIO:

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

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

## CONTEMPLATIO:

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

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

## JESUS FEEDS 5,000

### John 6:1-15

<sup>1</sup> After this, Jesus went across Lake Galilee (or, Lake Tiberias, as it is also called).

<sup>2</sup> A large crowd followed him, because they had seen his miracles of healing those who were ill. <sup>3</sup> Jesus went up a hill and sat down with his disciples. <sup>4</sup> The time for the Passover Festival was near. <sup>5</sup> Jesus looked round and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, so he asked Philip, "Where can we buy enough food to feed all these people?" <sup>6</sup> (He said this to test Philip; actually he already knew what he would do.)

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

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

<sup>10</sup> "Make the people sit down," Jesus told them. (There was a lot of grass there.) So all the people sat down; there were about 5,000 men. <sup>11</sup> Jesus took the bread, gave thanks to God, and distributed it to the people who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, and they all had as much as they wanted. <sup>12</sup> When they were all full, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces left over; let us not waste any." <sup>13</sup> So they gathered them all up and filled twelve baskets with the pieces left over from the five barley loaves which the people had eaten.

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

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



### LECTIO:

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

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

What is the meaning of this miracle? We could stop at the literal meaning

but if we continue reading the rest of chapter 6, we see John brings an additional dimension.

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

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

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



### MEDITATIO:

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



### ORATIO:

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

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



### CONTEMPLATIO:

When the crowd witnessed Jesus multiplying the food they said 'this is the prophet'. Perhaps they made the connection with a similar miracle in 2 Kings 4:42-44 when Elisha fed a hundred prophets by multiplying 20 loaves.

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

## BREAD OF LIFE

### John 6:24-35

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

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

<sup>26</sup> Jesus answered, "I am telling you the truth: you are looking for me because you ate the bread and had all you wanted, not because you understood my miracles.

<sup>27</sup> Do not work for food that goes bad; instead, work for the food that lasts for eternal life. This is the food which the Son of Man will give you, because God, the Father, has put his mark of approval on him."

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

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

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

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

<sup>34</sup> "Sir," they asked him, "give us this bread always."

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

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



## LECTIO:

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

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

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

Jesus asks them to seek spiritual not material treasures. Believe in me he asks. But they are not satisfied with the miracles they have already seen and ask for another one. Probably hoping for another free meal, they recall how their ancestors received manna from heaven (Exodus 16:13-36). Jesus explains that his Father was the true source of their manna then and has far better bread to offer them now.

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

Jesus fed people with real bread as a token of what is to come. But the promised 'bread' will not just stave off hunger, it provides eternal life.



## MEDITATIO:

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



## ORATIO:

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

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



## CONTEMPLATIO:

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

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

## COME TO JESUS

### *John 6:41-51*

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

<sup>43</sup> Jesus answered, “Stop grumbling among yourselves. <sup>44</sup> No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him to me; and I will raise him to life on the last day. <sup>45</sup> The prophets wrote, ‘Everyone will be taught by God.’ Anyone who hears the Father and learns from him comes to me. <sup>46</sup> This does not mean that anyone has seen the Father; he who is from God is the only one who has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup> I am telling you the truth: he who believes has eternal life. <sup>48</sup> I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your ancestors ate manna in the desert, but they died. <sup>50</sup> But the bread that comes down from heaven is of such a kind that whoever eats it will not die. <sup>51</sup> 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.”

*Other Readings: 1 Kings 19:4-8; Psalm 34:1-8; Ephesians 4:30 - 5:2*



### LECTIO:

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

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

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

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

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

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



### MEDITATIO:

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



### ORATIO:

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

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



### CONTEMPLATIO:

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

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

## REAL FOOD

### *John 6:51-58*

<sup>51</sup> 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.”

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

<sup>53</sup> 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. <sup>54</sup> Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them to life on the last day. <sup>55</sup> For my flesh is the real food; my blood is the real drink. <sup>56</sup> Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood live in me, and I live in them. <sup>57</sup> The living Father sent me, and because of him I live also. In the same way whoever eats me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup> 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: Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 34:1-2, 9-14; Ephesians 5:15-20*



## LECTIO:

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

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

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

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

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



## MEDITATIO:

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



## ORATIO:

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



## CONTEMPLATIO:

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

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

## WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE

### John 6:60-69

<sup>60</sup> Many of his followers heard this and said, “This teaching is too hard. Who can listen to it?”

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

<sup>66</sup> Because of this, many of Jesus’ followers turned back and would not go with him any more. <sup>67</sup> So he asked the twelve disciples, “And you – would you also like to leave?”

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

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



## LECTIO:

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

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

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

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

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

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

## MEDITATIO:

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

## ORATIO:

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

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

## CONTEMPLATIO:

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

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

## HEART ATTITUDE

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>7</sup>It is no use for them to worship me, because they teach human rules as though they were God’s laws!

<sup>8</sup>“You put aside God’s command and obey human teachings.”

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

<sup>21</sup>For from the inside, from a person’s heart, come the evil ideas which lead him to do immoral things, to rob, kill, <sup>22</sup>commit adultery, be greedy, and do all sorts of evil things; deceit, indecency, jealousy, slander, pride, and folly – <sup>23</sup>all these evil things come from inside a person and make him unclean.”

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



### LECTIO:

Jesus’ teaching about what was ritually clean and unclean was a very contentious issue both during his ministry on earth and afterwards as Gentile converts joined the church. Mark discusses the subject because he is writing for Christians of non-Jewish origin. Of course God had given the Jewish people detailed rules about food and hygiene (see Leviticus 11).

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

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

Jesus is not interested in people saying or doing the ‘right’ things if underneath their heart attitude is not right. Many of the Pharisees had lost the plot. God wants us to worship and serve him from a pure heart of love. You can obey as many of man’s rules as you like, but before God you will remain a hypocrite if your heart is not pure.



### MEDITATIO:

- Consider the attitude of your heart. Are you worshipping and serving God out of love? Or are you paying more attention to outwardly keeping the rules and doing the ‘right’ things? What is Jesus looking for?
- The Pharisees got their priorities wrong. Consider your priorities. Does anything need to change?



### ORATIO:

Ask God to help you keep a pure heart so that you always worship and serve him and others from an attitude of love.

Psalm 15 describes people who are likely to be found in God’s presence. Make a list of what does and doesn’t please God. Ask God to help you do the things you should and avoid what displeases him.



### CONTEMPLATIO:

In Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8 we hear Moses start to deliver God’s laws to the Israelites. They are specifically instructed not to add or take anything away from God’s commandments – just what Jesus confronts the Pharisees about in the gospel reading.

Today’s verses from James 1 continue the theme of hearing and obeying God’s law. Verse 22 warns us not to deceive ourselves. Just listening to what God wants us to do is not enough; we must put it into practice. Helping those in need and keeping ourselves spiritually uncontaminated by the world will make faith a reality.